



PRAIRIE INCLUSIVITY



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KRISTIAN'S LINER NOTES

The prairies may seem a place for moving through, but it is home, real and imagined, for many writers. The combination of flat lands and epic sky can give off a benevolent quaintness, even though we are also home to big cities. Though the prairies are geographically vast, we are deemed obscure in our writing, as though "great" writing was only done in more major centers. I admit I am Winnipeg-centered, but these poems come from all the prairie provinces as a way of being inclusive, even as poetry may occur more often in our urban centers.

My selections involve the prairie eye examining itself, its ear listening. Yet, when the prairie eye encounters a different type of space (as in Vancouver Lights, obviously not a prairie city, but by a prairie poet) the prairie poet can be appreciative of differences, like an innocent eye seeing the big coastal city as they begin to enter it. Seeing so many open fields makes one sensitive to subtle shifts, mirrored by line breaks that pull and break words along. Prairie realism, a genre found in prairie fiction, often focuses on survival in a harsh climate where difficulties are accentuated by isolation. My topic of survival in relation to self-determination is under constant subtle change as to how I imagined it.

Much could be said about the expansion of prairie and prairie writing, but I found a convenient way to describe a letting go and coming together and the spirit of our literature finding its own words: un-plan.

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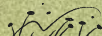
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As we break away from margins we can avoid marginalization, just as Dennis Cooley's poetry, for example, moves his words all over the page, as Marvin Francis and many others have done. Another function of the un is that the plains have disappeared as a direct subject. Our language is also often rich in meaning as you will see in some of the selections I have chosen, but that is not to reject plain language. Dylan Thomas's line "time held me green and dying / though I sang in my chains like the sea," quoted in Richard Harrison's poem, *With the Dying of the Light*, seemed to me a reimagined vision of prairie rootedness and the green of nature prior to the golden fields of agriculture. It is not poetic prairie realism but has the longing we can have here, as if we were chained or unable to leave. The poet Christoff Engbrecht once stated of: "the prairies forgiven for not being the sea." We are landlocked, and this could be a cause of a kind of disconnect that perhaps our cities have changed by bringing more people from afar to mingle. Though prairie poets may seem hidden in alleged obscurity, we continue to emerge with our ability to surprise.

I hope this small collection will convince you that prairie poetry has survived with its potential uniqueness intact through its variety, and I hope you make your own space for its growth in relation to yours. Poetry can be read in isolation, and understanding it can require determination, but your own self can grow in relation to the meanings poems contain. Then you can sing them.



THE POEMS

FULL METAL OJI-CREE
by Joshua Whitehead

**WALKING WITH WALT
WHITMAN THROUGH
CALGARY'S EAST SIDE
ON A WINTER DAY**
by Rosemarie Griebel

VANCOUVER LIGHTS
by Earle Birney

MIXED TAPE
by Katherena Vermette

I AM
by John Clare

**WITH THE DYING OF
THE LIGHT**
by Richard Harrison

19
by Brandi Bird

ROAD SHOULDERS
by Cecily Nicholson

THE BOW
by Bertrand Bickersteth

FAMILY REUNIONS
by Karen Connely

EDITING THE PRAIRIE
by Don Kerr

NOT THE MUSIC
by Lorna Crozier

OTHER
by Dorothy Livesay