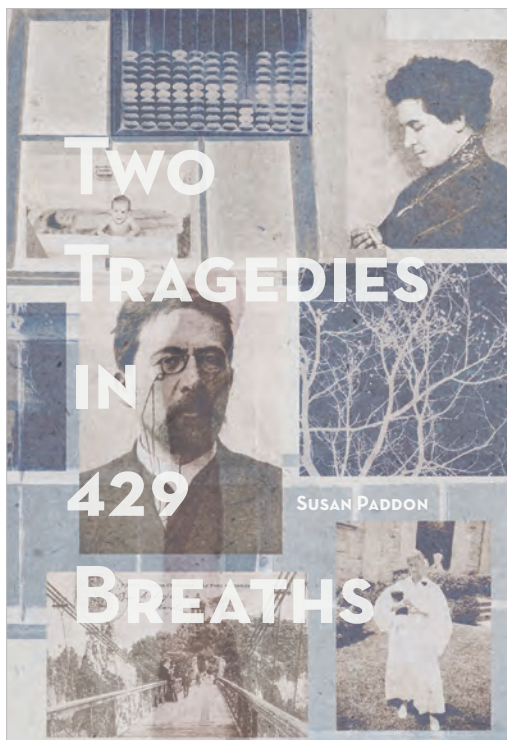




# BRICK BOOKS

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**SUSAN PADDON** was born and grew up in St. Thomas, Ontario, attended McGill and Concordia Universities in Montreal, and lived overseas in Paris and London before settling in Margaree, Nova Scotia. Her poems have appeared in *Arc*, *CV2*, *The Antigonish Review* and *Geist*.

## WATCHING

*"If you are not afraid of being stung by the nettles, come by the narrow footpath that leads to the lodge, and let us see what is going on inside."* ("Ward No. 6," Anton Chekhov)

My mother's neighbour is watching us  
from her back garden again. It's not her eyes I see,  
but the shadow she casts through  
the old vine-covered latticework  
that must have taken such  
small hands to make.

Leona's neck is craned  
towards the row of speckled green-  
on-green leaves that separates  
her yard from ours.

I know what she looks like  
standing there, not because I can see her,  
but because I have seen her  
so many times before.

No one visits her now. Not even her  
grown-up children. She has to get a man in  
to cut the lawn.

In her arms she holds the little cocker spaniel  
who's almost nine. All of her love  
goes into that hold, into the way one hand  
meets the other under his  
spotted pink belly.

We have grown silent  
on our side of the property line.  
Leona listens to our silence  
carefully, not to let us know  
she is listening.

Something is not right, she thinks.  
Perhaps it's her duty to keep an eye on us.  
Keep tabs on who goes in and  
out of this house. You never know  
when you might be of use.

I go now to the hedge  
where our gardens meet  
to see if I can't say hello.  
But her shadow has vanished.

I'd forgotten the small purple flowers,  
still nameless in my memory,  
that flourish here  
in the shade.

## WHAT SHE SAID

And this morning she made me so angry. What was it she said? *You miss your life.* That was it. *You miss your life ... of course you do, sweetheart. I'm sorry you're stuck here with me.* Like I am some kind of mope. Like I don't try to be patient and kind. Like I don't try to smile.

## UNSENT LETTER 2

To:

9 Cité Jandelle

Paris, 75019

Dearest J.,

*It feels like an eternity and yesterday since we saw one another. I picture you, cigarette in hand, on the balcony of our flat. Do you still wear that blue terrycloth robe outside?*

*Today is the Portes Ouvertes. On your way up the hill, you will pass three boulangeries with meringue in their windows, resist each time because there are milles feuilles on boulevard Simone Bolivar worth holding out for. The street cleaners will spray the sidewalks as you pass. When you arrive in Belleville, you will visit as many ateliers as the morning will allow. Your favourite remains the one that makes staircases. Treads, risers, balusters in heaps upon the floor. You'll wonder what might become of them—where those staircases will lead to once you've left. Later, you'll eat lamb couscous at the restaurant on rue Marie with everybody else.*

*It's Sunday. My father has taken my mother to church.*

*I wonder how you remember me. Do you think of me from time to time? I don't go anywhere now but to the shops and back.*

## TWO TRAGEDIES

There was blood on her dress when she got on the train.  
Someone said she turned green before fainting.

