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Andrew Parkin's Poetry—Landscapes, Cityscapes, Cultures

by Jack Stewart

Andrew Parkin, a Canadian/British poet with cross-cultural interests, is the author of *Dancers in a Web* (1987), *Yokohama Days, Kyoto Nights* (1992), *Hong Kong Poems in English and Chinese* with Laurence Wong (1997), *The Rendez-Vous: Poems of Multicultural Experience* (2003), and *Shaw Sights and Sounds—A Collection of Oil Paintings and Poetry* (2006) with artist Chan Hang, plus other texts. Parkin filters experience through perceptual, reflective, and imaginative lenses, to create a dense network of images. Out of a rich diversity of themes[1] I have chosen two interrelated strands—landscapes with geological, historical, environmental, personal, and pictorial dimensions and cityscapes with architectural, historical, ethnic, and cultural aspects. As Parkin writes in his Introduction to *The Rendez-Vous*, "[l]anguage, culture, and their interplay, become a part of the self, that other landscape, a richness given to the living by life, and to life by the living" (20).

Parkin's first collection, *Dancers in a Web* demonstrates an elegant control of language and metaphor over a wide range of subjects. An epigraph alludes to Sergei Eisenstein's "juxtapositions [that] had a single governing power: contrasts"—a clue to Parkin's poetics, in which "juxtapositions and contrast [work] like montage in cinematography…to make a web of interconnections."[2] Several poems celebrate music, cinema, or theatre. "The Fall of Paris" (31) affirms the power of music at a moment when the foundations of culture were shaken.

> Landowska plays while Paris falls;
> Scarlatti's energy relives its runs
> though sullen drums, beleaguered guns,
> affright the ancient air.[3]

Rhymes and assonance mingle sounds of war with music, which is ultimately more powerful than guns and cannot be silenced. The creative arts outlast destructive bombardments. Paris, as cultural centre, survives the city's rape through a mixture of cynical complicity—"the spleen of Baudelaire, / the rictus of Voltaire"—and heroic resistance.

"Last Reel" (*Dancers* 45) employs an extended cinematic metaphor of unwinding and undoing phases of history's "long, calamitous movie" in order to produce "[a] human film / Where lovers meet and trust, where laughter lives / Where we evade the serpent, prize the dove." Such affirmation may seem wishful, but as the world becomes increasingly immersed in conflict, humanist values become increasingly vital. Parkin celebrates the spiritually liberating values of language and poetry in "For Irina Ratushinskaya Arrested While Picking Apples" (28-30). Totalitarian regimes attempt to suppress self-expression, but given the right soil it flourishes even in hostile climates, proving poetry and freedom to be synonymous. Ratushinskaya was a poet of Polish background who rejected Soviet ideology. Despite internment and force-feeding, her desire for expression could not be quelled:

> Some fertile region, dark, obscure,
> beyond your mind, breathes ancient voices.
> Word-seed germinates in your feelings,
> spreads out leaves of surprise,
> orchids of nefarious beauty
> that bloom in the deeps of your eyes.
>
> (29)

Parkin's metaphors—"fertile region," "word-seed," "leaves of surprise," "orchids"—dramatize how poetic language grows, under pressure, from the ground of being.

In admiring the work of other poets and of painters, the poet finds his own voice. As Ratushinskaya draws on the irrepressible fertility of unconscious being, Parkin's landscapes, steeped in cultural experience sharpened by curiosity and contrast, often blossom into bodyscapes[4] or word-paintings with rich penumbras of association. Under the transparent "[b]lue green ice" of "Prima Vera" (*Dancers* 2), lurk shadows of love and war. An anatomy of spring fuses ice, water, and grass with the human body: "Under melting skin / floats ice bone / mirror thin." A microscopic eye observes "the rain's small bombs / [that] spill circles of fluent light / on the water's placid face" or the "leprous scabs that crust the grass." A final stanza affirms the "ancient dance" of water, earth, and light as a barefooted girl "floats in robe of lawn / where wild flowers curl," fusing grass and dress, flowers and hair.

Parkin's Canadian landscapes include riverscapes, mountainscapes, and seascapes. "At Lions Bay, B.C." (*Dancers* 21-22) hinges on theriomorphic metaphors that transform the wooded slopes above Howe Sound into

"[g]reat sloping backs, / sparsely haired elephants / rear[ing] grey through sea mist, / … / in dawn's green slap of brine / below rockface dream of Lions."[5] There is a music of place in birdsong and falling water, "where feathered notes / above the creek's continuo / dawdle and warble." The spirit of place permeates the house crafted of local wood and stone and embraces friendship and "the chill wine / poured as the ripened sun / dissolves fire into the sea." Place and season are distilled in images of roundness and ripeness, as in Keats's "To Autumn." The glow of lamplit windows, dispelling "squat shadows," contrasts with the dark mountainside and highlights conviviality. Parkin's poetic craft harmonizes emotion and landscape: "The wilderness and my own small / sadness rise in me and swirl / like mist that nudges the slopes." Such empathy with the natural world is cathartic. The erotic landscape of "River" (24) celebrates a metaphoric mating of "earth, water, woman," in which the sun-god (Jupiter) penetrates the green earth (Venus). The river's "long veins open to the skies / [as] fish flash quicksilver skins / over ancient stone's sleek thighs." In this geodynamic mating, salmon seek the river's womb and "Breasts rise heavy with gold. / Entrails shine smooth jade. / Diamonds crust every flesh fold." Womb of the river, breasts of rocks, and "Venus mound" of the green earth lie exposed to the Sun, where Earth opened "a million Springs ago / for the god's convulsive thrusts / and the water's flow"—primitive rites of generation repeated in endless cycles. Fertility is the transformative energy of living landscape.

