

# **CONTOURS: POEMS**

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By

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## ABSTRACT

*Contours* is a linked poetry collection that explores what we can learn for the Anthropocene by considering European Upper Palaeolithic cultures that lived in harmony with the planet's energies and practiced heterarchical social organization. To write the collection, I used ecopoetry principles of relationality and organic form, and endeavoured to develop my poetic craft by suggesting natural energies and human entanglements with those energies. My Artist Statement focuses on the spatiotemporal crafts of form and rhythm. To appreciate the European Upper Palaeolithic cultures, I studied the biome and landscape in which those people lived, and I experienced and studied examples in cultural context of their robust production of artefacts and figurative expressions, primarily of animals.

The collection broadens its wayfinding and attunement from the cultures of the European Upper Palaeolithic to include contemporary experiences in North America and Europe in classrooms, corrals, and community gardens.

Poems in *Contours* weave etymology throughout, suggesting communication's capacity to connect us with our expressive and social roots and to help us navigate change.

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## DEDICATION

In loving memory of my parents,  
Jesse Robert William Hammond and Irene Cousins

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

PERMISSION TO USE.....	i
ABSTRACT.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
DEDICATION.....	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	vi
ARTIST’S STATEMENT.....	x
Works Cited.....	xxviii
LIST OF FIGURES.....	xxxii
CREATIVE MANUSCRIPT—CONTOURS: POEMS.....	1
Introduction.....	3
Maps.....	4
Connection.....	7
Arrival: Les Eyzies, the “Centre of Prehistory”.....	8
Brink.....	9
Southern Aspect.....	10
The Escarpment.....	11
Quarried for Cover, Chateau Tayac:	
The Original Prehistory Museum of Les Eyzies.....	12
The Modern Musée de Préhistoire.....	13
Among Artefacts and Fragments.....	14
What Is Known, What is Not Known, and What Can Be Said, or Only Proposed.....	15

On Handling a Deer Antler Fragment with Three Drilled Holes Scored with Deep, Precisely Spaced Spiral Incisions for Fabricating Cord.....	16
Tool or Toy.....	17
Migration.....	18
Flute 1.....	20
Flight.....	21
Stalagmite.....	22
Flute II.....	23
Witness Engraved in Stone: <i>Schema's</i> Root Means <i>Hold</i> .....	24
Prayers for Parting.....	25
Flute III.....	26
FE <sub>2</sub> O <sub>3</sub> .....	27
Immersion.....	29
Beneath Font-de-Gaume.....	30
Approaching the Mouth.....	31
Wayfinding.....	32
<i>Curation</i> , Cognate of <i>Curiosity</i> , of <i>Care</i> .....	33
Passages.....	34
Tableaux.....	35
Vault.....	36
Preparing.....	37
The Palette.....	38
Flowing Stone.....	39



Perspectives.....	40
Horns on All Distinguish the Species.....	41
Technicolour.....	42
Engravings.....	43
Coevolution.....	44
Attuned.....	45
On Encountering a Stencilled Hand.....	46
Flute IV.....	47
Magdalenian Winds.....	48
Emergence.....	49
Soundings.....	50
Gifts.....	52
Two Twenty-Year-Olds and I, Speechless Before <i>Guernica</i> .....	53
Catalonia Waits, Uneasy, For Its Sovereignty To Be Recognized.....	54
Prairie Encompassed by Mountains.....	56
Lessons Miss Davis Inspired.....	57
The Tool Shed.....	58
Source.....	60
To Pulse and Trill.....	61
Equine Therapy.....	62
Touchstone.....	63
Navigating Childhood.....	64
Outcrop.....	65

Spelunking.....	66
Grotto Canyon.....	67
River and Rafters.....	68
After the Thunderstorm.....	69
Kayaking.....	70
On the Beach Beside Tow Hill.....	71
Moresby Island Dover Loop Trail, Haans Creek Watershed.....	72
On Leaving, Lisa’s Haida Sisters Give Us Cedar Roses.....	73
On Treaty 6 Land, Admiring a Tipi Raised on The Delta Bessborough Hotel Lawn During the Premiers’ Summer Meeting 2019.....	74
Seabirds.....	75
With Clusters of White Grapes in Our Hands.....	76
Our Understanding of The Evolving Universe.....	78
The View Is.....	79
Turning.....	80
Notes.....	81
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	85

## ARTIST'S STATEMENT

For readers in the Anthropocene, *Contours* reflects on Upper Palaeolithic cultures that lived in harmony with the multifaceted energy of the planet. To write the collection, I studied ecopoetics and endeavoured to develop poetic craft suggesting natural energies and human entanglements with them. My Artist Statement focuses on the spatiotemporal effects of form and rhythm.

