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WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A MARITIME WRITER: AN INTERVIEW WITH RACHEL LEBOWITZ AND ZACHARIAH WELLS

"ATLANTIC-CANADIAN LITERATURE," writes the late Herb Wyile in his book *Anne of Tim Hortons: Globalization and the Reshaping of Atlantic-Canadian Literature* (2011), "is characterized by a sophisticated response to the double-edged and profoundly disempowering vision of the region," which is seen as both a "leisure space" and a "drain on the economy." Including Wyile's, several book-length studies have been published on the topic of fraught Maritimity in fiction, including Janice Kulyk Keefer's *Under Eastern Eyes: A Critical Reading of Maritime Fiction* (1987) and David Craig Creelman's *Setting in the East: Maritime Realist Fiction* (2003), and special issues of *Canadian Literature* and *Studies in Canadian Literature* have also considered the topic with light coverage of its manifestations in poetry. Jeannette Lynes and Gwendolyn Davies' *Words Out There: Women Poets in Atlantic Canada* (1999) and Anne Compton's *Meetings with Maritime Poets* (2006) are also valuable collections of interviews, although their focus is not fraught Maritimity. As of yet, there are few interviews with Maritime writers that have addressed the questions of what Maritimity is and how it applies to their work—that is, if the paradox of neoliberalized leisure space is operative in their imagination, if they feel threatened by the literary centre, and if that threat manifests itself in their poems.

The following interview addresses these questions in relation to the work of Rachel Lebowitz and Zachariah Wells—two married poets who currently live in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Lebowitz was born in Vancouver, British Columbia in 1975, and she completed her bachelor's degree at Simon Fraser University and her master's degree at Concordia University before moving with her husband to Halifax. Her first book, *Hannus* (2006), was shortlisted for the Roderick Haig-Brown Prize and the Edna Staebler Award for Cre-

ative Non-Fiction. A revised version of her 2003 master's thesis, *Hannus* focuses on the life of her great-grandmother, Ida Hannus, a Finnish-Canadian suffragist and socialist who lived in the Finnish commune Sointula on Malcolm Island. The book was praised for its masterful interweaving of poems, interviews, letters, diary entries, newspaper clippings, government documents, and photographs, and Lebowitz was soon recognized as one of the leading collage poets in Canada. Her second book, *Cottonopolis* (2013), similarly combines poetry and found material to recount the story of the cotton industry in England, the American South, India, and the West Indies. It particularly focuses on the history of child labour and slavery, and it incorporates a wealth of historical research. *Arc Poetry Magazine* described it as "a tour de force that unveils the beauty and atrocities of a world besieged by industrial revolution," and *The Fiddlehead* similarly described it as "a breathtaking, eerie and oddly beautiful look at the vicious underbelly of capitalism." Her third and most recent book, *The Year of No Summer: A Reckoning* (2018), focuses on the events that transpired in the year following the eruption of Mount Tambora in Indonesia in 1815—the largest volcanic eruption in recorded history. Weaving together poetry, memoir, fables, myths, and historical material, it provides a wide-ranging reflection on the relationship between humanity and the natural world as well as on our need to find spiritual meaning during times of crisis. *Kirkus* described it as "a lyrical meditation on violence, disaster, and humanity's yearning for solace," and *Midwest Book Review* wrote that it was "as thoughtful and thought-provoking as it is historically accurate and contemporarily relevant."

Zachariah Wells was born in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island in 1976, and he grew up in the rural community of Hazel Grove. He left home at the age of fourteen and attended high school in Ottawa and university in Halifax. As an undergraduate, he spent summers working in Iqaluit, Nunavut as an airline cargo handler. After a brief stint in graduate school in Montreal, Quebec, he returned to Iqaluit in 2001 and later transferred to the remote settlement of Resolute on Cornwallis Island, where he worked until he returned to Halifax in 2003. His first book, *Unsettled* (2004), is a collection of poems inspired by his experiences in the Arctic. While it deals with ancient myths as well as contemporary stories of courage and survival, it focuses more on the mundane realities of manual labour, and it was praised by critics like John Thompson for its candor about the uglier aspects of northern life. Wells' second book, *Track & Trace* (2009), focuses