In "Bridges on Granville Island" (*Dancers* 20), light limns land and sea in a painterly vision of Vancouver harbour.

> Today the swallows were flying high
> and now the invisible sun
> behind the thick gouache of the hills
> paints a vast apricot sky.

Gouache is watercolour mixed with gum; it spreads easily yet has a matt surface and so is an apt medium for contrasting the foreground "sheen of the sea" with the background of darkening mountains. In Parkin's plastic composition, the sinking sun acts as invisible artist, lighting up the world and roughening the surface of the sea, with "muscles [rippling] along the curve / of its broad back." Animistic metaphors enact a sense of vitality in nature, as the sun suffuses space with time, giving lovers' ritual gesture of intimacy, as "wine / gleams in our glasses," an aura of destiny. Being together in a changing landscape, in which "golden light fall[s] and spill[s] across [younger] faces," enhances the sense of personal history.

In "The Music," Parkin writes: "my poetry is one of palimpsest and (cinematic) montage. The covering and uncovering of images invites meditation on successive ages of history and the processes of imagination itself" [6]. Cities are palimpsests of geological, architectural, social, historical, and cultural strata in time, as well as labyrinths in space. "Venice" (*Dancers* 17) presents a cityscape steeped in historical culture and glamorous in decay:

> This yellow oar grows slanted
> out of waters oiled by the sun
> and set against marble walls
> careful tatters patterned in a flag
> wave at crenellations tongued in stone

The city is a "great tattered poem" or tapestry conceived in romantic and painterly terms.[6] As a gondola moves slowly along a canal, the eye contemplates architectural facades gliding by in heraldic patterns. The drifting motion, accentuated by lack of punctuation, activates the inner eye, releasing meaning slowly in subtle word-plays—so "tongued" refers to the "grooved" facades, but also to the city's silent voice that resonates in its stones (cf. Ruskin). Venice is a cultural labyrinth in space and time,[7] in whose network of canals "we turn corners / swaying into the past," as one architectural or psychological angle of vision gives way to another.

Japanese culture provides a contrasting framework for *Yokohama Days, Kyoto Nights*, with Janice Matsumoto's line-drawings adding a visual dimension. A classically succinct haiku, "Summer Kimonos at Tanabata" (18), links a new generation with ancient cultural traditions: "The two children wrapped / in summer kimonos shine: / healthy fruit; old bough." "Tanabata, Festival of Two Stars" (17) also deploys Japanese iconography: a "long green curve of bamboo" suspends "[r]ippling papers and painted stars / [that] dangle their bait / in the sky's blue pool." A "bronze bell" reverberates through "Dream Puzzle" (51-52), a poem replete with images of pagodas and scrolls with "hidden characters." The poet's art-historical dream has a zen resonance: "I seek no meaning / but if you offer some key / let it be rich as bell notes, / joss-fragrant / as the dream itself." Cultural meaning inheres in things, sights, and sounds[8] and cannot be extrapolated from its material contexts. But it can be expressed in ritual gestures. "On Seeing an Empty Noh Theatre" (26) presents the space of illusion where costumed actors "strut and fret" their hour upon the stage. As befits such theatrical ritual,[9] Parkin pares the experience down to a few things that symbolize the material essence of Noh theatre: "the wooden space / the

mask, the fan, / the robes, the dance, / and in its midst, the man." As in Zen philosophy, action embodies ideas.

"Port of Yokohama" (*Yokohama* 10-11) chronicles that city's turbulent history. Growing from a village into a "city / of fifty-nine rivers," "battered by the Kanto earthquake / and then burned by war," it became "[Commodore] Perry's deep water anchorage" in 1854, when Japanese ports were opened to trade, bringing an influx of foreigners. "Traffic" (25), impressionistically mixes nature and culture, sight and sound. Scottish bagpipes at an intersection strike a stridently cross-cultural note, while the swift and graceful flight of a swallow contrasts with the lumbering motion of trucks: "A swallow skims commuters and the trucks. / Folding sharp little wings / it slips like a clasp knife / into a small brown nest" under a concrete flyover. The bird's instinctive flight is graphically encoded, as it "slips out fast / flicking its blades[] / [and carving] a jagged sliver of sky." The aesthetic pattern of its flight suggests graphic or sculptural lines of force that provide relief from the congested traffic. "End of Day in Yokohama" (28) shows a flair for pictorial metaphor. "Birds are black rags" vanishing behind "the smoky canvas stretched across late afternoon." Evening light highlights or modulates tones: "Windows become slicked gold / in the slinking sun" until "lamps / yellow the lowrise blocks." Playing across the cityscape, the "slinking sun" suggests a play-on-words, combining sidelong motion with shifting light. Glancing alliteration of s's, l's, and r's ("slicked," "slinking," "lowrise") adds a sonic element to images of the rainy city's luminosity.