It took two guards to lift her body from the platform.  
She looked like a dead thing being carried away.

Two doctors came in the night to perform a secret operation.  
She said she hadn't even known. Must have been the reason

she fainted in Gorki's play the week before.  
Stanislavski was with her in the morning. Maria would fetch her

in a few days to bring her to Chekhov's home.  
The problem was the timing. She hadn't been to Yalta

three months earlier. Both doctors said she almost  
didn't make it. Maria looked after her.

Chekhov moved around with two sticks.  
The problem was the timing. This he had to get out

of his head. He could forgive her anything.  
She did get better. No miracle.

The problem was the timing.

## CODE BLUE

We went out for dinner on the lakefront,  
to that little restaurant that's changed hands  
so many times. We ate

slowly and talked about nothing,  
ordered three Cokes with our food. After  
dinner we walked by the oil drums

and picked up lucky stones from the gritty sand.  
We launched thin ones out into the waves while  
the sun grew giant before us. We did not  
hurry about a thing.

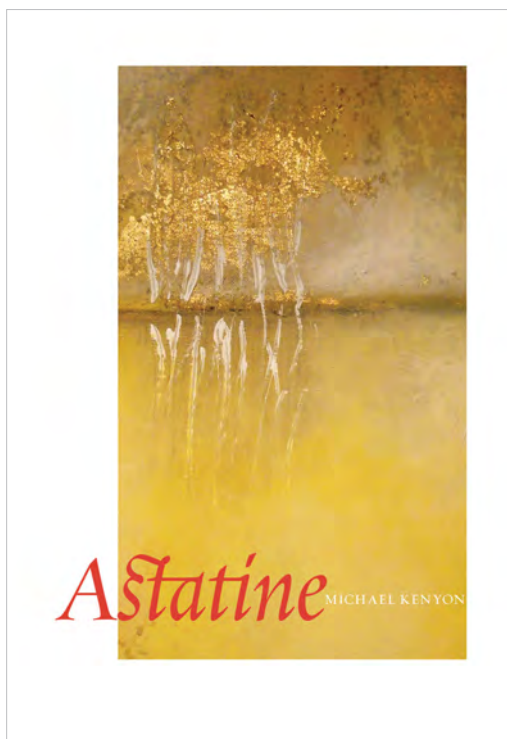
Maybe one of us knew it would happen that night  
and that was why we went back long after  
visiting hours. But when we got there,  
a code blue meant that we had to wait.

It took us a few moments to realize  
the perfect young doctors racing past  
us were headed for your room.

If only we'd been braver, we'd have  
burst through the doors ourselves, forced our way  
like good villains. When you could still speak,

the last thing you were able to ask me  
was where all of your worry would go.





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**MICHAEL KENYON** is the author of numerous poetry collections and novels. His novel *The Beautiful Children* won the 2010 ReLit Award, and his work has been shortlisted for The Commonwealth Writers Prize and the National Magazine Awards. He divides his time between Vancouver and Pender Island, having in both places a therapeutic practice.

## *Delta*

On the day I came down to claim a wife  
October was pale grey with a liver-  
green sky and waves rolled high up the river  
that shone, leapt and split my wilderness life  
from farms, and as I crossed into the neigh-  
bouring suburb's pools, crescents, signs and homes,  
a panhandler spat, a child-gang threw stones,  
a black dog barked warning then slunk away,  
a housewife on tiptoe caught me staring,  
planted her heels on the sidewalk and bent  
to snatch her boy from my path, the school bell  
rang and, there, a girl hung from the chain-link:  
sapling, star chart, blood-in-cream wallpaper  
from the fever-room I was born into.

## *Orpheus XVI*

Look twice at the black dog with four legs.  
You just saw a black dog with three legs.

Check the plant sale at the bank, your own branch,  
all profits to lost animals.

When waiting for a friend who does not show,  
enjoy the coffee, the red poppies.

Take the next Rilke sonnet to heart:  
“You are lonely, my friend, because you are...”

Husband of a broken arm, take your time.  
Joy is waiting. Joy is almost here.

Look twice at the black dog with three legs.  
You just saw a black dog with four legs.