on the fluidity of life and the fleetingness of the past by combining childhood memories with reflections on Heraclitus' maxim about not stepping into the same river twice. This book was shortlisted for the Atlantic Poetry Prize, and it was frequently praised its formal elements. For example, *Pickle Me This* noted that "within each poem the words fit together in surprising ways, with subtle rhyme, rhythm and alliteration," and *Freefall* similarly wrote that these poems embodied "everything poetry should be: reflective and linguistically aware, imagistic, connected to human emotion and experience." Several of the poems were also set to music by Canadian composer Erik Ross as part of his "Waypoints" song cycle, which was performed at the Jane Mallett Theatre in Toronto in 2013 and at the Opéra National de Paris in 2014. Wells' third and most recent book, *Sum* (2015), focuses on the multiplicity and mutability of the self, and it incorporates a wide range of poetic styles, including free verse, sonnets, epigrams, and even a villanelle. *Arc Poetry Magazine* emphasized the sonic qualities of these poems, which are "marked by rhythm that snaps like a snare-drum, punctuated by the occasional rim shot at a line turn," and *Quill & Quire* described Wells as "a Maritime poet of direct speech and muscular lexicon." Wells has also edited the anthologies *Jailbreaks: 99 Canadian Sonnets* (2008), which *The Walrus* described as "rigorous in its aesthetic evaluations and thoughtful in its attention to details of prosody," and *The Essential Kenneth Leslie* (2010), which was first collection of Leslie's poems to be published since 1972. Wells has also published one book of literary criticism, *Career Limiting Moves* (2013), which includes reassessments of major Canadian poets (like Margaret Atwood, Lorna Crozier, Don McKay, and Patrick Lane) as well as underrated or near-forgotten poets (like Charles Bruce, Kenneth Leslie, Peter Sanger, John Smith, Peter Trower, and Peter Van Toorn) and several emerging writers (like Suzanne Buffam, Pino Coluccio, Thomas Heise, and Peter Norman). *The Underground Book Club* described it as "playful, snarky, sharp-witted, intelligent and polemical," and *Free Range Reading* described Wells as "one of Canada's most vocal and pugnacious critics."

The following interview was conducted over e-mail in late 2016 and early 2017.

Shane Neilson: In her landmark study of Maritime fiction, *Under Eastern Eyes*, Keefer defines a Maritime writer as someone "whose work reveals a strong imaginative involvement with and commitment to the region. The

minds of such writers are either saturated . . . or ironically gripped . . . by the Maritimes—their work reveals the kind of eyes the region gives to a writer; the kind of things those eyes are compelled to notice and to represent." In her dissertation on Maritime literary regionalism, however, Susan DeCoste argues that this definition is "informed by a Euro-settler definition of belonging . . . that prescribes an author's long-term residency and family history in a single place as prerequisites for an 'authentic' regional identity." What do you think goes into the identity of being a Maritime writer? Do you consider yourselves to be Maritime writers, even though you have both spent considerable time outside of the Maritimes?

Rachel Lebowitz: I think it really depends on the criteria. If a Maritime writer is simply a writer who lives in the Maritimes, then I guess I would fit that definition, as I've lived in Nova Scotia for 11 years. But I think there are many people, yourself included, who currently live outside of the Maritimes but for whom the Maritimes is a real identity in a way that it isn't for me. In those 11 years, for instance, I've only lived in Halifax. My in-laws live in Prince Edward Island, and I've visited some other areas, but I don't know them in the way that I do areas in British Columbia, where I grew up and lived for 28 years.

As far as my writing goes, I have, during my time in Halifax, edited a book that I wrote primarily in Montreal, which is concerned with family history and the history of British Columbia. *Hannus* is about the life of my great-grandmother from her departure in Finland to her time in the Finnish utopian commune of Sointula and her life afterwards. Really, it's a portrait of a family, a community, and a time that are specifically located on Malcolm Island and Vancouver. My next book, *Cottonopolis*, veers from West Africa to the West Indies, India, England, and the United States. There is no grappling with the Maritimes or even Canada. My most recent book, *The Year of No Summer*, briefly mentions the Grand Banks, but the rest is concerned with Europe and the United States with a bit of India and China thrown in. There is a mention of a swing on a tree at a park that is just a block from our home and a few about our yard and garden, but those brief glimpses don't seem to be enough to warrant the title of "Maritime writer."

