

JUDGES' COMMENTS

"Odyssea on Train Pleads with the Bartender" is a playful poem with serious intent. Its wit, which is politically inspired, is bilingual, tapping into the eliding meanings of individual words in two languages in order to critique a resource-based economy concerned with neither the land it despoils nor the original inhabitants it has displaced to do so. A poem with these themes could be discouragingly hortatory, but Quartermain instead writes with sparkle and verve. This poem is a renewable resource: each reading does not deplete it; rather, readers find more subtleties to appreciate each time they return to it.

Odyssea on the Train Pleads with Bartender

WRITTEN BY MEREDITH QUARTERMAIN

In the land they call Alberta,
le fil de pensée ne bouge pas
parce que
nous suivons un train de marchandises
qui ne bouge pas.

La poésie est arrêtée
dans un champ de canola
so yellow *jaune* so *joli joli jaune*
près d'une montagne rose of salt
the mine promises to bury
in *la terre après tout* le potash
est disparu. C'est bon,
bartender sez.

Oh Fact Man, take me to Unbooty,
Ungreed, Unlooted.
Take me to Respect.
La terre of apples and venison.
La terre, cragged and glacial.
La terreur.

Oh tender of bars and blinders,
you promise Head Smashed In Buffalo Jump
(tho 500 miles south of track),
you promise photo-op bison roaming
home on playing antelope range—
Alberta's unclouded skyity
and narry a daunting wordity.

Take me to Otherwise,
Rockabye mirager,
to Argue and Debate.
Take me to Could Be and Riotous Council
in the land of Nakoda,
Paskwāwiyiniwak,
and Niitsítapi.