The prehistoric cultures<sup>1</sup> of the European Upper Palaeolithic are my subject model. Their figurative expressions<sup>2</sup> were produced over a period nearly five times longer than written history and identify them as people of “great sensitivity to the world, the changing seasons and the animals of the chase” (Mithen 227). Their relationship to nature can be said to be bioliterate.<sup>3</sup> They practiced heterarchical<sup>4</sup> social organization (Wengrow and Graeber 619). To appreciate the European Upper Palaeolithic cultures, I studied the biome and landscape in which these people lived, and I experienced and studied examples in cultural context of their robust production of artefacts and visual representations which were primarily of animals.

As my ecopoetic foundation, I draw from poets and critics of the field, including Scott Bryson who argues that “maintaining an ecocentric perspective that recognizes the

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<sup>1</sup> “I use the plural form ‘cultures’ to reflect the fact that the visual record of the Upper Palaeolithic is not uniform” (Nowell 604).

<sup>2</sup> Figurative expression is different from figurative language. Figurative expression refers to “representing a form or figure in art that retains clear ties to the real world (Museum of Modern Art #f). The definition of art is beyond the scope of this thesis.

<sup>3</sup> Being bioliterate means living in harmony with nature. (UNESCO “Being Bioliterate: Living in Harmony with Nature”).

<sup>4</sup> Heterarchy is “the relation of elements to one another when they are unranked or when they possess the potential for being ranked in a number of different ways depending on conditions. Understood from a heterarchical perspective, sources of social power are counterpoised and linked to values which are fluid and respond to changing situations” (Hornborg and Crumley 26).

interdependent nature of the world” is the first of ecopoetry’s primary characteristics. To suggest such interdependence, I use ecopoetic principles of relationality and organic form relating to the natural energies present in locations in the Upper Palaeolithic and the Anthropocene. Forces such as radiant, hydraulic, sonic, kinetic, mechanical, and Aeolian energies permeate the collection and underscore the value ecopoetry places on ecocentrism. Another practice of ecopoetry is the integration of poetic attention and sensibility with science. I balance scientific and poetic language, and logical and lyrical cognition. To develop my craft, I applied and experimented with critics’ and writers’ teachings related to energy. In addition to Bryson, in particular these include Ann Carson, Robert Hass, Lyn Hejinian, Jane Hirshfield, James Logenbach, Aaron Moe, Alice Oswald, and Jan Zwicky.

I incorporated two main methodologies into approaching my subject. I used feminist rhetorical practices of strategic contemplation and critical analysis,<sup>5</sup> and the practice of gendered archaeology, both through an intersectional lens. Feminist rhetorical practices in general helped me question the use of certain Greek poetics in *Contours* and explore appropriate craft alternatives. Strategic contemplation and critical analysis guided my identification of historic and gender bias in research I conducted and in my own point of view. To develop a practice of deep listening my subject required, I applied such questions and approaches as Jacqueline Royster and Gisa Kirsch recommend from the field of feminist rhetoric noted below:

When we study women of the past, especially those whose voices have rarely been heard or studied by rhetoricians, how do we render their work and lives

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<sup>5</sup> See Royster and Kirsch, and Kirsch and Royster.

meaningfully? ... How do they frame (rather than we frame) the questions by which they navigated their own lives? ... How do we make what was going on in their context relevant or illuminating for the contemporary context? ... [T]he imperative is to develop mechanisms by which listening deeply and respectfully becomes standard practice not only from the perspective of feminist rhetorical scholarship, but from rhetorical studies writ large. As an inquiry strategy, deep listening is geared toward facilitating a quest for a more richly rendered understanding— ... going repeatedly, not to our assumptions and expectations, but to the women— ... their work, and their worlds, seeking to ground our inquiries in the evidence of the women's lives (Kirsch and Royster 640).