In "The Mood Map" (*Yokohama* 31), "the old city" of Kyoto "haunts the new / and beckons / from corners of gardens / like green eyes." Anne Whiston Spirn, in *The Language of Landscape*, observes that "[t]raditional Japanese urban design has an interior orientation, nested enclosures occurring in both everyday and sacred precincts" (77). Here a labyrinth of walls, backyards, and alleys stimulates cross-cultural shocks of recognition, so that "I look through a doorway / into my own heart." In the four-part "Four Windows" (32-35), looking through square panes of glass reveals "food," "things," "dream," and "fate" as perspectives on the ancient/modern city. The window-frame is a synecdoche for the city's framing of individual lives: "Look closely and long at wood, / at its lattice of grain waves / parallel with history, / its whorls and knots, / flourishes of a universal signature, / of time's revolutions." Matsumoto's bold geometric drawing illustrates the grainy textures of a frame in which time has inscribed lines on space, as the material frame of the city stamps itself on the lives of its inhabitants, which interact, in turn, with the cultural matrix.

Parkin explores Chinese landscape, cityscape, and culture in the collaborative two-language *Hong Kong Poems*. "Descent to Kai Tak International Airport" (15) subjects the city to changing perspectives. The approach to the harbour presents an aerial seascape, in which "[i]slands stick to the sea / green or brown shells /… / limpets and barnacles it seems / sucking the smooth turquoise paint job / of the ocean's hull." In this panoptic view, objects in space are metonymically compressed and movement dramatized by sudden shifts of perspective and metamorphic imagery. The South China Sea that looks like an "upturned painted hull" as the plane banks turns to "ruffled silk" and "the sea urchin city" becomes a living part of the seascape, "pointing glass spines at the huge reddened sun." Swooping low over "shadowed junks," the plane lands and the poet "wander[s] the sunset city." Electricity transforms the skyscrapers into strange plants, as the city's "characters of commerce become neon orchids / sprouting along every street in the galaxy of signs." "[A] glass blower twists white-hot tubes," a symbol of the artist "[plying his] art / of coloured coils and circuits." Parkin reads "the wired dynamo" of the city, as Roland Barthes reads the semiotics of Japan through visual signs.

All cities are haunted by history. Cityscape and memory meet in the historical palimpsest of "Harbourside II" (*Hong Kong* 89, 91), where the present is transparent and sad ghosts who fled the Sino-Japanese War throng the quays to mingle with the living. "Ghosts throng and thrash in the nets of memory / trawled again and again," like shoals of fish from depths of the unconscious. The poem offers a socio-political view of "Chinese fleeing chaos, repeated rape of the motherland," only to conclude with "the farce of empire's end / [and] the greed-filled transition of power," as Britain relinquishes its colony to the People's Republic of China. Parkin has been influenced by Chinese painting in his subtle observations of landscape. Jerome Silbergild explains that in Chinese art and philosophy "the earth ('mountains and water,' *shanshui* the Chinese term usually translated as 'landscape') and the heavens are primary links in a dynamic chain of ongoing creation, not forms primarily but dynamic essences (manifestations of the formless Dao, infused with its energy), understood animistically, worshipped…pantheistically" (277). In "Mountain and Harbour I" (79, 81), those landscape features are declared to be "[the] parents of all poetry." Atmospherically, "grey silk mist / veils mute trees, / draws ghostly flags across volcanic hills" (79).

The delicate structures of metaphor that interweave Parkin's landscapes with traditional patterns of Chinese art co-exist with a raw and gritty realism, as modernity demolishes and reconstructs the city. Mary Ann Caws

observes that "the city is eternally a source of energy, empowered, empowering, and disempowering, with desire eternally at its center" (10). These terms aptly describe the urban dynamo Hong Kong that "grows in the mind's / envisaging, in dusty building sites, / distilled from sweatbead skin on collar-bones, // its rhythms are rattling jack hammers / and echoing coolies, / thud of the driven piles" (79, 81). Such vigorous physical and sonic imagery feeds on the constant growth and change of the burgeoning city. The poem matches the ongoing spectacle of construction, building a cityscape from sensations of sight, sound, rhythm, taste, and smell. Parkin's sharp ear and eye record Hong Kong's discordant sounds and dazzling sights in alliterative and onomatopoetic soundscapes (cf. Schaefer) and cityscapes.

