Margaret Roper and Erasmus: The Relationship of Translator and Source

Local Poetry: iHuman’s Kirsten Sikora

From Treasure Rooms to Special Collections: An Interview with Jeannine Green from the Bruce Peel Special Collections Library
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Margaret Roper

By Patricia Demers

As biographers, dramatists, historians, painters, and philosophers present her, Margaret Roper is preeminently her father’s creature. Educated in the More household, this erudite woman is assumed to be a paragon of filial virtue, a characterization which has the potential to muffle individuality. Only a portion of her writing has survived. Lost are her Latin and Greek verses, her Latin speeches, her imitation of Quintilian, and her treatise The Four Last Thynges, which More considered equal to his own. What remain are a scattering of letters and the primary text associated with her name, the translation of Erasmus’s Precatio Dominica (1523) as A devout treatise upon the Pater noster (1524), whose subject and mode appear to confirm the derivative nature of this daughter’s accomplishment. With its hallmark doubling of meanings for adjectives, nouns and verbs, the treatise’s claim that “he is nat a natu-ral and proper chylde whosoeuer do nat labour all that he can to folowe and be like his father in wytte and condicions” (Roper 108), a creative expansion of “non est autem germanus filius, qui pro sua virili non imitatur ingenium ac mores patris sui” (Erasmus 1221 B), encapsulates the prevailing view of this nineteen-year-old wife and mother, “the star product of More’s domestic school” (King 207).

When writing to the eldest, best-known and, presumably, most gifted of his children, Thomas More regularly used superlatives to address “puell[a] iucundissima[,]” “Margareta charissima[,]” “dulcissima filio” and “dulcissima nato” (Rogers 97, 134, 154). Eating a meal was “not so sweet” to More as talking to his “dearest child” (Stapleton 109), to whom he wrote from the Tower as “myne owne good daughter” and for whom he remained “your tender louynge father” (Rogers 509). In Erasmus’s correspondence with Roper, whom he greeted as “optima Margareta,” the humanist praised the letters of all the More sisters as “sensible, well-written, modest, forthright and friendly” (letter 1401, Basel, 25 December 1523). His Christmas gift to her in the year of the publication of Precatio Dominica was his commentary on Prudentius’s hymns for Christmas and the Epiphany; the gift not only verifies his confidence in Margaret’s Latin but also reveals Erasmus’s “attitude presque paternelle” since he casts himself as “le pédagogue attentioné, soucieux de former une élève de choix” (Béné 473). The following year Erasmus used Margaret as “the probable model” (King 181) for Magdalia in the colloquy “The Abbot and the Learned Lady”; this interlocutor wastes no time chastising the Abbot’s fear of women’s learning, deftly wielding a double-edged sword to reply to the claim that “a wise woman is twice foolish”: That’s commonly said, yes, but by fools. A woman truly wise is not wise in her own conceit. On the other hand, one who thinks herself wise when she knows nothing is indeed twice foolish. (Thompson 222)

Magdalia cannily engages her companion in the to pic of clerical ignorance, part of her “veiled critique of the intellectual sloth afflicting men” (Jordan 60): “If you’re not careful,” she taunts, “the net result will be that we’ll preside in the theological schools, preach in the churches, and wear your miters” (Thompson 223). When, in September 1529, Holbein unveiled for Erasmus his portrait of the More family, this scholarly friend wrote immediately to Margaret, “the glory of [her] British land” (decus Britanniae tuae), assuring her that he recognized everyone, but no one more than her (omnes agnoui, sed neminem magis quam te), whose lovelier spirit within shines through the exterior (per pulcherrimum domicilium relucentem animum multo pulchriorem) (Letter 2212, Freiburg, 6 September 1529). Thomas Stapleton, More’s early biographer, devoted a whole chapter of Tres Thomae to More’s eldest daughter, continuing the two strands of Margaret’s reputation: her exceptionality (“she attained a degree of excellence that would scarcely be believed in a woman”) and family likeness (“she resembled her father, as well in stature, appearance, and voice, as in mind and in general character”) (Stapleton 103).

Visual and figurative images of Margaret Roper associate her with learning. The woodcut prefacing the earliest surviving edition in 1525, a multi-purpose printer’s block, does not purport to represent Margaret Roper, yet the ways it attempts to define and encase the female subject are worth noting. Within the interlocking, enfoliated tracery of the border, suggestive of a cloister, this veiled woman, shrouded
in metres of cloth and almost surrounded by volumes, looks away from the open folio. This crude woodblock might prompt today’s reader to reflect on the perspectival shifts and linguistic freedom with which Roper coloured her vernacular rendering of Latin. Holbein’s finely detailed sketch of Margaret Roper, part of the commissioned family portrait at More’s home at Chelsea, stresses the resemblance to her father and also — as much to capture the full though sideward glance as anything else — represents the subject looking away or up from the book in her hand. Books are a signature emblem for Roper. For a seventeenth-century Jesuit eulogist, Pierre Le Moyne, she was an exemplary woman of strength, a modern Maccabee (cf. 2 Maccabees 7). With her knowledge of Greek and Latin, prose and verse, philosophy and history, Le Moyne observes, Margaret was More’s best work, his finest book: “cette Fille a esté le plus docte Livre et le plus poly, qui soit sorty de l’Esprit de Morus” (Maber 37).

In their speculations about Morean family dynamics, contemporary playwrights have imagined vastly different Margarets, an individual who is filial (for Robert Bolt) and disenchanted (for Paula Vogel). Although in his 1960 play, A Man for All Seasons, Robert Bolt takes many liberties in introducing Meg as an unmarried woman in her mid-twenties, “a beautiful girl of ardent moral fineness . . . who both suffers and shelters behind a reserved stillness” (Bolt xx), Bolt’s Meg is brilliant and strong. By contrast, Paula Vogel’s 1977 play, Meg, tries so hard to demythologize its central character that it trivializes her. Vogel’s Meg is a cynic, describing herself as “Margaret the Masochist” (Vogel 6); surprisingly vapid and vain, she answers her own query about why her father decided to teach her Latin and Greek by explaining that “I am very likely the only woman in the world right now pouring [sic] over these words — there is no other woman. I am unique” (Vogel 25). This Meg is also detached, refusing to wait for her father on his journey from Westminster to the Tower and leaving her husband to fabricate the story of her public embrace of her father, “an action so stunning that it was immediately recorded in at least three anonymous accounts of More’s last days” (Murphy 115). Reviewing her life, Vogel’s Meg assesses her daughters as giggly gossips; in fact, Mary Roper Basset, the only woman whose work appeared in print during the reign of Mary Tudor, was an accomplished scholar, translating her grandfather’s Treatise on the Passion from Latin to English, the first book of Eusebius’s Ecclesiastical History from Greek to Latin, and the first five books of Eusebius into English (Reynolds 127).

Margaret Roper was a creative translator schooled in travelling back and forth between Latin and English. The practice of double translation, from English to Latin and then from Latin back to English, encouraged in More’s home-based school, supplied the “early apprenticeship” (Weinberg 26) Margaret drew on most effectively in A deu- out treatise. Her father’s ardent belief in the need to educate girls and boys as, in the phrasing of his letter to the tutor William Gonell, “equally suited for the knowledge of learning by which reason is cultivated,” not only established “More’s leadership, in both practice and theory, about the liberal training of women” (Rogers 120–23) but also must have heartened and inspired Margaret when Erasmus’s commentary came into her hands. She knew from experience that “the study of Latin was, to some extent, a Renaissance puberty rite – but only for boys and young men –” (McCutcheon 201) and that her rare privilege also conferred a responsibility to share and disseminate this catechetical teaching.

Her practice in interlingual translation no doubt familiarized her with the classical touchstones about the advice, in Horace’s Ars Poetica, against word-for-word slavish translation (nec verbum curabis reddere fidus interpres) (lines 133–34). A similar directive from Cicero’s De Optimo Genere Oratorum, to convert not as a translator but as an orator (neque conversi ut interpres, sed ut orator) by relying on the diction used by one’s readers (verbis ad nostram consuetudinem aptis) (V. 14), had also likely been part of Margaret’s formation. Such guidance would soon form the basis of Renaissance translation theory, as begun by Etienne Dolet in 1540 with La Maniere de Bien Traduire D’Une Langue en aultre. Yet in this early stage of translating into English, Margaret Roper was a novelty: the first non-royal woman translator to make her mark. Her Treatise joined her father’s 1505 translation of some of Miranda’s minor works plus his biography, the 1504 translation by the Lady Margaret (Beaufort) Tudor, mother of Henry VII, of the fourth book of De Initiatione Christi and her posthumously published translation of Denis de Leeuwis’s Speculum Aureum as The myroure of Golde for the Synfull soule in 1522, and Tyndale’s 1523 translation of Erasmus’s Enchiridian militis Christiani.