To guide my selection and treatment of topics, I refined my approach based on the principles and practices of gendered archaeology. Since the 1980s, gendered archaeology has been addressing the dearth of evidence of women's lives, especially in prehistory to convey "all the rich variety of experiences, behaviors [sic], and symbolic systems," rather than make "grand statements about *woman's* past, even when juxtaposed against *man's* past" (Nelson 17). Topics in *Contours* aim to reflect activities of communal life, including education, music, parenting, and play, in their cultural and natural contexts. In interpreting the scientific record, I also aim to respect the practice of Upper Palaeolithic archaeology generally, especially where visual cultures are concerned. Errors are my own. A Notes section provides additional context, to reference the science, including artefacts conserved at France's Musée National de Préhistoire, Les Eyzies-de-Tayac.

The European Upper Palaeolithic cultures' figurative expressions I focused on are of two types: moveable (mobiliary) artefacts on bone, antler, and loose rock, and painting

and engraving in caves and rock shelters (parietal). I studied the mobiliary artefacts through research and an 8-day guest residency at Le Musée National de Préhistoire. I studied Vézère Valley parietal paintings through research and two field trips to Font-de-Gaume, an engraved and polychrome painted cave in southwest France. It's less well known than Lascaux but affords direct access to the images.

*Contours* as a title relates primarily to topography, as a planetary mapping device for showing terrain in distant and unfamiliar places. I borrowed the concept for the title from feminist Cindi Katz who notes that: "This notion of topography involves a particular precision and specificity that ... enables the inference of connection in uncharted places" (1229). I extend her use of topography's implicit spatial "scale-jumping and geography-crossing" capabilities (1229) to bridge time as well as space, in this case, from the Upper Palaeolithic to the Anthropocene, and from Europe to North America. The etymological root of *contour* is *change*.

Wayfinding and attunement are the collection's interrelated organizing principles. As wayfinding is the human condition, orientation, reorientation, and disorientation are our constant challenges. *Contours* reflects this reality in motifs of passage, migration, rivers, compasses, maps, guides, and landforms as means of securing physical and psychological bearings in an ecocentric landscape. Conversely, being lost is aligned with darkness, dead ends, instability, and the unfamiliar. Attunement entails receptivity and creating or being in a state of harmony. In *Contours*, in keeping with ecocentricity, attunement extends to and intertwines the biological and the social, supporting planetary life. Perception and interpretation in the form of reading nature's signs, others' gestures, and extending all of one's senses are Upper Palaeolithic strategies celebrated in their

cultures' figurative expressions and artefacts. The poems also track attunement through references to listening and breath in literal and metaphorical forms. *Contours* explores and applies these strategies to the subjects of the European Upper Palaeolithic and contemporary poems alike, to model ecocentric, bioliterate cognitive mapping for the Anthropocene.

The collection has three sections. “Connection” orients the reader to the speaker and the Vézère Valley Upper Palaeolithic environment and its artefacts. “Immersion” takes the reader face to face with Font-de-Gaume cave paintings. “Emergence” is named for its double entendre of urgency and its etymology, *bring to light*. It explores seemingly random contemporary experiences in North America and France in order to reframe and amplify what might apply from European Upper Palaeolithic cultures to the Anthropocene.

I integrated several continuity devices into *Contours* to support the collection’s unity, beyond the use of topic, theme, and motif already mentioned. Continuity devices bind a collection together, which is especially important in *Contours* with its structural dislocations in time and place. Examples in *Contours* include the use of etymology, juxtaposition, cultural bridges, verisimilitude, point of view, and various devices related to fostering receptive attention. An exploration of etymology considers language’s metaphorical role in human communication as we navigate social and natural environments. I experimented with juxtaposition, to conceive and develop individual poems and to arrange the collection. For example, the horse, a central image in “Connection,” is revisited in “Equine Therapy,” in “Emergence.” Developing similar

motifs throughout the collection engages the reader in unexpected echoes and callbacks and invites the reader to draw their own conclusions.