The Rendez-Vous demonstrates Parkin's multi-faceted cultural vision in five sections—"Britain," "Canada," "China," "Australia," and "Europe Again"—each with its distinctive landscapes, cityscapes, and cultures. Perceptions are conditioned by environment and culture, articulated through a highly poetic sensibility. Environmental concerns mingle with childhood memories in "Slag Fire" (38), a microcosm of England's "Black Country," so named for its industrial pollution. Parkin's mimetic/dramatic style displays an impressive command of tone and idiolect in the graphic realism of "Spitting on the Fire" (32), the "Brum" (Birmingham) dialect of "Tong in Cheek" (36), or the grim humor of "Get a Haircut" (41). Perception of landscape and writing about it are closely linked in "Snow Country" (29), where snow and paper have "white depths" against which "the black twigs / stand out like a bold hand / in Indian ink." "Writing," for Spirn in *Language*, "requires a translation of images and experiences into words and phrases, then a converting of weblike (landscapelike) writing into prose" (4)—or, in Parkin's case, poetry. The poetic desire to articulate structures branching out of the unconscious in clear-cut visual images is imprinted on the snowy blankness of the page. The "language of landscape" is rife with such symbols of being. "'For the artist,' observed Klee, 'dialogue with nature remains a *conditio sine qua non*. The artist is a man, himself nature and part of nature in natural space'" (qtd. Spirn, *Language* 40). For the poet of "Snow Country," contemplation of "these blunt forms, / frozen waves of land, / and the frost-arrested gestures / of Nature's dead" carries over to seeking "the [unknown] essence" of self "under the drifts" that cover the ground of being. Ontological and psychic terrains match physical as Parkin's reveries incorporate forms of landscape.

Spirn asserts in *Language* that "[l]andscapes were the first human texts, read before the invention of other signs and symbols" and that "the most

basic metaphors of verbal language—stem from experience of landscape" (15). "Nature's Book" (*Rendez-Vous* 55; "Canada")[10] illustrates the magnetic affinity between landscape and language through a series of metaphors. In "'One with Nature,'" Spirn argues from the standpoint of landscape engineering that "[h]uman survival depends upon adapting ourselves and our landscapes—cities, buildings, gardens, roadways, rivers, fields, forests—in new, life-sustaining ways, shaping contexts that reflect the interconnections of air, earth, water, life, and culture" (43). More than simply figurative, Parkin's grammar of landscape focuses on human reshaping of the environment: "Sentences and chapters accumulate / but have been edited and cut, / often wrong-headedly, by us. / Our marginalia deface its every page." Nature, too often exploited and abused, underpins culture.[11] If "Nature's book is a miracle / of literary form, inviting theories" (55), theories have now proliferated to cover the landscape (see DeLue and Elkins). But we all have to live *in* nature, as well as *in* language, so it is hard to gain a theoretical vantage. As if caught in some hermeneutic circle, "we're just characters in [Nature's] book," yet its "argument / of sublime and microscopic beauty / as well as impeccable, irrefutable logic" demands careful reading if we are to know ourselves. The arts provide lenses for seeing landscape in poetic or painterly terms. But the fabric of nature remains mysterious: "it has an anonymous author, receiving proof," yet creativity "pulses on" with no end in sight.

In "Alter Egos: Raccoon & Heron" (*Rendez-Vous* 57), also from the "Canada" section, Parkin adopts animal/bird masks for opposing sides of the self, a ritualistic division that may have been suggested by Haida myth or by Yeats and Noh plays. The empathy with imagined animal or bird consciousness recalls Ted Hughes's "The Thought-Fox" (13) or "The Jaguar" (15). Parkin first dramatizes the sensual mode of perception: "I watch from my fur mask / the world of grass-green grounds / … / And the pungent yards by night / alert my two-tone head / to voices growing in the gemstone dark." The stripe that divides the raccoon's head symbolizes sunlight/darkness awareness or psychological division of the self. Abrupt transition from day to night or animal to bird mask suggests metamorphosis from one mental state to another, as if a shaman were suddenly to switch totems. Parkin's "alter egos" are symbolic opposites: one lives on the ground, the other in water or air. The raccoon is an intuitive hunter "of clawed perceptions stolen, treasured inside, / finding sense beyond speech"; his "perceptions sharpened on tree trunks" are the equivalent of sensuous poetic language. The heron's looser, more elusive movement—"I spread my rag wings / to drag my way into vague grey sky, / … / flagging myself across

grey dusk"—is the equivalent of a more "intellectual" perspective, as the bird looks down from midair to "descry a raccoon self" on the ground below. Empathy with such contrasting creatures (or inner potentials) reflects a dualistic observer and the polarized perspectives of Parkin's ontology.