The preface of Richard Hyrde obliquely identified the “gentylwoman / whiche translated this lytell boke” by her “vertuous conversacion / lyuyng / and sadde demeanoure” and by her culturally approved difference, being “as loth to haue prayse gyuyn her / as she is worthy to have it / and had leauer her prayse to reste in mennes hertes / than in their tonges / or rather in goodes estimacion and pleasure / than any mannes wordes or thought” (Roper 100–01, 103). There is no way of checking how Hyrde’s depiction of Margaret, which accords so neatly with the patriarchal discursive order, tallies with her actual personality, nor of verifying if, perhaps, his “special accommodations for her gender” might constitute a deliberate verbal manoeuvre: “enabling women to be presented . . . as writers within a culture hostile to women’s speech” (Lamb 10–11). The imaginative detail and care Roper lavished on this production, its expressive idiomatic range and independent control of syntax indicate that this young artist was as fully aware as Hyrde of the extraordinariness of her accomplishment. Roper adjusted, juxtaposed and re-aligned syntactic and morphological categories. In its “ability to manipulate and mold the receiving rather than the lending tongue” (Raffel 105), her
work shows how “translation absorbed, shaped, ori-
tented the necessary raw material” (Steiner 247).

The two close readings of Roper’s translation, by
John Archer Gee in 1937 and Rita Verbrugge in 1985,
emphasize the natural rhythms and maturity of her
achievement. Although he cites few examples, Gee
argues for the “scholarship and art” of this “rela-
tively unknown girl” by indicating how her transla-
tion rarely follows the Latin ordering and structure
and how in the “felicitous freedom” of her diction “a
Latin word [is] seldom expressed by its English deriv-
ative” (Gee 161, 165). Claiming that “the translation
is as much Margaret’s work as Precatio Dominica
is Erasmus’,” Verbrugge conducts a more detailed
and substantiated examination of Roper’s “simple,
straightforward, and unpretentious” vocabulary,
her “tendency to double or couple the adjectives
or verbs,” and her building of “parallel structures
of her own” (Verbrugge 40). This essay undertakes
a broader consideration of the ways Roper’s transla-
tion achieves distinctiveness and independence.

In a discourse addressing an “assigned. . . way of
praying” (105) (precadxi formulam [1219 C]), it
makes sense that the translator strives to clarify
and crystallize the catechetical intent. Accordingly
Roper enumerates the seven parts and titles them
“petitions.” She also adjusts sentence structure to
underline didactic points. In the first petition, about
the hallowing of the divine name, she expands and
crystallize the catechetical intent. Accordingly
praying “(105)” (Precatio Dominica
mention achieves distinctiveness and independence.

On the whole Roper’s expansions are apt and effect-
ive. The rendering of ut hac gravi perpetuoque col-
luctatione virtutem tuorum & exerceres & confirmare
(1223 A) as “by continuall and greevous batayle / to
exercise / confyme / and make stedfaste the vertue
and strengthe of thy people” (112) underscores
the results of perpetual wrestling in the additional
reference to steadfastness. On rare occasions her
string of verbs does not capture the boldness of the
original. The Erasmian warning against subverters
within (intra Ecclesiae tuae moenia) whose aim is to
dishonour and impair strength (dedecorant, ac robur
labefactant [1223 B]) does not emerge as bluntly in
Roper’s translation; not only is the verb to hasten (propere) vivified as “hye us a pace to,” but a concluding section is added to
complete the sequence. Ita ducxit Filius tuus, etiam
ad altare relicito munere properandum ad fratrem
pacis reconciliationem (1226 B) becomes “Therfore
thy sonne gaue vs this in commandment / that we
shulde leav our offering euyrn at the auter / and hye
us a pace to our brother / and labour to be in peace
with hym / and than returne agayne and offre vp our
rewarde” (120).

Roper’s English achieves its directness and immediacy
through many – often surprising – experiments. She
shows a real ability to dramatize fairly static utter-
ances. Although in his On Copia of Words and Ideas,
a work designed to assist translators “in interpreting
authors” and a work which Roper no doubt knew,
Erasmus had warned against tautology as “repetition
among the parallelism of mounting tension and frustration,
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Erasmus had warned against tautology as “repetition
of the word or expression” (Erasmus, Copia 17),
he had resorted to this technique, along with effect-
ive parallelism, to exhibit the vehement response of
those who judged God through his followers and
thereby dismissed him repeatedly: Valeat ille Deus,
qui tales habet cultores: valeat ille Dominus, qui tales
habet servos: valeat ille Pater, qui tales habet filios:
valeat ille Rex, qui talem habet populum (1221 D).
Roper’s translation uses no repetition, but catches
the parallelism of mounting tension and frustration,
the prophetic sense of misrule and disjointedness.

What a god is he that hath suche maner of wor-
shippers. / Fye on suche a mayster that hath so
vexedly seruauntes: / Out vpon such a father / whose
children be so leude: / Banished be suche
with the victory of Jesus which "by mekenesse vened-quesshed cruellnesse" (111), Roper not only fulfils but overgoes the letter of the source text's vehemence about the Jews. Her father's increasingly vocal role as "a stann preacher of heresy and an undeviating apologist for Catholic orthodoxy" (Greenblatt 53) may have affected her colouring of the original; Erasmus's words themselves reveal "a form of religious anti-Semitism, rather than racial, . . . shared by many contemporary humanists" (De Molen 94). Roper characterizes Jewish practice "in their sinagoges and resorte of people" (1222 D), which he heightens the meaning of "dash against" in impingunt to "they caste eke in our tethe / as a thyng of great dishonestie / the most glorious name of thy children" (107) (Nobis probi loco impingunt gloriosum cognomen Fiili tui [1220 D]). The hoped-for conversion of the Jews means a completely unproblemated resigna
tion, "when the iewe also shal bryng and submut the selfe to the spiritual and gostely lerning of the gospel" 9113 (Judaeis etiam in regnum Evangelicum sese aggregatibus [1223 B]).

Familiar as she evidently is with the whole array of Erasmian suggestions for embellishing, amplifying and enumerating detail, the advice Roper follows the most concerning the method of amplification by which "we do not state a thing simply, but set it forth to be viewed as though portrayed in color on a tablet, so that it may seem that we have painted, not narrated, and that the reader has seen, not read" (Erasmus 47). Her extensions and adjustments of the Latin show a constant striving to be clear and graphic. To empha
size the almost angelic radiance of believers, she adds the meaning of relucet (shine back) to create a compelling picture of divine glory reflected equally at human and angelic levels. Relucet e in moribus nostris, non minus quam in Angelis caeterisque rebus obt se conditis, tui nominis gloria (1221 F) becomes "that the light and glory of thy name / maye no lesse appere and shine in our maners and lyuenge / than it shyneth in thy Anges / and in all thynge that thou has created and made" (109–110). The elongations always reveal how quickly Roper's moral intelligence tracks the consequences of wayward attitudes; rerum fluxurarum (1224 B) appears as "frayle and van-
vysying thynges" (115) and mancipia peccati (1227 C) as "thral and bonde to synne" (123). She does not shy away from stern indictments or grisly details to make the contrast between Christ and Satan as visual and immediate as possible. Unlike the "naturally good and gentilly" (natura bonus ac beneficus) Lord, the devil is a "currysshe and ungentyll . . . myster" (123) (immiti Domino [1228 A]); Jesus's pasto
tial intervention, "thou curest and maketh hole the sicke and scarbe shewe" (123), an arresting but not "repulsive" (Verbrugge 42) translation of morbidam sonas (1228 A), is an entirely justified reclamation of possible casualties through the wounds inflicted by the devil, who was compared to "a rauousen Lyon / lyeng in wayte / sekyng and huntyng about / whom he maye deouure" (123). However, as well as hitting home the grimness, Roper deliberately softens many of the negative constructions in Erasmus's Latin. She sidesteps the straightforward declaration that un
ter the Father gives the bread it will not be salvat-
ury conveyed directly through the negatives of nec salutaris est, nisi tu Pater quotidie dederis (1225 C), by obscuring the negative implications in the some-
what cumbersome "yet but if thou father doest gyue it / it is nat holosome nor anything sauyleth" (118). She silences a whole clause dealing with mortal of
cences to lay greater stress on the amendment of fatherly correction; "if any thyng we offende the" (120) mitigates the sinning propensity of Erasmus's supposition si quid offendimus, sicut offendimus frequenter in multis (1226 C). As if to emphasize human compliance with divine "gentlynesse" and "wysedome," Roper alters the literal meaning of "we do not protest against" for non recusamus (1227 B) to "wherfore we be content to put to what soever
frode we maye leape" (122).

The work of this unknown girl, who was also a re
markably shrewd, self-possessed scholar, is poised on the brink of individual creative expression. Although in the sixteenth-century female-gendered activity of translating, a woman translator was "less vulnerable to the accusation of circulating her words inappropriately" because "they were not, strictly speaking, her words at all" (Lamb 12), Roper's translation is not enslaved to the source language nor does it caper irresponsibly in the target language. The respect ac
corded the source seems due as much to its subject and intent as to its authorship.