## Reading *Middlemarch*

I just saw the trees outside Qualicum  
and loved them, so took a photograph and  
here it is, an effort at something  
beyond my control, leaning, the lean mine,  
a forest, a small forest of thin trees  
just outside Qualicum where my parents  
lived – Englishman’s Falls, Qualicum River –  
and I still love the trees, the photograph  
of the trunks leaning, or seeming to lean –  
I aligned slope with the viewfinder’s frame –  
an effort developed, mounted and hung  
on the east wall of the outhouse in the  
alder grove, and love this effort to sway  
something beyond my control, the middle  
of a spring conversation with my wife  
in the sunny trailer, wind chime alive,  
prop-plane above, called into this present  
forest of alder with catkins, branches  
bending truly, red tips flying, bowels  
undulating, mindful of Casaubon  
and Dorothea, outside our control.

## *Half-Lives*

Some listen to children, some history.  
The earth is full of not only what we  
have put in it, but with its own beauty,  
which is not terrifying, and then is.

The heart hears a child and listening  
through the child's heart for the world  
is harder than listening to history  
or to trucks shifting down on Dunbar.

We rate half-lives but do not register  
our own guts wrestling with beans and cabbage.  
We fall in love with teachers, our stomachs  
in a knot: *Sumer, Tigris, Euphrates*.

We dissect the giant squid, a stranger,  
pale on the laboratory table.  
Surely we should mourn the cousin we swam  
with just yesterday or the day before?

We worship the earth and forget the sea,  
yet ocean fills our blood, and a plastic  
balloon as big as America floats  
shimmering in the black North Pacific.

Once time and space are locked into a cave,  
we can begin to explore yet one more  
dimension. Plato, Aristotle, yin,  
yang, echo of echo, iterations,

all isotopes colliding in our breath.  
Perhaps. Listen. The steps along a street  
at night. The steps along a street at night  
are not the steps along a street at noon.

## *Swim Forty-Five*

When I finish with you  
the branch to the fence  
a crease in the light  
I'll finish with loss

\*

She goes out early in the afternoon  
now it's October, leaving my father  
to dream the old dream of letting her go,  
begun when he was a boy in England  
and she a girl on her way to Russia  
and the complete freedom she's still after,

stroke by stroke, on the rain-dimpled water  
of Roe Lake, the New World facsimile  
of her nineteenth-century reservoir  
in the Yorkshire moors. A long swim from there

to here, watched by eagles, counting each stroke,  
watched by beaver and ducks; she swims alone,

while Dad marks time and home: *she won't return.*



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**DEANNA YOUNG** is a is the author of two previous books of poems, *The Still Before a Storm* and *Drunkard's Path*. Her work has appeared in journals across Canada, including *The Malahat Review* and *Arc Poetry Magazine*. Originally from southwestern Ontario, she now lives in Ottawa.



## **SURVIVANTE**

Falling through the dark house alone, dark  
province alone, no friend or relative near,  
when a phone rings

sharply in the other room, not  
the phone beside my ear.  
That's not right. There's only one line.

Now the sound of a child running  
toward me down the hall, the rolling drum  
of hardwood

when I know the floor here  
to be ceramic tile. Caught by the gills, in a net  
between worlds, I struggle,

decide, I'm not that stupid.  
A scream, I know, would wake me,  
but the contract between brain,

body, will, it's severed.  
He's cut the wire again. The desire  
to give in is sweet, strength needed

to grip the edge not in me. All I have  
might not be enough this time, I'm thinking,  
when here, now, like a siren,

the indignant self.

I make my move, the wrestler's last explosive flip,  
and heave myself into the fact

of the midnight room.

*No phone rang, I say out loud. No child  
needs me right now.*

## RESCUE

A storm came up the night of the funeral, right up onto the verandah where we had all gathered after the service, after the slow drive back

and the sandwiches that waited on plates in the kitchen, offering themselves to our inevitable hunger. A balmy September evening, and the wind

galloped across the city, a wild herd over the houses, rain on its back, a thousand hooves landing all at once on the roof, shattering the thin

mood like a window. Drawing us to the railing to feel its leafy breath on our faces, the grace of being all together under one awning and

*It's him*, we said. The thunder. When a final car pulled up and parked across the street, high beams fanning the coastline of a dangerous sea.