Contrasting with landscapes in the Book of Nature, cityscapes bustle with human activity and change. Recalling Vladimir Tatlin's futurist design for a spiral monument, "The Cranes" (*Rendez-Vous* 142) depicts a Tokyo building site, transposing mechanistic structures into geometric images with tight parallel phrasing,

> as Tokyo within her urban sprawl
> displays at dusk her neon calligraphic face.
> The rectangles, the stilts of houses,
> sculptured concrete, clip-on modules
> with punctured metal giving shade—

Urban construction calls for a metonymic style stressing *contiguity*, in which the writer as verbal architect employs "clip-on modules" of imagery. "Neon calligraphic signs" and rectangular/linear facades reflecting light or casting shade suggest "the manifestly metonymical orientation of cubism" or "the art of the cinema, with its highly developed capacity for changing the angle, perspective and focus of 'shots'…[and its] variety of synecdochic 'close-ups' and metonymic 'set-ups'" (Jakobson 92). This architectural style differs markedly, in its staccato rhythms and metallic consonants, from Parkin's painterly descriptions of landscape. The poem closes with a metaphysical conceit highlighting the inexorable progress of Japanese industry, as "[t]he cranes swing slow / their metal chopsticks in time's hand / to grip each day a rising sun." While Barthes sees the Japanese cityscape as "[a] carpet of living sensations, of brilliant signs" and as "the very abstraction of the fragments of view…which frame me" (107-08), Parkin concludes that "[a]rchitecture is the make-up on a culture's face," its way of presenting itself to the world—while hiding behind a mask.

Rhythms of destruction, as well as construction, enter Parkin's landscape verse. Stormscapes constitute a musical and emotional sub-genre. In "Typhoon" (*Hong Kong* 29), images of a tropical storm link rampaging motion with violent emotions of rage and sorrow: "Cloud coils writhe / silver and black. / At anchor sampans and junks buck. / Unseen talons rip / pull twist wrench out / the green hair of the trees." The abrupt sequence of aggressive verb-actions, combined with mimetic rhythms driven by alliter-

ation and assonance, accentuate violence. The chaos of the storm agitates nature as emotional chaos agitates the heart: "Wind everywhere flaps / its coarse wet canvas / and a flight of glass arrows / rides the horizontal rain." In "Lightning Unstitches the Dark Sky" (53), the act of reading is linked with a storm outside and nature's revelations overshadow art. Looking up from his book at a riven sky, the poet projects textual images onto space.

> The dim page of a half-read book
> awaits the next white splash of light,
> its storm-lit print a banal quotation in a greater text.

Poetic reverie merges the storm's sky-writing with the writing of history. "Huge characters… / of endless change, successive palimpsests / … / sketch monologues of vanity" as lightning's sign-language zigzags across "the charcoal cloth of China's sky" with the swiftness of a calligrapher's brush. In "Storm and Bird" (113), reading is replaced by listening. Simultaneous awareness of the world outside and inside the room is amplified by Tchaikovsky's music that seems to embody the composer's presence: "Outside the typhoon shakes the sheeted rain / across the mountain and the crested sea / while in our room / I listen in the glow of lamps / to this music of two opposing moods." The listening poet attunes his senses to contrasts of sound and sight, storm and calm, discord and harmony, empathizing with the lucid order of art that transmutes raging elements.

Maxwell Hearn notes that Chinese artists "created iconic images of nature that conveyed lofty symbolic messages or auspicious sentiments" (8-9). "Moored at the Maple Bridge at Night" (*Rendez-Vous* 108), translated from "a poem by Zhang Ji, cut in stone at Cold Mountain Temple, Suzhou" and revised by Parkin, demonstrates how Chinese landscape poetry resonates moods and emotions. The opening lines focus on the moon, a cawing crow, "frosty air," and rippled water, followed by a statement linking such images with a pervasive "sorrow." "Parting at a Tavern in Chin-Ling" (128), translated by Chen Hong and Parkin from Li Po (701-762),[12] one of China's greatest poets, captures the drifting, flowing, lingering mood that marks a transition between phases of experience. "Near Bride's Fall" (109) personifies the fragrant Heong tree that "gave its name to Hong Kong (Fragrant Harbour)" (author's note). Decoratively costumed with surreal touches, the tree "wears green hair elaborately teased /and bright with kingfishers," like a geisha's blue combs. In "Hong Kong Rock" (116), the city springs from geological bedrock, "coarse grained / magical with quartz / holocrystalline twinned / with faintly pinkish feldspar," an

urban dynamo emerging from a matrix of "minerals support[ing] growth / animal, vegetable, human, economic."