Here now the desyes of vntye and concorde / for it is nat fyting ne agreeable / that bretheren / shulde disagre or varry among themselfe / by ambi
cious desire of worldly prouicions / by conten
tious debate / hatered or enuoy. (106)

Although her emphatic abhorrence of violence con
eys a standard de contemptu mundi position, es
cially evident in the contrast of "the realme of this worlde . . . holde up by garrions of men / by hostes and armour . . . and defended by fierce cruellnesse"

She is as capable of shrinking as of expanding the source. In contrast to Erasmus's catalogue of beasts and food to whom unbelievers offer worship, boves, arietes, simias, paruum, coepe (bullocks, rams, mon
keys, leek, onion [1220 D]), Roper listens more to the De Copia advice about metonymy (chapter xxii) to make the best-known sacrifices stand in for all the rest and reduces the list to "some also to oxen some to bulles /and such other lyke" (107). Colour is a hall-
mark of her style; it resides in onomatopoeic coinages such as "the bullishyng of ryuers" (109) for fontium scatebrae (1221 E), illustrative, though now archaic, words such as "ouerhippe" for praetergrediamur (go beyond) in her version of neque in re divinae voluntat-
is tuae praescriptum praetergrediamur (1224 E) as "that in nothyng we ouerhippe or be agynt that/ which thy godly and divine wyll hath apoynted vs" (116), and precise elongations of sensory and emo
tional details as in enlarging neque placet (1225 A) to "thou utterly dispysest" (117), quae carnalis est (1225 A) to "that sauereth all carnally" (117), and es perecutius fame (1225 B) to "what tyme we were lyke to haue perishd for hungre" (117).

The advice in the De Copia about observing "how a paratticular age has achieved variety in the use of words" as opposed to wasting "time with synonyms" which are "not far from babbling" (Erasmus 24–5) must have had a special place in Roper's thoughts as she embellished certain phrases to reflect Ref

ersion realities. It is very possible that the texts, book-burnings, and ecclesiastical inspections of the campaign "to stem the steady stream of Lutheran literature" (Verbrugge 36–7) in the early 1520s were flashing through her mind when she expanded Audi voto concordiae. Non enim convenit, ut fratres, quos
ua bonitas aequavit in honore gratuito, ambitione, conten
tione, odio, livore inter se dissidente (1219 D) to

Here now the desyes of vntye and concorde / for it is nat fyting ne agreeable / that bretheren whom thy goodnesse hath put in equall honoure / shulde disagre or varry among themselfe / by ambi
uous desire of worldly prouicions / by contentious debate / hatered or enuoy. (106)

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pecially evident in the contrast of "the realme of this worlde . . . holde up by garrions of men / by hostes and armour . . . and defended by fierce cruellnesse"
and credal formulation, Roper’s sentiments prepare the way for subsequent generations of women. The rich assortment of writing by women compiled by Thomas Bentley in the Second Lampe of Virginitie of his Monument of Matrones (1582) corroborates the perseverance of Roper’s work. She would echo wholeheartedly the “exhortation” of Lady Jane Dudley “the night before she suffered,” a prayer which the imprisoned and condemned Lady Jane wrote at the end of her Greek New Testament and sent to her sister: “It will teach you to live and learn to die. It shall win you more than you should have gained by the possessions of your wofull fathers land” (Bentley 101). Roper would also endorse the logic of the creatively petition in Elizabeth Tyrwhit’s prayer about “our fraitlete and miserie;” its contrastive picture of human weakness would be very well known to Roper:

> What shall I saie to God? Thou art most good, and I euill; / thou holie, and I miserable; thou art light, and I am blind; / thou art the blessed one, and I am carefull and full of sorrowe. My Lord, thou art the Physician, and I am the miserable patient; I am nothing but uanitie and corrupt, / as euery liuing man is. What shall I say O Creator but this, / that I am thy creature, and shall I perish? (Bentley 113)

Another collection with which Roper would agree, The Praiers made by the right Honourable Ladie Frances A burgauennie, and committed at the houre of hir death, to the right Worshipfull Ladie Marie Fan (hir onlie daughter) as a jewell of health for the soule, and a perfect path to Paradise, contains many literary forms Roper did not attempt, such as “a Praier deciphering in Alphabet forme” the name of Lady Abergavenny’s daughter and a closing acrostic. Yet Abergavenny’s recorded prayer against “euill imaginations,” requesting “a cleere conscience, shamefast eies, innocent hands, and a tongue to tell the truth” (Bentley 173) transmits the same pristine resolve seen throughout Roper’s translation. The fervour of the catechism showing “the maner how to examine . . . young persons,” in Dorcas Martin’s translation from the French of An instruction for Christians, containing a fruitfull and godlie exercise, as well in wholesome and fruitfull praiers, pinpoints the issue at the heart of Roper’s earlier undertaking. When the Mother asks the Child to “rehearse . . . in the common language . . . the forme that he hath given us,” the Child not only recites the Our Father but explains its name:

> To declare the love that he beareth towards us in Jesus Christ, to the end that in full assurance and boldnesse we may come to him onlie, and not to be afraid of him, no more than a child is of his father. (Bentley 236)

The intense filial bond between Margaret More Roper and her father accounts for her scholarship, her friendship with Erasmus and, in a practical way, our recognition of her as a translator. But this daughter for all seasons is not simply a conveyor (translatus meaning “carried across”) from Latin to English. In its elements of self-conscious discourse, her authorial voice does not shy away from teaching, from commentary on its own functioning and primary message. Her additions and embellishments, along with decisions to elide and collapse phrases, show how warmly she responded to the rhetorical exercise of preaching. Expounding on, colouring and extending the Erasmian source, her translation supplies a truly polyphonic response.

Note

1 Among the remnants are one letter to Erasmus, two to her father in the Tower and one letter of disputed authorship, the Alington letter, an account of a conversation with her imprisoned father written to her stepister, Alice Alington. On the matter of Margaret’s writing the Alington letter, Walter M. Gordon favours neither side over the other, pointing to the facts that “there is no winning argument in this dialogue” and that “the two people are left divided, if not in common sympathy, at least in desire and understanding”; see “Tragic Perspectives in Thomas More’s Dialogue with Margaret in the Tower,” Cithara 17 (1978): 4. Elaine Beilin opts for Roper’s authorship as “more than likely”; see Redeeming Eve: Women Writers of the English Renaissance (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 25. Nancy E. Wright uses Foucauldian theory to illustrate how “Margaret’s words function as a homosocial bond between Thomas More and Henry VIII”; see “The Name and the Signature of the Author of Margaret Roper’s Letter to Alice Alington,” in Creative Imagination: New Essays on Renaissance Literature in Honor of Thomas M. Greene, ed. David Quint, et al. (Binghamton: Medieval and Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1992), 257.

Works Cited


Lamb, Mary Ellen. Gender and Authorship in the Sis-
women’s words on reading

Women readers – from poets to musicians – share their thoughts on reading. In this issue we include excerpts from interviews with four very different women.

Carmen Rodriguez came to Canada as a political exile from Chile following the military coup there in September of 1973. She writes in both Spanish and English and currently teaches at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, Canada. We talked to Carmen when she was in Edmonton to do a reading of her work as part of Women’s Words 2004, an annual Summer Writing Week hosted by the Faculty of Extension at the University of Alberta.

CR: Well I’ve been a reader my whole life. My mom was a teacher – both my parents were teachers – so my mom taught us all to read way before we went to school. I’ve been reading since I was three.

WWR: Wow.

CR: You know, it’s not such a fantastic feat when you think that Spanish is a phonetic language so learning to read in Spanish is simpler than English and French. But anyway I grew up surrounded by books. Both my parents really gave books a lot of value. My dad used to say things like we may not have beautiful designer clothes or the latest in furniture . . . because teachers in Chile are poor, they’re still paid very poorly. It’s not like here where teachers do get a decent salary – in Chile, no. So we were poor, we had very little money but we were brought up to really appreciate reading and to appreciate books. So I grew up reading all kinds of things. The books that supposedly I was allowed and also those that were “forbidden” in quotations marks. (Laughter). I managed to get my hands on them. A lot of stuff in translation into Spanish from Shakespeare to Dostoevsky, Zola, Faulkner, you name it. I was fed, really, a diet of universal literature from very early on. These days – well, my thing is fiction and poetry. I do read non-fiction once and a while but I’m always, always reading something to do with fiction and poetry. . . Well, I can tell you that my ideal reading scenario is me in my bed curled up with my book and just being immersed in this other world that this book offers to me. For me that’s my ideal reading situation. No interruptions, no nothing – just me and my book. I love that.