As far as my particular identity goes, I feel most comfortable identifying as a North-Ender, as I've lived and worked in the North End of Halifax for many years. I'll always be a "come from away," but I've still become part

of the community there, as I coordinate tutoring programs for adults at the Halifax North Memorial Public Library, and the majority of the learners live nearby—some just next door or down the street, some right across the street—so I often bump into them on my walk to work. Other than our home and neighbourhood, however, Halifax doesn't really come into my writing. Making the decision to live here was done in many ways to facilitate writing, as it allows us to work part-time or seasonally, which is much harder in Vancouver, but it's not central to my work. In fact, the park near our home has been very important to me since I arrived here partly because the view from one certain spot reminds me of Vancouver. I often sit in that spot, look out over the harbour, and feel comforted. But I don't actually feel connected to Vancouver anymore due to all the changes the real estate market has wrought—it's no longer the place where I grew up. I do feel connected very much to Lasqueti Island in British Columbia, where I used to spend summers and where I still spend at least half the time on my visits "home," and sometimes it even feels honestly like home.

I think questions of identity are generally challenging, but perhaps this is even more true for a writer like me, who hasn't written about Canada at all in the last 10 years. I tend to read whatever most grabs my interest, so I don't seek out Canadian literature unless the subject interests me and I'm very behind on reading the latest books by Canadian writers. My core identity is really that of a writer, educator, wife, and mother, and I try to find as much of a balance between those roles as possible.

Zachariah Wells: The weasel answer to your question, I suppose, is that it's a case-by-case thing—not only because of the individuality of writers and their experiences and backgrounds (and their desire to cleave to a fixed identity), but also because of the generality of both "Maritime" and "writer" as categories of identity. Personally, I only think about this sort of question when it's posed to me, which isn't to say that I haven't at times been preoccupied by questions of identity. The title of my most recent collection, *Sum*, is Latin for "I am," and my exploration of what that phrase might mean has been oriented more towards the universal (i.e. anthropological/psychological/neurological) underpinnings of identity construction or "self process," as neuroscientist Antonio Damasio put it. Essentially, what Damasio and others have determined is that the self is a shifting fiction. There is a small, stable "core self," but most of the components of selfhood are malleable—

both from within and from without. As someone who has lived on all three coasts, spent significant stretches of time in six provinces and one territory, and frequently travelled through areas in which I haven't actually lived in the course of my professional activities, all of this makes intuitive sense to me. I've never felt at ease in any single identity construction—I don't really believe in any such thing as "being myself"—so I'm leery of thinking of myself as a Maritimer in any essential sense. I've sometimes been referred to as "pan-Canadian," which is probably the most objectively accurate handle. "Canadian" is a catch-all, meaning everything and nothing, since most Canadians actually know very little of the country as a whole and since diversity defines Canadian culture more than any other commonality does. The fact that our institutions are so strenuously obsessed with the idea of "Canadian identity"—or worse, because more normative, "Canadian values"—is proof of its factitiousness.

I suppose I'd say that I never think of myself more as a Maritimer than when I'm outside the region or when I'm speaking to someone from outside it, which I do a lot, since I currently work as a service attendant on Via Rail's Halifax-Montreal train. I live in Halifax now—for the third time in my life—but that's more a matter of convenience than of any profound attachment to the city. When I think of home—that is, the place I come from and the place in which my character took root and shape—I don't think of the Maritimes in general; rather, I think of a specific piece of rolling countryside in Hazel Grove, where I spent my first fifteen years and where my mother, brother, uncle, and cousins live today. As Milton Acorn put it, "Since I'm Island-born, home's as precise / as if a mumbly old carpenter, / shoulder-straps crossed wrong, / laid it out, refigured / to the last three-eights of shingle." I don't carry around with me any particular regional pride or a conscious sense of fellow-feeling for other Islanders or Maritimers, and my heritage is a mixed one. My late father's family goes back who-knows-how-many generations in the Maritimes and New England, but my mother grew up in Ontario and half of her heritage is Russian-Jewish, which was pretty damn unusual on the Island. (When Jewish Island poet Joe Sherman died, a few gentiles had to be deputized for the traditional funeral rites.) My dad also spent most of his youth in Ottawa, where my grandfather worked for the federal government. So the horizons of my world, even as a child growing up in a quiet little valley, were broader than most of my peers'. I always felt a little alien as a kid, which was exacerbated by the fact that I was an atheist

from pretty early on, while most of my classmates were at least nominally Christian. Frankly, I couldn't get away soon enough, and I moved to Ottawa for high school before my fifteenth birthday. This was initially disorienting, but there were a lot of other kids of mixed heritage there, and I found a level of social comfort and belonging that I'd never had on Prince Edward Island. If I have a people, they're mongrels.