"Observing the Lizard" (*Rendez-Vous* 117; "China") is another page from nature's book. It starts with the metaphor of "the curved tail of the road uphill," then plays artful variations on the creature/environment motif. As one form transmutes into another, the watcher realizes that "[a] strange excrescence of bark" is a lizard. As the eye adjusts, "[he's] caught, still-life, / in an arrested crawl, /… / his dusty leather-ware trunk freeze-framed, / stark still as the leafless twig of his tapered tail." Camouflaged against trunk and twigs, he seems part of the tree. Metaphor identifies diverse things by a single hypertrophied resemblance and so is an apt trope for expressing disguise. "Sporting his tiny garland," the lizard blends into his surroundings of bark and leaves, "illustrat[ing] the woods / like a frontispiece." A companion poem, "Observing Dragonflies" (118), relates nature's random dance to art's design. The dragonflies that "tack through my lines, / thought on the wing" are a symbol of the creative process. As they hover and dart around the poet's head, words come to his mind in a shimmering penumbra of associations: "Verse music in my head / mixes with perception / of fuselages camouflaged / and slivers of thought-speech." The metaphoric and alliterative "fuselages camouflaged" enriches meaning with a subliminal allusion to World War Two,[13] as "all hover in the hot light of words" like aircraft caught in a searchlight beam. Parkin attempts to match the "close [visual] reality" of the dragonflies swarming around him with words that "melt on the tongue," as memories, sounds, and meanings dissolve in a synaesthetic unity. In a moment of intense perception, the "swarm of dragonflies" merges with poetic rhythms, so that the dancing motes of life seem to embody creative perceptions. Parkin, in "The Music," observes that "art selects, suggests, humanizes, and estranges…It offers an opportunity for seeing and meditating upon what is seen" [2]. But how can you know dragonflies from "slivers of thought-speech" or the dancer from the dance?

D. H. Lawrence thought that "[e]very great locality expresses itself perfectly, in its own flowers, its own birds and beasts, lastly its own men" (30). But Elizabeth Helsinger points out that "[f]or each [landscape] poet, it is less the place or space itself than the process through which it becomes meaningful…that is the true subject of his poems" (328). Parkin's landscapes embody "spirit of place" as an affinity between subjects and objects. In "At a Bend in the River" (*Rendez-Vous* 133), his affinity with an Australian place is intensified by interaction with a companion, eroticizing the view:

> Frail violet stars trail their green
> across red-blonde flakings of the rock
> and higher, above the road, we stop
> where gum trees twist peeling, silver limbs
> in the subtle dance of living wood.

Frailty and strength harmonize in complementary tones, while the silver bark of interlacing gum trees reflects the light.[14] The couple's commanding outlook expands their vision. From a different cultural perspective, Gary Snyder observes that "[the] Chinese perceived mountains and rivers as numinous; special bends in the rivers…were seen as spots of greater concentration of *ch'i*, spirit power" (87). *Ch'i* seems to be at work here, as Parkin's animistic response links the Australian landscape with human desire and anatomy:[15] "The lick of [the river's] huge, dark tongue / smears the pebbled curve," "[t]he dappled fingers of trees scratch their shadows across the sandy backbone of the road," and "a vast desire" plants growing forms "on the tanned body of the mountain." Rivers traditionally symbolize life's journey. Seen from a high perspective, this river might be flowing either way—just as the poem moves ambiguously on dual levels of landscape and life. Parkin's geographic and ontological vision of "follow[ing] [the river] in silence… / until we reach the strange exhilaration of the sea" ultimately enfolds seeing within being.

The vantage point of "Picture, Garden, Sea" (*Rendez-Vous* 136-37; "Australia") is a tree-shaded arbour above an ocean that aggressively embraces cliffs and shore. Structured on scenes "Outside the picture" (shoreline and garden) and parallel scenes "Inside the picture" expressing the engraver's perception and mood, the poem highlights the violent interaction of waves and rocks that sculpts the coast. Parkin's metaphors seamlessly interweave nature and art, sensory and aesthetic perception, and the eroticized encounter transforms indented coastline into bodyscape. "The chiselled face and torso / of the shoreline must endure // [the sea's] whetstone tool, his tongue's rough edge, / long licks and the sudden bites / of his frenzied, foam-filled mouth." The outward scene is inwardly reflected "in the feathered light / of the green afternoon of the self," as the poet absorbs seascape and artwork. Moving rhythmically back and forth between "picture, garden, sea," assimilating, condensing, and comparing, he turns from the precisely modeled engraving to look at the raging sea below. Anthropomorphic metaphors link this blind force with human fate:

> Brown rocks poke through salt-spray rags.
> Red rocks bleed with ceaseless floggings by waves.

> Rock is a massive shoulder and arm.
> (137)

As waves move in, "[the rock's] hand with granite fingers plunges / beneath a hem of white lace afloat / on the flared blue-green skirts." This reverie on nature and art is also an interartistic study of geological and artistic composition. After immersing in "the salt water of another's mood," the poet emerges all the more clearly into the sunlight of his own creative being, as seascapes and landscapes of the mind undergo a process of gestation.

