



## What the Tree Said

In the park of memorial benches  
lies a plaque beneath a small birch:  
*All I want is a walk-on part.*  
The tree asks only this of passers-by  
who pass by without noticing  
the shining, peeling bark, or the sparrow  
churring on a twig as the breeze  
carries leaves through the grass like petals  
swept from a stage. I, too, am guilty  
of looking away to check my phone  
and when I turn back the plot is empty,  
the birch moving off with the rugged  
oak, the purple ash, the blazing maple.  
All bow in the wind and take to the path  
as if in departure from their final performance,  
heading to a secret afterparty we're not invited to  
though I follow closely behind, listening  
to their murmurings, inhaling their brief scent.

Nina Berkhout

## Pinhole

All we needed for joy back then:  
a shoebox, scissors, and pasted images.  
Now my nephew ever so carefully  
arranges tinfoil cut-outs for a kingdom,  
carving holes in the side and lid  
before peering through to his story.  
For the rest of us— in our third  
or fourth of four chapters—  
time shrinks to a point  
we can't widen.

In a moment, though, we'll hold the flashlight,  
as excited as the boy before us  
who exclaims at his new world  
the way we once did,  
seeing all of life within a tiny opening.

Nina Berkhout

## Ballad

You were well on your way to forgetting  
that quietly failed passion  
until the old song you haven't heard since  
comes on, and suddenly the decades  
haven't passed like quicksilver,  
your bodies still slip and sway  
together, oblivious of all that will go wrong.  
The reasonable thing to do now  
would be to turn off the radio.  
Instead you raise the volume, lie back,  
and plan your reunion with another life.

Nina Berkhout



### **About the Author**

NINA BERKHOUT is the author of five poetry collections: *Letters from Dead Man's Cay* (2003), *This Way the Road* (2005) both from NeWest Press, *Pas de Deux* (Turnstone Press 2006), *Arrivals and Departures* (BuschekBooks 2010), and *Elseworlds* (Seraphim Editions 2012) which received the 2013 The Archibald Lampman Award. This award is presented annually to an outstanding collection of English-language poetry by an author living in the National Capital Region. Her earlier work was shortlisted for *THIS magazine's* Great Canadian Literary Hunt and the John Hirsch Award for most promising Manitoba writer.

Originally from Alberta, she now resides in Ottawa, Ontario, where she works at the National Gallery of Canada. She holds a degree in Classical Studies from the University of Calgary and a Master's Degree in Museum Studies from the University of Toronto. Her debut novel *The Gallery of Lost Species*, an Indigo and kobo Best Book and a *Harper's Bazaar* Hottest Breakout Novel, was published by House of Anansi Press in 2015. She is the author of another novel, *The Mosaic* (Groundwood Books 2017) nominated for the White Pine Award, the Ottawa Book Awards, and named an Indigo Best Teen Book.



**Nina Berkhout**

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In an online interview, conducted by poet and small press publisher rob mcclennan, she shares:

Poetry is more immediate, precise and concentrated than fiction. Every word counts. With fiction, you can get away with more description and meanderings. While poetry is often autobiographical, being overly biographical in fiction can be disastrous. And of course, with poetry, it's all about the language and the imagery. You can write a poem without having a plot or a character. Maybe it's not so much about what one can accomplish that the other can't, but more what they should both be able to achieve: with poetry as with fiction, the writer hopes their reader will connect and feel a range of emotions long after they've closed the book. Personally, I want there to be a story in each poem I write, that the reader can take away and remember. And I would hope that there is poetry in my fiction line, at least some of the time.

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