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The first international Visitor to the WWR Program in October 2003, Professor Crisafulli is Director of the Centre for Studies in Romanticism at the University of Bologna and lead researcher of an international research project on European Women’s Drama of the Romantic Age, funded by the European Community.

**PD:** What are the major interests in your research?

**LMC:** Romanticism is the area in which I have been working, researching and publishing for the last twenty years. I could define myself as a Shelleyan. In fact, the focus of my research has certainly been on P.B. Shelley and, in part, the circle of the Shelleys, including William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft; their writing interconnects. But more recently, I have turned my attention to women Romantic writers and, in particular, women poets, and most recently, women playwrights. I run a centre for women Romantic poets and a journal, which I edit; they are both interdisciplinary.

*So we have other scholars involved all the time, in fact; our scholars come from different areas, disciplinary areas, such as philosophy, history, French literature, Italian literature, German literature and, of course, music. We have some brilliant, really brilliant, scholars in music and art history. So we are quite a large group.*

**PD:** Is it a network?

**LMC:** It is a network, and it is not. It is a network in a sense that we have involved other universities – the University of Florence, of Rome, of Parma – but we have also involved British, French, American, and Canadian universities.

**PD:** Spanish?

**LMC:** No, not Spanish yet, unfortunately.

**PD:** But you’re working on it!

**LMC:** Yes. So, that is our network. There is also a group based at the University of Bologna where I teach, where I work, and, so, let’s say that this group is really Bolognese.

**PD:** We usually associate “Bolognese” with a sauce!

**LMC:** Exactly, exactly! Ragu, no?

*We have a lovely, really committed group of Bolognese scholars. In Italy we are expected to apply for government or university support and financial support.*

**PD:** Indeed. Research Grants.

**LMC:** Exactly, research grants. We have been extremely successful. We have so many books and volumes and transactions coming out, and our younger, very productive colleagues do work with us closely. Beyond these colleagues we have involved many students, many postgraduates, many colleagues, from different areas, and on many themes.

**PD:** So it’s actually teams on themes.

**LMC:** Exactly. Exactly. Well, we have several; I’m not going into all of that. You know, in twenty years, you can imagine. But let’s say if we talk about the last five or six years. We have addressed women Romantic poets, European women Romantic poets. We’ve been working on women writing in Europe. As a matter of fact our most recent book is due out in a week or two. It’s a fascinating look at women’s letters, at how women corresponded in Europe, within Europe.

**PD:** And obviously in different languages.

**LMC:** Absolutely. Different languages, on different topics. In fact, the book is divided in different sections, and each chapter has a theme, a title, a brief biography, also bibliography, and then, a discussion of the aesthetics or theory that she may have elaborated.

**PD:** Now, is it largely in Italian or entirely in Italian?

**LMC:** We have the original text and then we have
from which women had to be removed.

PD: Banished.

LMC: Exactly. Banished. And so, you know, in a way, to write for the theatre meant also to challenge a long tradition of male domination and domain, and, of course, production. On the other hand, women wanted to do that, wanted to be there, wanted to write for the theatre. Why? This has very much to do with the theory of Romanticism as such, you know, the need of the Romantics – despite all restrictions, despite the fact that the Romantics are always being seen as being closed or imprisoned in their ivory tower – to communicate. They needed to communicate, to reach an audience, to reach a reader, to reach their mind, to reach their behaviour, to be able – I don’t want to say to shape but I’m certainly going to say it – to shape it and to give it a new meaning, a new purpose, a new aim.

PD: And they also felt the need to communicate in the language of the people.

LMC: Exactly.

PD: To communicate in a way that would be understood.

LMC: Absolutely, because theatre and drama needed a mimetic language, a realistic language, the language of reality and also the life of the people themselves.

PD: A reflection of the mind.

LMC: Absolutely. And so women, just like men of the time, wanted to take part in this great event, which meant these mass media, this great shift in media and this need to reflect a changing reality, to shape society and give a different opportunity, especially for women. This was particularly true for women because they were deprived of legal rights. They couldn’t appear in courts independently. They didn’t even have the rights to their own intellectual work. It’s sad but they could not receive, as we say today, the income derived from their publication. It wouldn’t go straight into their hands because they needed somebody to represent them: a husband, father, or brother. Let’s think about Charlotte Smith. For her entire life Charlotte Smith was protesting against this, against the fact that she couldn’t claim her rights, in public, in the court. Even when she had been divorced, for a long time, she still needed her exhusband to represent her to collect her income from publishing. So, anyway, more than anybody else, women wanted to make their voice heard, to make their pleas, to shape an ideal woman, to shape a new woman. It’s perfectly true that Ibsen with Doll’s House started a bourgeois theatre, a bourgeois comedy, and opened the way to the new woman. Well, I say, “Yes! But isn’t that only what the canon says?” Why don’t we go back?

PD: Peel back the layers, and see what happened before that.

LMC: Exactly, especially as far as women writers are concerned. Especially as women playwrights are concerned.

PD: With the medium of the stage, it’s significant, I think, to realize that Romantic women playwrights were writing for a public, not a private, stage. It was no longer closet drama. It was public drama, and I think that’s a major difference from an earlier period. Could you comment on the different cases you have discovered? Let’s compare, for instance, the experiences of the stage of Joanna Baillie and Frances Burney.

LMC: I think that maybe we can see this problem, or this question, from two perspectives. One is how somebody who was successful, as Joanna Baillie was, had, at a certain point, to withdraw. Joanna Baillie, like many other women writers, like Barbauld, for instance, had to give up their writing because of their sex. Because they were publishing so successfully, critics started wondering if it was right for them to be doing so. Joanna Baillie, despite the fact that she was successful, did decide to withdraw because she couldn’t stand attacks or criticism any longer. But Joanna Baillie was one of the lucky ones in the sense that, at least for some years, she could not just write plays but also see them staged. And this was thanks, I must say, to the support of some great authorities of the time, in particular Walter Scott. Now, Walter Scott recognized Joanna’s potential and used her intellectual production, her theatrical work, because, as you know, Scott was very much concerned with the Scottish Renaissance and with the creation of a national theatre, a Scottish national theatre, which he considered absolutely essential in order to shape a national identity.

Theatre has long been viewed as the platform of a national identity. This idea was the basis of Yeats’ plans for Ireland. And in Australia, at the beginning of the twentieth century, there was also a great concern to create an Australian identity through a
national theatre. Okay. Now, what Scott knew, being a genius, was that Joanna, being Scottish herself – although she had lived in London for a long time – could produce this kind of national drama. And she did it! So she wrote *The Family Legend* for this purpose.

**PD:** It was commissioned, actually, wasn’t it?

**LMC:** Oh, yes, Scott commissioned it! The play was extraordinarily successful: it was produced in Edinburgh and the audiences of the time really responded positively. Now, on the other hand, with Fanny Burney, we have only recently discovered the volume of material she wrote for the theatre. We now realize how much she wrote for the theatre, and how involved in the interests of the theatre she was. But we don’t know her as a playwright. We know her as a novelist. A great novelist. Now, we know too, that she was prevented from becoming the great playwright which she certainly could have become, based on our reading of her plays today. And the reason why she was prevented was exactly because her family – her father was Dr. Burney – was extremely well known in polite society, especially at the court. So for a young lady to write for what was judged to be a disreputable venue was simply an impossibility. She was prevented; in fact, her father forbade Fanny Burney to publish. She had offers from publishers, but her father did actually intervene to stop them. There are many others like Burney, many others. I’m convinced that Jane Austen could have been a fantastic playwright. When Austen was young, her whole family was staging plays.

**PD:** Maria Edgeworth wrote plays, too.

**LMC:** Yes. But duty calling is one perspective; the point is that some women, talented women as we know, many of whom became outstanding novelists, were prevented from writing for the public, commercial theatre.

The other perspective which I alluded to earlier is the fact that, within theatre, within the drama itself, we expect a comedy of manners from the woman writer. We tend not to anticipate a serious commitment towards society or a serious, shall we say, elaboration of either a theory of aesthetics or an aesthetic. In fact, however, women who challenged these conventions went straight into a fantastic competition with men in all the genres, in all the dramatic genres. They wrote tragedies as well as comedies, as well as farce, melodramas, and so on. An incredible number of women wrote what is called history plays. Now, if you deal with history, it is inevitable that you deal with ideology, that you deal with how the contemporary social situation came about, how women have been...

**PD:** Constructed?

**LMC:** Well, constructed. Yes! Yes! Well-constructed, and how they were obliged to play their role. So there is a question of genre, there is a question of gender, there is a question of classes, of social classes. To deal with a history play, to produce a history play, means that you need to be concerned with all this, you know, which was quite challenging and dangerous for them. And they did it. They did it! They used time and space in a very clever way. They used Spain and Italy or Greece instead of England, but that was done by Shakespeare, too. And they used medieval life and history, or Renaissance, rather than later – eighteenth or early nineteenth century – and so they used displacement. But they needed to be able to speak, to be able to access ... 