"At Uluru" (*Rendez-Vous* 147-49) opens with a quotation from W. C. Gosse's diary of the discovery of Uluru/Ayers Rock in 1873, then dramatizes the poet's own rock-climbing efforts over a century later. The experience is translated into rough-textured mimesis with frictional alliteration and resistant consonants that force the rhythm to stumble: "we climb red-handed to the ledge, / our lungs raw, ears pink / on rock curves and cusps rusted / and rutted black over millennia" (147). Tongue-twisting "r"s and "l"s accentuate the struggle, as the sacred rock resists assault. Parkin fine-tunes sounds, shelves verbs, condenses syntax, weights substantives, and stresses monosyllables, underscoring the rootedness, antiquity, and stubborn presence of the monumental rock. Crisp stanzaic patterns modelled on *haiku* and *tanka* concentrate visual expression: "Rock a molar rooted / deep as a mine. / Desert a rare green / surprising as rain, / silver silken / as inside skin / … / Rock hard centre of red earth womb" (148).[16] Structural division into short imagistic units and contrasting colour planes underlines geological stratification. As the climber descends, a rocky landscape glides past his eye, "[a] shadow point[ing] like a dark finger / towards the perfect ring / of a mid-air rainbow, / coloured circle of refracted light, / promise of a mystic marriage" (148). The alchemical conjunction of light and shadow refracts the numinous quality of the ancient site. Geology—"Rock ingot cooled from nearer earth's core"—overlaps with anatomy, while "heat" and "heart" elide in the "[h]eat throb of spirit's anvil." Red-black and light-dark motifs form a painterly unity: "Morning's blush before / day's deeper red" contrasts with "desert rock now black" at sunset. The aboriginal vision of a living, (re)generative earth pulsing with magma and giving birth to rock-forms, subtends the bodyscape of seminal rock-pools and extruded rock-shapes. Thrust up in the midst of the Outback, Uluru is a microcosm of the continent and its shaping forces. "Rock held tight still. / Old grinder in earth's livid gum."

Celebrating an Australian farm in "Araluen" (*Rendez-Vous* 154), Parkin exploits short sharp vowels and hard consonants—"clipped gray rocks /

bare the teeth that push through turf'—to underline the physical effort, as if with gritted teeth and clenched muscles, of running a sheep-farm. Scanning the land, the poet's eye follows a road that "flicks and twists around" like a snake "for its slow digression through steep brush." The visitor's gaze sweeps across a vast expanse opening vistas for reflection. "[W]hite, arched windows" frame "the disarray of distant hills smudged blue / and a lone eagle's glide in a slow arc." Mental and elemental entwine as the lie of the land suggests sweeping visual patterns. Comparing mindscape with landscape and skyscape, the watcher concludes that "[all] logic is unstable as the clouds." But at ground-level farming and friendship provide equilibrium. "Australian Light" (143-45) is an especially painterly poem, in which the speaker awakens to sunlight playing over furniture and "the pale blue shine of dawn" outdoors. Scanning landscape with a painter's eye, he observes how changing intensities of sunlight transform the scene.[17] As in impressionist painting, there is a progression from early to mid-morning, "as the sun floods across the floor / promising intense colour," and then to "noon light [that] sharpens everything around us," and so to late afternoon (at another farm) as "[we] arrive trailing a dust cloud, / car's brownish tail feathers spreading through azure light." Animism pervades the Australian landscape that painter Sidney Nolan saw as "gone back to Genesis" (qtd. Clark 71).

In "Europe Again," Parkin depicts the Norman landscape from a seaside cottage in "Clos Marin" (*Rendez-Vous* 162-63), combining a sense of local habitation—"sun's glitter kindles the window-panes"—with an expanded sense of space, being, and history: "I stand, a hint of salt on my lips, / breathing seaweed and mollusc-scented air / under the Conqueror's wide sky." The *clos* is a seaside estate where fruition and mutual experience are distilled from vintage years: "It's then I savour a sip of Calvados, / glimpse in golden depths the ripened fruit / of a crop more than thirty autumns past. / You close your eyes, with apple blossom lids, / and I lift my head to the sun's warmth." In this sunny setting, the lovers recover a lost Eden. But the peaceful Norman landscape has suffered from grim pressures of history that flash upon the inward eye:

> In an instant all this Norman coast country froths
> like crushed apples in the still of my *clos marin*
> festive with periwinkle, bluebells, and the spry primrose;
> bubbles with cow parsley at the edge of spinneys,
> on land soaked with the blood of warriors
> who charged from the ships to beach and cliff,

> who floated from gliders like blossom shaken to the fiery earth.
> (162)

This is a landscape saturated in memory.[18] Behind its decorative surface lies a background of violent action: the lengthening cadence of the last line suspends motion before shattering impact. Fortunately, the Norman coast today retains its traditional figures and occupations: "At quayside in his brine-battered trawler / a fisherman repairs the bewildering net," as if mending ravages of war and time. Such ancient trades have an heroic fibre: "His rough red fingers ply a needle yellow as blackbird's beak, / springy-tough as the rib of a fish." Human destiny is intertwined with nature, as "gulls tossed in the wind" are "rocked…in mind's mirror," rising and falling on resurgent currents of creativity.

In "Evening Walk in Umbria" (*Rendez-Vous* 198-99), an ambulatory rhythm alternating single and paired lines, conveys individual and dual responses. A man and woman "walk in golden light," savouring a moment together in space and time. Their joint experience is encapsulated in "a soft green plum" that entices taste and touch, "amazing by so much sweetness crammed / in as small and delicate a thing." Their reawakened sense of place and of each other makes them feel like "discoverers of life," treading well-worn paths as if for the first time. They have entered a continuum of amatory, sensory, and cultural experience, embedded in Italian landscape.