Similarly, I only tend to think of myself as a writer in writerly contexts. When I'm serving tables, I'm not a writer waiting on customers—I'm just a waiter. When I'm with my son, I'm not a writer who has a child—I'm a father. So I guess I would have to say that there are certain highly specific circumstances under which I would consider myself a Maritime writer, but most of the time I don't think about it one way or another. Mostly, I don't like being pigeonholed. I think a lot more about socio-economic status than geography, gender, or ethnicity. But that's another sticky wicket.

Lebowitz: What does it even mean to be a Canadian writer?

Neilson: As a Ph.D. candidate specializing in Canadian literature, I think of Canadianness as an identity that is constantly in flux, that is various, that is usually presented in opposition to American identity, and that is very much predicated on our origin as a colony that did not undergo revolution. Of course that definition is problematic, as it ignores and erases indigenous peoples, but the problem of how to define Canadianness is only interesting to me insofar as the definitions of larger constellations are hedged, contingent, and somehow more unstable than that of regional identities. Maritimists like Wyile and Davies have said that Maritime identity is somehow more concrete than Canadian identity because the nation isn't as identifiable and present as the earth beneath one's feet.

Rachel, your background is particularly interesting because you don't identify yourself as a Maritime writer but you do identify with a very well-defined neighbourhood in Halifax and, as you mentioned, there are specific elements of your Halifax locality that enter into your writing. So let me ask you this question in a different way: what is it that makes someone the kind of Maritime writer that you, having lived in the Maritimes for more than a decade, are not?

Lebowitz: I haven't thought through these sorts of considerations before,

but I suppose that I would define a Maritime writer as someone whose work features the landscape, the history, the language, or the people. That definition expands then to include writers who were born in the Maritimes and no longer live here but whose images or language reflect this area. By language I mean the expressions, vocabulary, or dialect of a particular region. For instance, I'd never heard the expression "what a sin" until moving here, and if I read that in something, even if it was written by someone no longer living here, I would see that as a particularly regional piece of writing.

So I think of myself as a writer who lives in one region of the Maritimes but who has yet to write anything that I'd be comfortable calling Maritime writing. This is quite different from how I feel about Zach's writing. He's leery of categorizations, and he's written poems that cover many different landscapes, histories, and topics, but he also has a fair number of poems set in Prince Edward Island.

Neilson: You seem to be saying that such a title implies an intense affective identification with a particular place, but these kinds of bonds often require the experience of exile in order to be recognized for what they are. Based on the roots you've both established in the North End, do you think you would feel the same kind of pangs that I feel about New Brunswick if you ever needed to move somewhere else?

Lebowitz: I think I would feel pangs if I left Halifax, but I also feel pangs every summer when I leave British Columbia. I guess I'm caught in between. And as much as I have made my home here, so much of that is because it made financial sense to do so. If we hadn't met, then I would have moved back to British Columbia after graduate school. And if we could have afforded to move back to British Columbia together, then I would have been excited to do so—especially if it meant living on or near a gulf island. But it makes sense for us to be here. Anywhere I would like to live in British Columbia is more expensive than what we have now, since housing, childcare, medical services, and insurance all cost so much more there. In many ways the decision to move here was purely pragmatic, as it was primarily based on our overall quality of life.

Neilson: Zach, you also included poems in *Sum* that reflect and refract personal identity. In "Choose Your Own Debenture," for example, you included

the lines "Would I be doing x if not for y? / Fucked if I know. Can't imagine why / not, but then neither can I stir the cream / from my coffee." Is it strange to have such artifacts included in discussions of identity like the one we're having now? If you had to articulate your position regarding place and self in a poem, what would it be?

Wells: I think I already have, and poems are perhaps the best place for such articulations because they are always zones of shifting ambiguity. In another poem, I refer to the first person singular pronoun as "Such a slim barrow into which to stuff / a life; such a narrow beam to cross / and brace the walls." In another: "Sorry, I'm not myself today. Lately, / I think I never am." In another, referring to the idea propounded by physicists that time has no objective existence: "Oh, the pains // We take to stake a claim on Space." The yard and garden that Rachel referred to sneak in too: "I take a walk around / the garden walls I've built as baffle // to the fascinating marvels of my life." These are just a few examples from my most recent book.