A child inside, asleep but stirring: my cousin's daughter. And him not old enough to be a father, really, yet there she was, arriving

in the care of her young grandmother, my pretty, ever-buoyant aunt, a Partridge-era Shirley Jones. Who could be seen now, in the lit interior,

gathering jackets, the handles of several bags, a Tupperware container.

Expectation swam, then thrashed among waves now rocking the verandah,

our frail wooden boat, as it became clear my cousin, the girl's father, had no plan to cross the churning street, to collect his child and bring her

back across the channel, to shelter, rescue. The years he'd nearly drowned in  
rising like a tide around him, cold shock of being lifted, many times,  
  
by the hair and so transported from one banal place to another—over  
a mall parking lot, down a narrow hallway to bed—by his own father. Into that  
  
murk he could not step off, but faltered and refused, though we prodded,  
*Go get her*. He did not want to get wet, he shouted into the downpour,  
  
when, on impulse, mother of two young girls myself, I bolted,  
accepted the child like a sack of gold from the straining arms of my aunt  
  
and carried her back, the others cheering our soaked arrival.  
A shameful act, and binding. As though I'd carried him across—a man  
  
grown, but ruined, unable to swim against the current, change.

## IF A DOOR OPENED

I

What would it be to stand at our own window  
on our own worst night of the year, looking in?

Think of all the brave houses, shouldering  
darkness and rain. If a door opened, would we enter?

II

Kindness sits by the window smoking, her pale flesh  
swelling like bread dough in the August heat.

She shrinks at the slam of a car door. Kindness  
has been so sad for so long, no one wants to be around her.

III

*We're rich*, she said. *We have each other*. Now,  
we laughed at supper. Uncontrollably sometimes,

a woman and three children. We took turns falling off our chairs,  
we were so bloody happy. Alive is a better word.

## EAGLE DRIVE

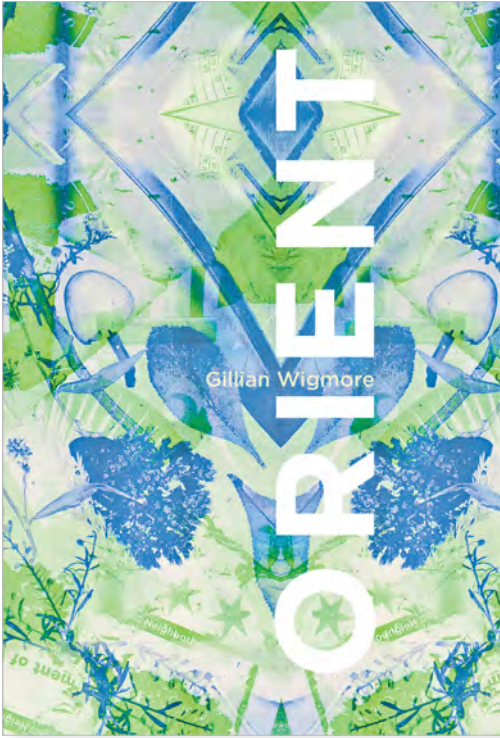
And here is a night near Christmas  
he comes home fuming rye,  
easing LPs from his parka—  
Waylon Jennings, Merle Haggard—  
lifted from Kmart on post-Legion spree.  
Slitting cellophane with a thumbnail.

Now hear my mother, unable to resist:  
*That's not something to brag about to children.*  
And see her head bounce three times  
off the kitchen cupboard, once  
for each child watching.

Years later, out walking  
in the languid hours after supper,  
summer dark a cool hand on my neck, we pass a house on fire  
with a certain type of scream, a woman's voice flaming  
at the windows. And time  
falls on its knees on the sidewalk before us,  
pleading.

To this day we have whole conversations,  
my mother and I, made up only  
of the names of streets.  
We know what we mean.

*George*, I might say, or, *King Edward*.  
To which she might answer, *Stanley*.  
*Eagle Drive*.



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**GILLIAN WIGMORE** is the author of two previous books of poems: *soft geography* (Caitlin Press, 2007), winner of the 2008 ReLit Award, and *Dirt of Ages* (Nightwood, 2012), as well as a novella, *Graying* (Mother Tongue Publishing, 2014). Her work has been published in magazines, shortlisted for prizes and anthologized. She lives in Prince George, BC.