**PD:** And in most successful cases, they also needed and, sometimes received, support, encouragement, and mentoring from male figures.

**LMC:** Yes.

**PD:** I’m thinking of Garrick and Scott. For all of the use that they made of these women, because they were strategists, too, they also helped several women, didn’t they?

**LMC:** Yes, I agree entirely. David Garrick was tremendously good and generous to his women but, as you said, that was often because he understood how good they were and how successful.

**PD:** They were marketable commodities.

**LMC:** Exactly. Now, I know that you have recently published a good book on Hannah More. I think this is fantastic because there are so few books on her and but she was so relevant, so important at that time, a different era.

I went to your Special Collections Library yesterday, and I picked out Percy, the tragedy which Garrick, in fact, supported very much. Hannah More is the author; she is responsible for the work but it was first published anonymously. There is a very good introduction by Garrick, who praises and introduces the playwright, but discloses no name. So we don’t know the name.

**PD:** Actually, it’s curious; More favoured anonymous publication. Her first work was a play for school girls, *Search After Happiness*, published anonymously. *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education*, which went through many editions in the first nine months, was originally published anonymously. Everybody knew who did it immediately, because it had Hannah More’s intellectual trademark all over it. But, she preferred – or maybe she realized the strategy of decorum of – anonymous publication.

**LMC:** Yes. And anonymity is a female case. Anonymity throughout history, traditionally speaking, is certainly something that, unfortunately, characterizes women’s writing. They had to draw apart a curtain. And they did it too – Joanna Baillie herself, Mary Russell Mitford and many other women. Only when they actually were successful did they feel that they could come forward, and then they did it. So, it’s certainly a case of difficulty and of censorship, censorship in history, in the canon.

I just wanted to tell you another impressive thing, going back to your comment earlier about how men supported women. Thomas Betterton was another good supporter – of Aphra Behn. Garrick was supportive of at least sixteen or seventeen women playwrights of the time. You named Hannah More, but then we have Charlotte Lennox, Hannah Cowley, and many others.

I think that also, if we move away from theatres and think about other genres, we can see different kinds of support. Let’s just consider how much P.B. Shelley and Mary Shelley did collaborate. They revised each other’s work and advised one another; it was beautiful the way in which they supported each other in the full conviction of the genius of the other. There’s also Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft. In a clumsy way Godwin actually tried to revive Wollstonecraft’s memory after her death.

**PD:** and to publish her work.

**LMC:** Yes. So actually there are cases where collaboration between women and men worked.

**PD:** It was supportive, nurturing, successful. I know we don’t have a lot of time left, but in the minutes that we do, I want to ask you about your own reading. As you know, this project that Gary and I are engaged in involves investigating the connections between writing and reading for women in the present and the past, for women in our historical situation and in other times and places – across many geo-
In terms of other sorts of reading, if not the material I’m reading now, my life has been somehow structured around books and reading. I can’t forget two books by Henry Miller, *Tropic of Cancer* and *Tropic of Capricorn*. When I first read them I was pretty young, but at that time everything had to be known about sex. They gave me a sort of entrée, an introduction to the topic.

**PD:** Did you find them shocking? Or sexist?

**LMC:** Shocking but fascinating. I couldn’t stop reading. His way of making things physical, and tangible I found utterly amazing. But then moving on, I was very much influenced by Garcia Marquez. *Hundred Years of Solitude* was another way of opening up my imagination.

**PD:** What specifically did you carry away from Marquez? Was it the huge sweep of the historiographical imagination?

**LMC:** Well, it was the lightness. The prose floated in the air. Exactly the opposite to Henry Miller! As much as Miller made me see and feel and visualize and smell life, the physical body and physical relationships, with the same energy Marquez made me dream. I was able to fly into a huge created universe of colours, fantasy, magic and language. I think that I learned – without having his ability – the power and magic spell that a word can have. How one can produce another world.

**PD:** Worlds within worlds within worlds!

**LMC:** Exactly! Bubbles of colour surround you. You start flying with them. It’s just magic! This was something that really affected me. Another important book when I was a student, in my twenties, was by an Italian, Gesualdo Bufalino. He may not be as well known as Calvino. Italo Calvino was another one who, together with Garcia Marquez, really opened up this magic world of fiction and language and fantasy. But back to Bufalino. His book, *Diceria dell’untore*, was translated as The Plague-Spreader’s Tale. What I was absolutely fascinated by was the fact that Bufalino used language in such a sophisticated way. He weighed words. Each word is a gem. Each word is so rich in itself, is self-contained.

**PD:** Is it minimalist, spare writing?

**LMC:** I may be giving you that impression, but it’s exactly the opposite – extremely rich narration, almost a flowering of words. He used words in Italian that I had never encountered before or that I had forgotten. He re-pristinated – do you say that? – made fresh, recovered a language, expressions, words that had been left behind.

**PD:** I rather like re-pristinated! It captures the sense precisely.

**LMC:** Yet within this quite elaborate, rich and decorated sentence, each word has its own relevance, its own importance. It was research of linguistic beauty. It was a celebration of words, without forgetting the kind of human understanding and depth and awareness. Bufalino in this book is very tragic, very dramatic. It’s about a young man who is very ill and must go to a hospital. But the richness of the way his imagination and life, despite his body being shrunk and becoming less and less powerful, expanded and became richer was very compelling.

**PD:** It reminds me of the way Michael Ondaatje’s figure in *The English Patient* ruminates.

**LMC:** Yes, the unfolding of the day in the interchapters and the stories of six individuals that intersect and weave their way through the novel.

**PD:** Do you think you’ve always been a reader? Did you like reading as a child? Do you remember your first experience of reading?

**LMC:** Yes. I had a father who was an academic. He believed very strongly that his four children should read, should get into books and into the pleasure of words at a very young age. I remember on Sunday going with him to the newsagent and his saying, “go on, now, select what you want. Don’t be afraid.” I collected what I wanted, usually a pile of cartoons, magazines for children, and yes *Superman* and *Superwoman*.

**PD:** And nothing was kept from you or censored?

**LMC:** No, that comes at another stage! I didn’t have any pressure in terms of what to read or what not to read. Until I was about twelve or thirteen and I started to read I guess you would call them paperback romances. We called them fotoromanze. At that time there were two very popular fotoromanze called *Sonia*, that’s Dream, and *Bolero*. They had beautiful pictures, photographs of young men and women hugging and kissing. Nothing really scandalous. Everything was so proper. The dialogue and story concerned courtship.

**PD:** Popular romance.

**LMC:** Exactly. At that time Italians were very very poor, very basic. And so were these books. Nothing in these stories was enriching. And so my brother, who was eight years older, finding me with these fotoromanze, was extremely angry, so angry that he slapped me. This was only the second slap of my life; the first was from my parents and was absolutely justified. The second was from my brother. He told me I couldn’t get into this “rubbish.” He went on: “At a time when you are shaping yourself as a woman, do you want to become a stupid creature?” He re-
ported to my dad, who usually never got furious but was always calm, balanced, temperate, and genteeel. My father simply forbade the magazines to come into the house. “You have had your experience,” he said, “but from now on these publications will not be read in this house.” I must admit that I did betray his trust a couple of times.

PD: You went underground!

LMC: Yes. As boys do in their bedroom or the bathroom, I did transgress a couple of times after that. But then I stopped. Not because I was afraid of being caught. In any case my father would never be stern. He wasn’t a disciplinarian. He was somebody who liked to talk, to talk about ideas. We solved any problem through talking. But I started to look at this literature or pulp fiction through their eyes. I realized that the style of these books was rather limited. So I gave them up.

PD: Did you agree with their judgement that it was rubbish?

LMC: Well, not exactly rubbish, because it was still fun. In terms of how my language could be enriched and be more articulate, I started doing a sort of – how do you say, an analysis of how many times a word is used?

PD: A word frequency list.

LMC: Yes, a word frequency list. And I found they were always using the same words, very simple, the same structure and sentence length.

PD: So from the point of view of syntax and language you found them pretty minimal.

LMC: Yes, very minimal. Still, very handsome men! They were the same as movie and popular TV stars. They weren’t unknown to me. But the one reason why I liked to read this stuff for a while, not for a very long time, was because I recognized those actors and actresses.

PD: You mentioned Henry Miller as one of your early influences. How do the fotoromanze and Miller connect?

LMC: Oh, they do connect. Being in Italy, being a Catholic, being brought up in a sort of bourgeois family, and being also the eldest daughter, I wasn’t allowed much freedom. I don’t want to put this wrong. I had lots of freedom in terms of intellectual choices and opportunities. I could go to theatres, to concerts, to the schools I wanted; I could go abroad. But in some ways my head was cut off from my body. My body was female; it had to be forgotten somehow, left behind, or taken care of. The head had to be developed. This could also justify the fact that many of the readings or stories I remember as a child were boys’ stories. I developed an independent outlook and also the wish to be a boy.