My first book, *Unsettled*, also deals with the experience of being a stranger in a strange land (in my case, a young white settler in Nunavut), and my second book, *Track & Trace*, finds this subject growing and changing in a wide array of settings. This question of self and place is really too central an issue for me to encapsulate in a single poem, which is why I've been working through it in various ways ever since I started writing. My "position" vis-à-vis place and self has been defined far more by change and movement than by place and essence. Insofar as change and movement have characterized the lives of many Maritimers, I suppose there's some overlap with your concerns there.

Neilson: One common theme that is prevalent in both of your work is your shared commitment to socialism and social critique. Perhaps this is a place where there might be an inkling of a shared Maritimity?

Lebowitz: *Cottonopolis* is a very socialist book, as it documents the social conditions during the Industrial Revolution. However, it's also a critique of gender and racial oppression. For example, "Exhibit 16: Bandage" starts off looking at a slave woman's experience after childbirth and then moves to Manchester to talk about the experiences of white women factory workers and how little time they got off work when they had babies. The book is es-

sentially an indictment of many different forms of slavery, which are often interconnected.

Neilson: Zach, I expect there's a hundred (or more) reasons why you are concerned about class, but do you think there is a discrete Maritime element at work here? The economic fortunes of the Maritimes in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries come to mind, as does the region's reliance on seasonal employment.

Wells: I wouldn't say that there's a *discrete* Maritime element in my socio-political views, though Maritimers are statistically more likely to find themselves on the wrong side of the poverty line. But my class consciousness—which includes my consciousness that I don't belong neatly to one class or another, since I've worked in "semi-skilled" transportation and service sector jobs but my upbringing was comfortably middle-class, I make a decent living, and I'm now a property owner and a landlord while also serving as shop steward in my union local—has more to do with globalized late capitalism, the prevailing dominance of neoliberalism, and everything that goes with that (austerity, privatization, widening class gaps, and increasing economic insecurity for an increasingly large segment of the population) than it does with anything particularly Maritime. My own situation has certainly been in some respects more precarious because I've lived and worked here, and it's been mainly seasonal employment (though less so now than in the past), but, as Rachel pointed out, we've been able to live a more bourgeois life here than we could have possibly managed in Vancouver, Toronto, or even Montreal.

The union to which I belong (Unifor) is the biggest private-sector trade union in the country, and our collective agreement with Via Rail is a national one. Within the group of employees covered by that agreement, the Eastern bloc is small and therefore less influential, so in that way some of the finer grain elements of my life as a union representative and political activist are coloured by Maritimity. Some particular issues in our region—which is less valued by the corporation than the less-insolvent Quebec City-Windsor Corridor—have gone by the boards in contract negotiations, so at times I feel like we're up against not only our employer's priorities but also other regions. On the other hand, we'd have a lot less leverage if we had our own collective agreement, separate from Ontario and Quebec, so I wouldn't

want to split off even if that were an option. If feeling embattled is a particularly Maritime affliction, then I guess you could say that Maritimity informs my political views and actions. However, the labour movement has never been especially strong in the Maritimes; outside of Cape Breton, middle-of-the-road small-c conservatism has been the default Maritime setting for a long time. There has certainly not been widespread radicalization in my workplace despite the existence of a lot of problems. My union position is an elected one, in theory, but on three occasions I've either filled it because it was left vacant or been reappointed by acclamation. If I'm more outspoken than most of my colleagues, it might be in part because I've spent a lot of time outside of the Maritimes, I've had more education, and I wasn't born into the working class. Hell, I went to an Upper Canadian private school, so I have less anxiety about confrontations with "superiors." Some might even call it a sense of entitlement, which does not seem very Maritimish, so I hesitate to draw too thick a line between place and politics.

Neilson: Rachel, what about the possibly romantic argument that the place you live in necessarily finds representation in your writing in terms of mood or energy and that this is enough to bring you into the tent of Maritimity? Even though you don't write about it, you are so engaged in community work that it seems to inform what you *do* and who you *are* in a fractional and not total sense. Doesn't that intense engagement backdraw your writing into Maritimity, even though the writing isn't classically regionalist?

