

ARTIST'S STATEMENT

Rabbit Lake grew out of a desire to write about an aspect of the mineral world. I am fascinated by geological history and human relationships with minerals. I have often wondered if rock has its own ecology, its own agency, if it is in some way animate. Additionally, I wanted to write about the relationship between colonial history and the non-human world. Desires for plant and animal materials drove the historical colonial machine: tea, sugar, spices, cotton, furs. Neocolonialism is driven more by non-renewable raw resource extraction: rare earth metals, oil and gas, radioactive ore. I began to wonder what colonialism looks like today in Saskatchewan, the province where I have lived for the last five years.

Saskatchewan's mineral resources include vast reserves of high-grade uranium. As I began my research, I looked for documents specific to Saskatchewan and discovered transcripts from public hearings held in 1993, when the uranium industry was expanding across Saskatchewan's northern boreal forest. I knew these transcripts would contain a multitude of voices: concerned citizens, activists, dissidents. I chose to read the transcripts from the Rabbit Lake hearings because Rabbit Lake was the only name that evoked the non-human world. As it turned out, Rabbit Lake is North America's longest operating uranium mine, consistently active since 1975. I then discovered geology articles specific to Rabbit Lake—these became source material for textual experiments.

Initially, I intended to write an inter-genre thesis: I wanted to walk a line between non-fiction and poetry, blending prose and lyric to create a hybrid. I knew

that my research might pull me toward prose, but I didn't want to let go of the poetic mode, toward which I have always gravitated. As the work progressed, it became harder to walk this line. At the urging of my mentor, supervisor, and peers, I finally allowed myself to push the work toward poetry and away from prose, and to take on more experimental techniques as I did so, including erasure, cut-ups and collage.

My influences include Mikaela Dyke's play *Dying Hard*, which features the voices of dying fluorspar miners adapted from interviews; poet and essayist Don McKay's concept of "geopoetics" outlined in *Deactivated West 100*; Sue Goyette's experiments with appropriating and altering government documents in *Outskirts*; and Sandy Pool's *Undark: An Oratorio*, which maps a specific thread in nuclear history using appropriated, altered, imitated, and invented voices, as well as found text and fragments.

I have also been influenced by the concept of the rhizome as outlined in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*. Inspired by botanical structures, the rhizome is characterized by connection, rupture and multiplicities. The Rabbit Lake transcripts are rhizomorphous in their mapping of heterogeneous voices linked to specific territories, histories and concerns for the future. My thesis is likewise rhizomorphous: it pursues lines of flight while also making connections between peoples and places, as well as disputed histories and possible futures.

Lines of flight in my thesis include references to Canada's historical involvement in the Manhattan Project and the legacy left behind on the shores of Great Bear Lake, as well as nuclear weapons testing on unceded Shoshone and Paiute lands in Nevada, and the proposed storage of nuclear waste at Yucca

Mountain, also on unceded Indigenous lands in Nevada. These lines of flight—which arose within the transcripts, as well as in runners put out by further research—pursue points of rupture and connection on a much larger map, one that could conceivably expand to chart nuclear history on a global scale.

To a large extent, my thesis imitates the form of the transcripts, though this form is interrupted by a number of textual experiments, as well as the presence of an unknown speaker. I believe poetry suffers when forced into linear or arborescent structures, and that it flourishes when it is released from the perceived need to “make sense” in the way that an essay might “make sense;” this less logical and more elliptical approach defies rational, linear thought, such as that which drives the neocolonial machine. Poetry is most powerful when allowed to wander nomadically, creating its own rhizomorphous map as it moves in multiple directions at once, cohering and amplifying without needing to culminate or conclude.

Initially, in reading the transcripts, I sought to identify recurrent concerns. In doing so, I was drawn into specific voices. I distilled and paraphrased sections of testimony, while also writing poems triggered by their content. Rather than colonize found text, my intention was to create a parallel structure for the found text to colonize; I invited the voices from the transcripts to take hold within my poetry, rather than impose my poetry upon the voices. It was important for me to make this distinction given that issues of appropriation and colonization are unavoidable when imitating voices in order to explore a topic as contentious as uranium mining.

As I distilled the transcripts, I created a chorus of women and a chorus of elders, because these groups of voices consistently spoke from a unified perspective.

I gave voices archetypal titles: Women, Elders, Biologist, Geophysicist; I also invented a number of experts, including a Lichenologist, a Limnologist, and a Cosmochemist. Finally, I changed Cameco's name to Uraneco. I did this partly to avoid the possibility of libel and also as a way to grant myself greater creative license in order to further elevate or mythologize the hearings. These archetypal titles and altered or invented names also draw attention to the fact that these hearings stand for a much larger whole: they represent a pattern still playing out today. I favoured voices of dissent because they were marginalized in the hearing process. I came to envision this project as a political intervention and I chose to focus on the extent to which the needs, desires and fears of women, Indigenous people and the scientific community are dismissed and diminished by the neocolonial machine, which promotes profit and industry at the expense of community and sustainability.

Ecocritical theory has also influenced my work in that it invites the reader to consider the non-human world and the realities of its history and future. In his essay "Nature and Silence" in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, Christopher Manes discusses the idea that the non-human world possesses its own language, to which humanity has become willfully deaf. Referencing Michel Foucault, Manes points out that "... social power operates through a regime of privileged speakers...[while] women, minorities, children, prisoners, and the insane" are deemed "'meaningless' and often silenced" (16).

The Rabbit Lake hearings were structured in a way that favoured privileged speakers: members of the corporate proponents' panel were white male settlers;

members of the federally-appointed panel were also exclusively male and only one member was of Indigenous ancestry. By favouring the voices of women and Indigenous elders, and by giving them equal weight alongside various scientists and so-called “experts,” both real and invented, I am seeking to disrupt this privileged discourse and to provide an alternative lens: a way of seeing through and beyond the binary opposition of “economy” and “ecology.” The work is structured in two parts: North and South, with more Indigenous elders’ voices in the North, and more “scientific” voices in the South. The women and textual experiments travel nomadically between North and South. I have attempted to situate certain voices in order to reflect their connections to places throughout the province, while also balancing the repetition and variation of themes throughout the thesis.

In the Rabbit Lake transcripts, passages of inaudibility occur, marked in parentheses. I attempt to use these instances of inaudibility as points of aperture into a parallel unspoken and unrecorded text. I have likewise included an unknown speaker, essentially a stand-in for myself, as another means of disrupting the discourse: I invite the reader to consider those who were not able to attend the hearings, or who were not able to testify due to feelings of helplessness, exclusion, anger or fear. I likewise invite the reader to consider the presence of subtext: what was left unsaid, what was going through the minds of those who simply witnessed and listened, what wasn’t heard or understood? What went unconsidered? What slipped through the cracks? While the poems written to carry forward the women’s, elders’ and experts’ concerns take a lyric/narrative form, the experiments, including those derived from the Rabbit Lake geology articles, are intended as a means of

further disrupting the discourse. The experiments are also a means of drawing the reader's attention toward various kinds of silence, including that of the mineral world.

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