PD: The wish to have more freedom.

LMC: Exactly. So when I got to Tropic of Cancer and Tropic of Capricorn, I think something happened. I realized that body and mind come together. I also discovered how lovely, how beautiful, it is to be a woman in terms of feeling your own harmony. Your body can sense things beautifully, and can express feelings. I was undergoing a sort of transformation into young womanhood. I left my hometown and moved away to go to university. That was quite different from what women did in Italy; they used to stay at home when they were doing higher education or university. I was very much supported by my father, too, who wanted to give us the same opportunity he’d had and my brother had had. At eighteen I decided to go to another town for university. That was tremendously good for me, to be able to arrange my daily life, to decide what I was going to do each day, how I was going to feed myself, what I was going to wear, how I was going to spend my money. For a woman of my generation to be able to go away and be completely independent and responsible for your choices and intellectual pursuits was tremendous.

PD: But it was also an opportunity to test your own formation, to put into action the enlightened principles modeled for you at home.

LMC: Yes, of course. I must say I’m extremely grateful to my father for the opportunities he gave me; he put so much trust in me.

PD: Trust is essential. So we return to David Garrick, to the early enablers.

LMC: Absolutely. It’s important to be backed, supported. I imagine that this is the same for everybody; all young people – men and women – need that kind of warm encouragement. But for women that is a must.

PD: Let’s finish by returning to your research network. Is it pretty evenly balanced between female and male colleagues?

LMC: You know when I started my academic career the academy was a pyramid. Women were always on the lower level, the base. The higher you went, the fewer women appeared. Now I find, with great pleasure, women are more visible; the hierarchy is different. In a way it’s disrupting. There are many voices. Many women are involved. So, we have many women. But, on the other hand, I think it’s important to have male colleagues. It’s important for my students to hear a different perspective and voice to understand some of the complexities of gender. It is true that in the humanities nowadays women tend to be in a considerable number, which is nice. I wish they were also in a large number in sciences and economics.

PD: Thank you so much for contributing to this interview.
iHuman Youth Society is a non-profit, charitable society operating in Edmonton, Alberta, which aims to reintegrate and advocate for at-risk youth by giving them access to various forms of artistic expression. The Society was born in 1996 when Sandra Bromley and Wallis Kendal involved a number of high-risk youths in the creation of the Gun Sculpture Peace Initiative, an anti-violence project that has been exhibited locally, nationally, and internationally (www.gunsculpture.com). iHuman now works with a core group of approximately 100 youth every year in a creative arts environment where the youth are given the resources and support they need to express themselves through artistic outlets such as painting, theatre, music, writing, film, video production and dancing. To find out more about iHuman and what they do, visit their website: www.ihuman.org

In 2001, 20-year-old Kirsten Sikora discovered iHuman Youth Society, where she began to work on sorting herself out emotionally and artistically. There they encouraged her to come out of her shell by offering her mentorship and free art supplies. Before long, she was working on plays (co-writing and acting), writing poetry, and painting with a vengeance. Kirsten has always been a poet, but at iHuman she found the courage to show her poetry to others who would value it. Writing has always been therapy, a refuge, and a survival tactic for Kirsten. She is currently working at iHuman helping other youth, particularly young girls, express themselves through writing and art. She is also working on publishing Sketch, a collection of work by iHuman youth to be published soon. Her début collection, Sundry: a book of poems, has just been released by Sextant Publishing, a division of Cambridge Strategies, Inc., in Edmonton. The following is a sample of Kirsten’s poetry.

Where applicable, click on the links to see clips from Blood Oranges: Love and Consumption, a film based on her poetry written, directed and produced by Kirsten Sikora (Starring Kendra Sherick, Music by Gail Olmstead).

Love – The word

Love
The word unfolds from my tongue
Only to be caught with my teeth and bottom lip
I wonder if this has anything to do with its nature
Does it spill forth from me and then I seek to capture it
Hold it inside
Maybe that’s just me
Perhaps some pronounce it “luv”
The mouth slowly offering it
Like a kiss
I’ve seen some mouths sneer slightly
Like the word dirties them
Certain lips smile when they say it
While others frown
This most slippery of words
It seems to get away from all of us
For even though it’s the most over used word
Our lips giving it every second of every day
We still feel a lack
Nothing in its construction belies its meaning
Yet that’s the same with all words
Say something often enough it becomes empty
Meaningless
Love, like language, is born from memory.
15

For a Buoy

I saw you
Sensed a spark from the first
Something secret, sacred, soft
Soft
Like your baby-wide smile
That disarms me completely
Sucks the strength from my sadness
While your eyes
So bright, vivid, alive
Send joy-filled laughter bubbles
From my belly to my throat
Tickling my heart, pushing the corners of my mouth
Such is the beauty of your soft spark
I cannot bear to touch you
Why run my hands over your skin?
When it's the quality of your dreams I want to feel
Caress your hopes
Kiss your imagination
Spend all afternoon making love to your
Soft spark

When we were fierce

Once upon a time
We weren't afraid of anything
Holes in our elbows and knees
Dirt under our nails
Homeless, Restless, Aimless
An extensive wardrobe of adventure

Graffitti

Looking over this place
Where we made our lives from paint
Now covered in generations of Jiffy marker
Where eloquence and idiocy mingle
With desperation and expression
Something you said once spied up at me
And I find myself staring hard at the space
Where you used to be

Diamond Girl

Diamond Girl
Sparkle and shine
Harder than anything
I cut through your densest metals
Yet your sharpest edges
Don't even scratch my surface
My possibilities are endless
I seem impossibly strong
That alone is your grounds for
Seeing/Exploring/Pushing
So recklessly to the breaking point of
My center
And when I shatter
You shake your head and walk away.

Soul Window

Eyes flick downward
As something glib and cynical
Rolls off my tongue
On to the floor
Cringing, as I hear my own laughter
Hard
Sharp
Eyes flutter upwards
Lips pursed in a tight half smile
A grimace
I wonder if this is the same face
That once had cheeks sore from smiling
Endlessly wide
Eyes stare straight
Before falling flat
Glancing inward at the wreckage of self
Where bitterness and spite
Has collected, caked
Upon the joy that was once
So bright

women’s words on reading

Kate Braid has written three award-winning books of poetry and has recently published an anthology of Canadian form poetry, co-edited with Sandy Shreve, entitled In Fine Form: The Canadian Book of Form Poetry (2005). She worked in construction for fifteen years as a journey carpenter and now teaches creative writing at Malaspina University-College in Nanaimo, BC. Kate was also in Edmonton for Women’s Words 2004, where WWR’s James Gifford caught up with her.

KB: Right. So, the reading is really important but it’s not everything. And a poem does change when you hear it, but I must say, it doesn’t always change for the better. One problem is – say you have poems that you love and you get a chance to hear the poet read them. It’s never the way, at least for me it’s never been the way it was in my head and sometimes it’s better and sometimes it’s not. Or I decide I don’t like the poet – the body language or whatever, they’re arrogant or I don’t like something – and then the poems can be ruined. So I think it’s actually dangerous to go to a poetry reading, but it can also change your life! When I heard Michael Ondaatje and Sharon Thesen do a poetry reading I was smitten with love for poetry. I mean, it really changed me dramatically and changed my attitude to poetry.

JG: They’re both fantastic readers.

KB: They’re both great readers, great readers. Ondaatje – I already loved his poetry, I didn’t know Sharon’s at the time – I already loved his poetry and after that I loved it more because I had his voice in my head. So every time now I read him I can hear Michael Ondaatje. I can hear that sort of soft accent and the way he sort of softens certain vowels and the Englishness of it and the slow pace – very, very slow, careful. The way he says “Buddha” is an amazing thing – the Buddha is much softer. So I think the readings are important but there’s just so few times that people can come. I like doing readings also as a performer because it gives me a feeling of whether the poem is working orally, which in the end is the final test. So you get sort of a feeling back.

Not every poem, not every audience, but I know for me that when I’m reading my own poem and the hair is standing up on the back of my neck that it’s working. Sometimes it’s a function of audience – I’m picking up a response – but it’s also meaning that the poem’s working. And that, for me, makes me feel like, ok, this poem is finished.
PD: Thank you Jeannine for meeting with us and agreeing to talk about Special Collections. When did the collection start at the U of A?

JG: The Special Collections Library began in the first library at the University of Alberta which was located in the Old Arts Building. It was to the left of the central foyer. Typically, at the University of Alberta, as in most universities in North America, the Chief Librarian would have a Treasure Room close to his office — and I say “his” because most chief librarians were male at this point, in the early part of the twentieth century. The Treasure Rooms contained materials that the Chief Librarian thought were just too valuable or rare, or would suffer depredation if they were left in the circulating stacks.

PD: I love the term! (Laughter) Shades of Robert Louis Stevenson, really.