Lebowitz: It's a hard question, isn't it? I'm not sure that the place where I live can be represented in terms of mood or energy, and I've never really spent time wondering about my writerly identity beyond that of just being a writer. To quote Archy (Don Marquis' fictional cockroach, who wrote humorous verse), "the main question is whether the stuff is literature or not." I'm bad with identity definitions, or perhaps I just feel uncomfortable with many of them, but if I had to define myself in terms of region, I suppose I would feel more comfortable as a British Columbia writer than a Maritime one.

Neilson: Do you feel that you are an exile, then?

Lebowitz: That term sounds politically charged, like something was done

to me or I was pushed out of something, which isn't the case at all. I just don't feel like I'm part of mainstream writing culture. I'm not involved in the world of Canadian literature, and I think part of the reason is that my writing is neither one thing nor another. I write essays that sometimes veer off into verse and then move back to prose again, yet no matter what I end up writing it is always this "mixed-genre" thing that ends up in the poetry section. For my latest book, I received grant money through the "poetry" category, but some of the essays were originally published as non-fiction.

I don't think a discussion of identity in terms of genre is irrelevant to the discussion we're having here because it points to a lot of the discomfort I feel around this issue. For instance, I'm not sure whether I'm even a poet—that's also a hard question—as I just don't seem to fit in anywhere, and that's mostly okay. I have my doubts about that sometimes, but on my good days I realize that I've written pieces I'm proud of, and I've been fortunate to have great readers.

In many ways I feel more connected to British Columbia than I do to Nova Scotia, but when we moved back to Vancouver (in 2006) I didn't suddenly feel like I was a "Vancouver writer." I met and became friends with a few other writers, but I didn't feel like I was part of any scene, and I was also working on poems about England at the time. As far as that goes, my editor, Stephanie Bolster, just finished reading my latest manuscript and says that there is a British diction to it at times, which is perhaps a holdover from her reading of *Cottonopolis*, but not entirely. I'm not sure if my written diction does have a British feel to it, but it was an interesting observation.

Neilson: Zach, Rachel brings up the centre here, as in the centre of English literature—that is, Britain. Do you feel threatened or ignored by centres of power in Canadian literature, and do you think there is a centrist aversion to staples of Maritime imagery?

Wells: If I have an objection to the centre of literary culture in Canada—that is, Toronto—it's that it can be frustratingly insular and parochial. But I think it's easy to overestimate the importance of that centre, especially when it comes to poetry, which is marginal wherever it is. So yes, I do think there's a pretty widespread aversion to—or at least a more-or-less willful unfamiliarity with—matters less urbane amongst a lot of poets. This is something I criticized in my review of Todd Swift and Evan Jones' anthology *Modern*

Canadian Poets (2010) for *Canadian Notes & Queries*. This book is a train wreck in many ways, but its most proudly-worn and explicit prejudice is in favour of the "cosmopolitan," which excludes a lot of poets—not only those from the Maritimes (like Charles Bruce, Milton Acorn, Alden Nowlan, and Kenneth Leslie) and those who migrated to the Maritimes and embraced the region as home (like Travis Lane and John Smith) but also those from other marginal places, too. I think it's telling that Swift and Jones refer to "the historical region of the three maritime provinces." I mean, how can you appreciate the literature of a place if you don't have the first clue what the place is? Their book isn't so much an antidote to the "garrison mentality" as a moving of the stockade posts. The funny thing, though, is that Swift and Jones clearly consider themselves to be outsiders, as they're both cosmopolitan expats who live in England. It's far too easy to get caught up in this neurotic mindset of inside vs. outside or us vs. them. Most of the time, when people speak resentfully of the establishment or the centre—however they might delineate or define that concept—it's nothing more than a projection of their own feelings of marginalization and neglect. No doubt some people even consider me an establishment figure, but the truth is that all poets are more or less ignored. I certainly don't feel that I've been disproportionately dismissed.

Neilson: Have you ever engaged with these ideas in your poetry?

Wells: I'll answer that question with an anecdote relayed to me by Canadian poet Jeanette Lynes. In a class she was teaching at St. Francis Xavier University some years ago, one of her students analyzed a poem of mine, "Fool's Errand," that was included in Kate Braid and Sandy Shreve's anthology *In Fine Form: The Canadian Book of Form Poetry* (2005), which must have been the textbook she was using. The poem features a young speaker who comes upon two dogs fucking in a snowstorm, and the student read it as an elaborate allegory, in which Ontario was the male dog and the Maritimes were, well, the bitch. So apparently I have.