

## Editor's Notes

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It is a great pleasure to introduce Rishma Dunlop, award-winning poet, playwright, essayist, editor, and translator—bright star in Canada's literary firmament. In reading poems from Dunlop's four acclaimed books—*White Album*, *Metropolis*, *Reading Like a Girl*, and *The Body of My Garden*—we encounter a lyric exploration of contemporary women's lives: the varied roles that we inhabit as daughters, mothers, lovers, wives, friends, and committed professionals who seek to balance a quest for individual fulfillment against the demands of gender-specific responsibilities.

A poet who writes “through the taste of fear/and rage and fury” with “milk and blood” and “ink fierce and iridescent,” Dunlop possesses a memoirist's eye for telling detail. And like the best memoirists, Dunlop ranges beyond nostalgic recollection of the past to plunge headlong into the deepest ontological layers of human experience. Whether she is writing about first love, a father's death and a mother's grief, the passions of young motherhood, the interplay of *eros* and *caritas*, or the violence of city streets across the globe, Dunlop's is a poetic that deftly connects the literal and autobiographical to the larger currents of history.

In “Primer,” we encounter a young child learning to read, poised over a text with cheerful pictures, its “garden of verses” and neighbourhood of “houses lit with yellow sunshine.” Too young to know that the future will hold “pages for *consequence*, *coercion*, *fraudulence*,” she knows only this book's “lovely language/that has no word for *harm*.” The world, too, is a text we learn to read, and Dunlop draws our attention to the particulars of female identity formation within western culture. In “The Education of Girls,” the poet recalls her Girl Guide days, wryly revealing the unspoken agreements of suburban life where girls, taught practical skills to make them “capable,” also swear to uphold official commands: “*look for/what is beautiful and good in everything, and try to become strong/enough to discard the ugly and unpleasant*.” How compelling, therefore, this artist's studied embrace of beauty: from gardens with their “wild strew of roses,” to “flocks of crows/singing a crude chorale,” or the “whir of monarch butterflies, orange-gold dust of thousands of wings,” Dunlop's lush imagery pays tribute to the radiance of our often troubled tenancy on this earth.

For Dunlop, even the smallest domestic details may reveal our connect-  
edness to social and political spheres: perfume dabbed on a strap line “that cut  
across my brown skin” comes to resemble “trails of fighters” firebombing Viet  
Nam on the family TV. “History,” she observes, “threatens to swallow us//year  
after year.” Yet art and language countermand this destruction: they elegize,  
humanize, *make something happen*—“the right word,” this poet tells us, “can  
send you breathless.”

Dunlop’s sweeping lines have a cinematic force, moving dramatically  
between time and place to forge connections across continents and genera-  
tions. Yet she is equally capable of a lyrical delicacy that enriches this broader  
vision. As she holds a student’s newborn, a professor is transported back to  
early motherhood, pleased that despite “this hard season,” she can “still find  
redemption” in a lover’s body, in “lovemaking that is a form of prayer.” While  
a mother grieves her husband’s loss, a daughter finds comfort in her father’s  
garden, yet half a world away, “in the rubble/of the burned library in Sarajevo”  
a cellist plays an adagio for victims killed in a breadline, and the poet closes  
in on this defiant gesture—how the “scroll of his cello/is a fist shaken in the  
face/of death.”

Taken together, the poetry in this Folio holds both defiance and re-  
demption, providing an apt showcase for a rich and complex body of work.  
Here, too, the urban scenes and domestic tableaux of photographs offer a  
perfect counterpoint to Dunlop’s poems. The powerful scrollwork of light  
and script—on walls, doors, pages, clothing, bodies—is testament to one of  
Dunlop’s defining insights: “The heart is literate./It wants to read the pages  
it has unfurled.”

—Jane Satterfield