JG: Absolutely. In any event, as time went by, as donors donated, and as professors retired and donated their collections, became too small to contain the holdings. In the 50s and 60s Special Collection Libraries started developing their own identity, if you will, within library systems. A major landmark in the evolution of Special Collections here was the death of Dr. Rutherford, the first Premier of Alberta, in the early 1940s. He was a focused collector. Fascinated and obsessed with the development of the west, both politically and culturally. His major interests were narratives of explorers — various inland and coastal explorers, the searches for the Northwest passage that were so popular — the books were very, very popular when they were published in the nineteenth century and at the time that Dr. Rutherford was collecting them in the 20s and 30s they weren’t terribly valuable. Canadiana hadn’t caught on yet.

PD: Wasn’t in.

JG: Right. So he had his passions. Franklin’s loss and the ultimate searches for Franklin. He was also interested in the cultural development of the province so he also collected really well published books of poetry. These were either gifts for his daughter, Hazel (ultimately, McQuaig), and Mrs. McQuaig collected books and donated throughout her lifetime — much longer and later into the twentieth century than her father had lived. So it was really almost a half a century of books and connections with Dr. Rutherford. It was agreed at the time of the Rutherford donation, when the librarians realized its importance, that the Rutherford collecting philosophy would carry on, that the University library would continue to buy books that enhanced the initial core of his collection. In the 60s the University of Alberta was the benefactor of the province’s very, very deep pockets. I mean, we were talking about Premier Lougheed this morning and I think it was during the heyday of his administration that he really did concern himself with secondary education and the development of the university. People think that I’ve lost my mind when I tell them this but in the 70s and 80s there was a double matching grant. For instance, if a donation was appraised at $50,000.00 the library would receive double that amount from the government. That grant program lasted until about 1989, when the amount became a one-to-one match and then gradually died off completely. Those were the days!

I wish I’d been around because it would have been really quite exciting to see. The major collections at the University were purchased in the 60s, and during Mr. Bruce Peel’s administration. Such as the Robert Woods Collection from California which contained many highlights in western Americana. This collection jibed extremely well with the Rutherford collection’s focus on western Canadian history; it broadened our scope by taking us down the Columbia River to Astoria and the Pacific coast.

PD: Right, further south. Astoria was at one time a British outpost wasn’t it?

JG: Oh, yes, absolutely. There was huge debate about whether both Oregon and Washington would not be part of Canada. The border would have gone down
and just sort of lopped off California and I'm sure there are a lot of people today who live in those two states wishing that had happened. (Laughter) In any event, the University had a great deal of money, but there were also, I would say, scholar librarians around at the time. Librarians that had very strong subject strengths and really selected wisely. There were also important people at this University, like Dr. Rothrock in the Department of History and Classics, who was an internationally respected French historian. He worked with a bibliographer in the library and acquired an incredibly strong French history collection; it is really quite amazing. We've had visiting scholars who have come here to teach sessions in the History department. They're absolutely amazed that they can get them almost immediately because whenever they've had to find them in libraries in France, it takes more than you'd like to think for these books to be retrieved. So it's been gradual; sometimes in rather short bursts there were really major, wonderful collections acquired. And then over periods of dried-up funding we suffer a little bit. But, generally speaking, this library has really developed, I would say, to the point that it is now, in the last twenty years, among the highest ranking research libraries in Canada. John Charles, the recently retired Special Collections librarian, was very keen about our artist's book work collection and it's really due to him that we have one of the significant artist's book work collections in Canada. In the area of English literature, again, due to John and his predecessors and Dr. Forrest of the English Department, we were able to acquire the Ralph Ewart Ford Bunyan Collection, and we've been developing our D.H. Lawrence collection. We have many foreign translations of Lawrence. To sort of flesh out Lawrence's impact on writing and literature, we also have movie stills and other Lawrence ephemeral pieces. So those acquisitions really give the collection a different dimension entirely.

**PD:** You produce magnificent catalogues, too.

**JG:** So for the last – the Entomological exhibition – it was thrilling to walk into a shop and see a poster advertising it. These posters attracted people who don't ordinarily visit, because we're primarily a humanities library, though we do have some historical scientific books and of course the entomology section has been developing hand over fist lately, through the generous donation of an alumnus, a retired entomologist. We try to attract visitors from all walks of life. Of course the faculty uses the Collection, graduate students, undergraduates, the staff on campus – people who work as FSOs in various departments use Special Collections. We try to do as much outreach as possible and encourage high school teachers to bring their classes to Special Collections. We were an important, very popular part of the schedule for the Summer Youth University Program. Do you remember how well that program was received?

**PD:** Yes.

**JG:** And that was lovely because students from grade nine – just going into high school – would come in and it was really pretty exciting and pretty intense. When I would show children, very young children who had grown up in Edmonton, for the most part, our oldest book, the _Nuremberg Chronicle_, they couldn't believe it was printed in 1493. They can't believe that they can actually almost touch something – I mean, they can, if they want to, if they wear their gloves – that's over five hundred years old.

**PD:** The gloves tend to add to the aura, don't they? (Laughter)

**JG:** Yes, they do. We love to encourage that. We have visiting scholars. There is a person at Penn State who's working on 18th-century pirates. Not the live ones, but the books that were pirated and published in Dublin and that kind of thing. Of course, now that we have the Wirth Institute for Austrian and Central European Studies at the University, I can't fail to mention the Bishop of Salzburg's Collection, another major purchase of the 60s. It was one of the key factors in the Austrians deciding to locate the Institute at the University of Alberta.

**PD:** Well, the collection is broad and rich and diverse, but it has some particular gems for those of us who are interested in women's writing. Would you like to tell us a little about some of those exceptional books we have for scholars and students of women's writing?

**JG:** I have been trying – and I still am – to collect books that reflect the history of women reading and books written for women, or books written by women for women, or books written by women for everyone. It's been one of our focuses here for the last fifteen or so years. Among the books for women, the Minerva Press was active from the late part of the eighteenth century until long after William Lane, the proprietor's, death in the beginning of the nineteenth century. For many, many years scholars, including Dorothy Blakey, who wrote the first bibliography of the Minerva Press in the 30s, thought the list of Minerva Press imprints was quite complete; but she worked without the internet. And then in the 90s, Deborah McLeod, a PhD student in the English department, discovered some Minerva titles not included in Blakey and decided to focus her disser-
Jeannine Green, Head Librarian, Bruce Peel Special Collections Library

PD: Yes, obviously. Three and four deckers.

JG: Because readers using circulating libraries paid per volume. And of course, if you started a novel, you had to finish. So they worked very, very well.

PD: After all, she was just abandoned at the end of volume one; you had to have her identified and reconciled! (Laughter)

JG: The cliffhanger. We probably had ninety or a hundred Minerva titles at the time and Deborah read them all. Then she went to the Corvey Collection in Paderborn, Germany, one of the largest English language fiction collections in Western Europe. She spent several weeks there and said it was absolutely glorious. She had written and asked them for access to their Minerva titles. Deborah read Minerva novels for at least three years and every summer she would come in, every day, and sit in the reading room. We really admired her stamina! (Laughter) She did really solid research. Each of the novels in her bibliography is annotated and she's captured the tone and world of the time. She discovered many aspects of the publishing life of the Minerva Press that were not in the Blakey work. After she had successfully defended her dissertation we got her a large congratulatory box of chocolates. (Laughter)

PD: I would hope a very good bottle of wine, too! (Laughter) Well, the Minerva Press is definitely a gem of the U of A collection.

JG: It is. We have probably one of the three major collections in North America. I was at a conference in Cambridge a few years ago and an important American antiquarian book dealer spoke at our conference. The conference topic was the transition of literature, the movement of books and archives, from England to America; and subsequently to the Far East – and the magnificent libraries of English language literature that were being developed in Japan. He was finding markets for English literature in Japan, particularly involving women, again. Japanese people are interested in the history of women reading in the West. The dealer observed that 'If you would have told me twenty years ago that I could get more than five pounds for a Minerva Press, I would have eaten my hat! I'm so sorry I didn't pay more attention to them.' (Laughter) We have one book that was printed at the Minerva Press that deals with the French Revolution and it was taken to Paris and was annotated. It's unfortunate it was written by a man who went to Paris after the Revolution, but he makes notes in the end leaves of what he perceived – he'd been to Paris before the Revolution and these were his reflections on what had happened.

PD: Oh! The astronaut.

JG: Yes, the astronaut. I was leafing through Ximines Rare Books in England for one of the Honorary Degree recipients for the Installation ceremony in the fall, Julie Payette, is a real curiosity.

PD: I see. Are the notes in English or French?

JG: They're in English because he was an English traveller. But the book that I've bought from Ximines Rare Books is English dealer, which I just got yesterday, and there's a lovely – I'll get it, it's just beautiful – (Jeannine leaves room)

PD: And another book Jeannine has brought out for us is Margaret Atwood's Speeches for Dr. Frankenstei. This is very early Atwood. I'm surprised they didn't put it in the exhibit right now on Canadian presses of the 60s and 70s, but this was on display about three or four years ago when Special Collections did an exhibit on the art poem. Quite rare.