"In the 12th" (*Rendez-Vous* 173) is a Paris cityscape set in the *arrondissement* where Parkin lives and where a green revival inspires an anthropomorphic surreality:

> The old rail track is now a garden
> long as a green giant's arm
> to stretch from the big torso
> of the Vincennes forest at Porte Dorée
> as green fingers reach
> above the viaduct towards Bastille.

Local windows along the route reflect roses instead of passing trains and "[on] the grass where a castle stood" lovers make "a rendez-vous with the sun." Paris is a transparent milieu in which memory and imagination conjure up famous ghosts. "Guillaume Apollinaire Motors along the Avenue de St. Mandé" (174) includes the heroic apostrophe: "O antique motor of Apollinaire! / O gauntlets, goggles, klaxon horn!" Living in this hotbed of culture leads the poet "[to] crave rough intercourse of history and myth / in morning sunlight of the Paris June." Objects, like places, catalyze memo-

ries. "The Wee J.B." (181) records slitting open a book with a pearl-handled knife, while watching "neighbours of all ages throng / under a Van Gogh sun."[19] The knife opens a Pandora's box of memories—father "peel[ing] an apple, skin one green curl, / [and] proffer[ing] a slice" on the tip of the knife; mother "reading the adventures of Colonel Bramble / with the aid of a trusty Harraps."[20] (Her efforts to learn French may have been at the root of Parkin's love of French culture.)

The concluding section of *The Rendez-Vous*, "Shards" (227-38), offers a postmodernist archaeology of fragments that illustrates Parkin's method of selecting and assimilating images. As cultures split up, shards of value are disseminated through other cultures, as in China pieces of broken pottery are collected and set into lids of wooden boxes. A striking example from the contemporary art-world is Cai Guoqiang's installation, *Reflection* (2004; Sullivan fig. 11.38), where the artist "engulfed [the skeleton of a fishing boat] in a huge quantity of white shards from the refuse heaps of the Dehua porcelain kilns in Fujian" (Sullivan 314). "[In] a country / trying to glue itself / together again," like China, the drive to modern identity resurrects and reconstructs selected pieces of the past. From poetic shards—"[f]ragments held up to the light / piece by piece, examined scrupulously, / [to] suggest the complete picture" (227)—Parkin constructs his personal and cultural mosaics. As he claims in his Introduction to *The Rendez-Vous*, "we can make an effort, working together, to create a future in which the valuable fragments of our cultures may be preserved and made into a mosaic of the future" (17). This process involves selecting, connecting, contrasting, defining, and redefining momentary perceptions or longstanding experiences of landscapes, cityscapes, and cultures.

Notes

1 Cf. Stewart, "Art and Ekphrasis."
2 Parkin, Introduction, *The Rendez-Vous* 22.
3 "Wanda Landowska (1879-1959) recorded Scarlatti's sonatas in Paris, 1939–March 1940" (author's note).
4 Porteous relates "the interchangeable body:land metaphor" to "an actual symbiosis" (85).
5 Cf. Snyder on "[t]he dance of yin-yang energies…(mist on the mountain peaks, rainbows and rain squalls, rocky cliffs and swirling streams…)" in Chinese poetry (87).
6 Lynch sees Venice as "an example of…a highy imageable environment…[that] invite[s] the eye and the ear to greater attention and participation" (10).
7 Faris observes that "[t]he labyrinth has persisted…as image and as structural design in urban writing, highlighting the interdependence of those two entities the city and the

text" (33).

8 Cf. Williams's imagist dictum: "No ideas / but in things" (145).

9 Parkin has edited Yeats's one-act plays, *The Herne's Egg*, *At the Hawk's Well*, and *The Cat and the Moon*.

10 Cf. Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*: "In Nature's infinite book of secrecy / A little I can read" (1.2.8-9).

11 Cf. Sagar, *Literature and the Crime against Nature*.

12 Cf. Li Po, *Selected Poems*.

13 "Bomber, April 1945" (*Dancers* 43-44) memorializes Parkin's elder brother, killed in World War Two.

14 Cf. Parkin's ekphrastic poem, "The Ghost Gums of Albert Namajira" (*Rendez-Vous* 150).

15 Spirn, *Language*, notes that "humans understand one kind of thing in terms of another, [metaphorically] projecting bodies and minds onto the surrounding world…a river [is] seen as having a mouth, a mountain as having a foot, front, back, and side" (20).

16 Cf. Spirn, *Language*: "Uluru rises out of this [vast red] desert, like an island in the sea…As one walks across the red sand… the red rock rises in the distance. A thousand feet from the rock, plants are greener" (112, 88).

17 Cf. Monet's serial paintings of *Haystacks at Giverny* (c. 1884, 1886) and *Rouen Cathedral*, in *Impressionism and Post-Impressionism* (66-67, 72-75).

18 In Schama's words, "landscape is the work of the mind. Its scenery is built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock" (7).

19 Van Gogh's canvases were flooded with dancing motes of sunlight after he joined the impressionists in Paris in 1887.

20 See Maurois, *Silences*; *Harrap's French Dictionary*.

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