*from skyward from the self*

1

the fact of a fish, a trout, a weighted thought,  
firm, thick bend of flesh, flex of meat, heavy, unblinking, slick  
fish of dreams, Plato's fish, lived for years in the black lake,  
*years*, from fry to broken flesh.  
this is no revelation, this smacked body-flinch,  
and this is no poem of sorrow, not a flick of regret,  
instead the flash of water flung skyward  
from the self-preserving tail.

this perfect morsel, this unblemished self, this scathed or unscathed one  
scaled green, gold, blue, black, pink, orange, grey, white, embolism of existence  
cracked once, twice above the gills, centred thump on the hill above the eyes  
like so – cease the ode, it's supper time.  
beyond the silk gut, the gorgeous spleen, those  
sated crows hanging around on the beach; beyond the memory  
of weight in my arms, first as I pulled it forth and then as I held it close,  
evening glare off the fading shine, dried slime, the fillet knife  
catching the flash of light: after-image of the rod held high.



## tavern

nobody says tavern any more  
just pub or bar – you can't say poetry  
in a pub or bar  
you can say whatever you want to in a tavern

one night, the power out  
I told a poem no one's heard  
the like of before or since

me either since I made it up  
in the dark, words bubblin up  
like clams in mud

breakin the surface like so much  
air, but all these men –  
mill men, cowboys, vagrants, farmers –

I had them silent  
I had them still, I had words  
comin out of me like nothin

I ever knew before  
or since  
there's been drought and flood

they've closed the mill  
and opened it again  
I had a job and then I didn't

but once I spoke a tavern sermon  
that came to me in darkness  
and men I knew who crossed the street

who shunned me in daylight  
they wept  
and that's somethin

## Vanderhoof girls

*after Charles Lillard*

sometimes you think of her and her shotgun wedding,  
her dad dancing barefoot till his footsteps bled.  
you think of her and you think of her sister,  
who married a mormon elder when they were both fifteen  
and she was the prettiest, smartest girl in the school  
before she disappeared and before you thought seriously  
of burning the whole thing down, then left instead.

you think of her giant farm truck and apples and peanut butter,  
Simon and Garfunkel blaring from popped speakers,  
the two of you singing and the road grass all burnt up and hopeless.  
you think of her mum, who was quiet and worked with troubled youth,  
and then you think of her with her eyes brimming,  
the both of you standing dumb in the foyer of the friendship centre  
holding eyes, not hands, because her mum was thrown from a horse, killed,  
and you knew no other motherless girl your same age.

you stop thinking because it hurts.  
you've spent too much time and words on landscape.  
you owe them more, you've been pretending you don't belong  
but all along you've known: you're her,  
no matter your travels, your schooling, your poems.  
you know her too well – her and her and you.

it's self-preservation, all this writing, reminding yourself  
where you're not, where you could be,  
where you'll finally be: the plot of land above the hospital  
your great-grandad bought in 1925 to house the whole ramshackle lot of you  
when you die. You lie staring, wide eyes to the ceiling,  
remembering, fearing falling to earth, succumbing to the current,  
to some hometown boy, or some good old-fashioned home birth  
in Vanderhoof, two miles from the family homestead.

## hewn

here, in the tumble home from sky  
to cliff to curve, we meet the inward-see  
of cave hollow, black and chamois yellow,  
brown, dust, and if we look,  
a chalky shade of blue.

the armoire of cool after sun,  
shade after heat. note  
the greys after the blues.  
we seek the fall  
from home, above ground,  
to below,

from beams and boards and wood  
to the shiff of moving soil,  
the smooth-packed earth floor –  
this is what we're after:  
abode of before-thought,  
when the dark was all around us,  
and in the dark we built a fire.

**I am a word  
in a foreign language**

an unused word

she lifts her head when I step inside  
I thought myself here  
thought the path into existence  
the leaves a wilderness I had to execute  
to find her warm hovel  
thick fug of stew

she lifts the hem of her skirt  
when I come inside  
wipes my face  
with loose-weave cloth  
licks me clean  
with a dirty tongue

she doesn't like me, but she'll wash me  
before I foul her  
and I do

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