PD: Oh, John Harris, the publisher for children?

JG: No. (Laughter) The title is Astronomical Dialogue between a Gentleman and a Lady: wherein the doctrine of a sphere, uses of globes, and the element of astronomy and geography are explained in a pleasant, easy and familiar way. With a description of the famous instrument called the orrery. It was printed in London in 1719.
They don't have a copy of that. I know we're going to have it because we can't wait until Monday to see if the dealer still had it and he did.

PD: So we've got it?

JG: We've got it.

PD: Fabulous!

JG: But that's the kind of thing – when I see any books of instructions for women in dealers' catalogues I try to acquire them for the collection – if they're within reason price-wise – the strong English pound and US dollar have to be factored in for most such titles.

PD: Well one of the gems that we actually have in the Library, much to the chagrin, I think, of scholars in Eastern Canada, is the first, the only, early modern edition of Lady Mary Wroth's The Countesse of Mountgomeries Urania. They don't have a copy of this in the Robarts Library at the University of Toronto and we are extremely fortunate to have this first edition. I say single edition because it only appeared for six months and Lady Wroth withdrew it from circulation because of charges of libel. It's the first pastoral, the first sonnet sequence by a woman in English, and this first magnificent, stunning, mysterious romance by a woman in English, The Countesse of Mountgomeries Urania. I know we're going to capture a picture of this later.

PD: The illustrations are by Charles Pachter. It was in the collection, was it?

JG: Yes, it was in the collection.

PD: The illustrations are by Charles Pachter. It was printed in 1966. So this is very early Atwood. It's remarkable for me to realize how many undergraduates are actually introduced to Atwood and Canadian literature and the tradition of the artist's book, which of course, is on display here, through such a work. As you were saying, we have a regular assortment of classes who come to Special Collections for twenty years; he can just hardly wait to come here because we always find something to show him he's never seen before. (Laughter) But that piece is very, very rare. And it's number –

PD: 11.
JG: of –

PD: "The edition is limited to 15 copies, all on paper, hand-made from linen and cotton by me," who signs Charles Pachter to copy number 11."

JG: Now he's at the Cranbrook Institute in Michigan. That's one of the reasons why Allison Sivak (who's curating "Pressing: an Exhibition of Canadian Poetry and Small Publishers, 1950-1980") didn't use it in the exhibition. There was a short discussion on the RBMS list recently (the Rare Book and Manuscript section of the American Library Association). Apparently, Charles and Margaret were at camp together, and that's how they met, when they were children.

PD: Oh, I see.

JG: And Pachter is very interested in Canadian literature.

PD: Is he Canadian?

JG: No, an American. But they met on one of those lakes that are in southern Ontario.

PD: Perhaps Lake Michigan. (Laughter)

JG: It could be. They collaborated on two or three items and what a wonderful collaboration! This was much later, of course, after they became adults and he went on to the Cranbrook Academy. So that's how they met and that's the connection between Pachter and Atwood.

PD: Well we have lots to explore in the Special Collections and I want to thank you for this exhilarating introduction to the Collection. We're hoping that our magazine will be able to display and talk about some other highlights from the collection.

JG: Thank you very much and please do encourage one and all to visit us and to join us. I think it would be really interesting if you got people down to talk about their particular fields – Sylvia Brown


JG: I think that would be a terrific little series.

PD: Yes, that's a good idea. Thanks very much.
The Anthologist is a project in progress at the CRC Humanities Computing Studio. The goal of The Anthologist is to create digital anthologies, which allow images of the texts themselves to be displayed. The Early Modern Women Anthologist highlights and displays some of the resources of the Bruce Peel Special Collections Library. Selections from two volumes (1664 and 1669) of the Poems of Katherine Philips launch this feature.

Katherine (Oxenbridge) Philips, the Matchless Orinda (1632-1664), was born in London to a prosperous, mercantile, middle-class family and educated at Mrs. Salmon’s school in Hackney, where she formed the basis of her society of female friends. Philips early adopted the code name of “Orinda.” Admirers soon extended this pseudonym to “the matchless Orinda.” In 1648 Katherine Oxenbridge married the fifty-four-year-old widower Colonel James Philips, who was serving as High Sheriff of Cardiganshire, Wales. Orinda balanced her time between London and the Philips estate in Wales, securing influential literary champions in both locations. Poet, translator, and letter writer, Philips died at thirty-two from smallpox, contracted during a visit to London to protest a pirated edition of her poems.

Her translation of Pierre Corneille’s La mort de Pomée (1644), which she completed in 1663, provoked enough interest to lead to stage productions that year at the Theatre Royal in Smock Alley in Dublin and, in London, at theatres in Lincoln’s Inn Fields and St. James’s. The following selections from her poetry, often addressed to identified or coded contemporaries, illustrate some of the ways she opened up interior, autonomous space.

Philips composed 130 poems – dialogues, odes, epitaphs, eulogies, songs – on topics of immediate and interrelated concern: friendship, contentment, happiness, retirement, the soul, and death. Her poetry supplies a kind of cultural barometer. Though married to a Welsh Cromwellian, she does not disguise her sympathies or the breadth of her understanding of Royalist and Parliamentary causes. She boldly makes a religion of female friendship. She also grieves feelingly the death of her only son, born after seven years of childlessness.

Over the next couple of pages, you will see photographs of five poems by Katherine Philips taken from the 1664 edition of her Poems in the Bruce Peel Special Collections Library.
After his defeat by Cromwell’s forces at Worcester on September 3, 1651, Charles II fled to the Continent. Philips invokes the defeats of Pompey, who fled to Egypt after Pharsalus, and Samson, who grinds at the Philistine prison house in Gaza (Judges 16. 21-30).
“Lucasia,” Mrs. Anne Owen of Orielton, West Wales, is the subject of over twenty poems. Henry Lawes, composer and musician, was praised in verse by both Philips and Milton; Lawes wrote the music for Milton’s mask, Comus.
Henry Vaughan, Welsh poet and doctor, shared Philips’s Royalist sympathies. He added the title “Silurist” to his name in honour of the Celts (Silures) who once lived near his birthplace in Wales. His poetry expresses religious attitudes through Baroque symbolism.
Orinda claims she has been inspired and guided by Lucasia’s soul.

When one of the earliest members of Orinda’s society of friendship, “Rosania” (Mary Aubrey), married William Montagu, Philips was not informed or invited to the wedding; hence, “friendship’s injury.”
women’s words on reading

Tanya Kalmanovitch is a classically-trained violist/violinist who is currently completing her PhD in ethnomusicology at the University of Alberta.

TK: Well, I’ve always been an avid reader. I started young and never stopped. But I’m a bit omnivorous and fairly – catholic, say – in my tastes. I read a lot of fiction. I’m interested in this parallel between the reading of musical scores and reading of performances in my process of developing as an improviser. Probably the most important thing that I’ve done in terms of growing in Jazz improvised music is a process that we call transcription, which generally tends to imply that you’re transcribing a musical performance into musical notation. But really in the way that it’s benefited me the most, the actual notation has had almost nothing to do with it. It’s been more a process of listening to a great musician, a great artist, a small selection of that music – maybe two minutes or five minutes – learning it by heart, learning to sing along with it, and then learning to represent that on my instrument. Because of the instrument I play it’s almost – it’s always a foreign instrument.

The whole point of transcription is to take it inside yourself, I suppose. And then to translate or represent on the instrument, so it involves changing yourself. It implies some sort of transformation, or transformative process, both of yourself and the text – if you want to call it that – that you’re taking on. It’s probably the closest that we have to oral transmission sort of method of learning. It’s been enormously instructive and valuable to me. It’s been very empowering because as a performer trying to learn about playing Jazz on an instrument that is not only maligned in Jazz, but mocked in the string world and the orchestral world, (laughter) with this particular set of barriers and obstacles that I felt I faced as an adolescent and as a young woman – not that I’m not young now, but younger, still – this was a way for me to learn how to play Jazz in my own home without having to put myself in, what I felt to be, at times, a threatening social dynamic. The things that I learned from doing that and that I still learn from doing transcription are mine and nobody can take that away from me. This is very empowering and I see the same thing about reading and the way reading empowers people. Like my mother, growing up in a very poor community in Manitoba, and the importance that books had to her as a young girl. It’s the same thing: the things that she learned from them nobody could take from her. Nobody could go inside and take that away and then you turn those things into your life.
next issue:

- **Sharon Pollock** – Interviews with the Governor General’s Award-winning playwright and U of A cast of *Moving Pictures*
- Essays on Pollock’s work by theatre scholars
- Interview with Patricia Rae, Head of the Department of English at Queen’s University
- More local poetry
- More Women’s Words on Reading