I also needed to include cultural bridging devices so that readers could understand fundamental cultural differences. Upper Palaeolithic figurative expressions suggest that people may have conceived of time and space differently then. The contemporary Western understanding of time tends to place value on product. In contrast, in the Upper Palaeolithic, the serpentine, a frequent graphic symbol, “stands for the periodicity of time, that is, for a process rather than for a thing or a set of things.” (Marshack “Comments” 206). A recurring device I use to alter cultural conditioning to an awareness of process enlists nouns as verbs, as in “Magdalenian Winds” where the reader encounters “past escarpments cairning the Vézère Valley.” Contemporary Western conceptions of space include outer space as alien, and nature romanticized as wild, or naturalized, oddly divorced from human interaction. Upper Palaeolithic people “interlaced ... landscape properties and sociocultural fabrics” (Hussain and Floss 1164). Several themes such as herd behavior, education, and play enact this interlacing of bioliteracy and heterarchical social values, including promoting “play quite deliberately” to counteract “tendencies toward dominance” (Gray 476). Philosopher Susanne Langer refers to art’s intuition of the duration of “lived time” as being “passage” (115). Upper Palaeolithic people’s approach to space seems similarly embodied as lived space.

Throughout *Contours*, I use verisimilitude, point of view, and engagement devices that Jane Hirshfield discusses. I use them to develop reader comfort with the unknown, and to counter gender, species, and ecological stereotypes and expectations, the iconography of the cave, and misinformation. The familiarity of verisimilitude helps



readers trust. I build on the familiar to deliver the unfamiliar. For instance, “On Handling a Deer Antler Fragment ...” presents familiar animal and bird species before introducing recent discoveries about Neanderthals’ strategic hunting practices that serve to offset popular negative stereotypes about Neanderthals’ intelligence. Using point of view, I provide the reader with a journeying speaker as well as various associates, guides, and cues to the physical and social environment. As in Upper Palaeolithic cultures, reading and responding to cues permit navigating and survival. To reconcile using a human point of view with ecocentrism, early in the collection, I introduce the landscape as witness. Using Jane Hirshfield’s engagement devices of hiddenness, uncertainty, and surprise (i) underscores humanness across time and space while fostering receptive attention and connection to the unfamiliar. Of hiddenness Hirshfield says, “The largest hiddenness surrounds birth and death” (10). In *Contours*, we witness the plight of prey, and encounter remains and prayers for the dead. Images of new life occur throughout in the form of children, animal young, and umbilical cords. Uncertainty arises in confronting complex issues like war. Surprise “erases the known for the new,” and “... magnetizes attention” (48). Through the surprise of juxtaposition, “Stalagmite” measures time in terms of space and process.

Because spatiotemporality is integral to *Contours*, my discussion here focuses on the spatial craft of form and the temporal craft of rhythm. *Contours* uses the structure of organic form, conventionally and experimentally, to channel the interplay of energies and stillness represented. First, I’ll address my general use of form in *Contours*, then my particular use of two basic stanza forms, couplets and tercets; then, I’ll discuss how *Contours* experiments with these principles, and finally, I’ll show how I use form

concretely to display some poems. Robert Hass writes of a poem's interplay of energies and stillness generally: "a well-made thing, a passionately made thing, a thing made from a full commitment to the art it instances, captures the way it expresses both energy and stillness" (7). "Tableaux" presents the inherent contrast and challenge, here. Its title sets the expectation for motionlessness, while the poem ends with "mass and musculature / sinewing stone." "River and Rafter" captures a contemporary young woman's encounter with the dynamic, yet potentially dangerous natural forces of water moving through rapids. The poem starts in stillness: "A pod of rafts / floats in an eddy's / slow swirl, waiting." It propels toward a new order channelling energy over rapids—through "jets of wind. / She plies her paddle, / sluices past veiled rock, //" and eventually arrives at "stillness / where sun shafts probe // a silt-suspended pool to sand." Lyn Hejinian's understanding of form encouraged me to consider the dynamic forces of the natural world in new ways. She explains, "Writing's forms are not merely shapes, but forces; formal questions are about dynamics—they ask how, where, and why the writing moves, what are the types, direction, number, and velocities of a work's motion" (42). To become a more bioliterate person and poet, my encounter with the Upper Palaeolithic has led me to ask about such dynamics and their interrelated marvels.

Hass's insights on basic stanza forms regarding couplets and tercets guided how I shaped the energy play in several poems. He notes, "Two lines introduce the ideas of form as the energy of relation" (27). On the tendency of odd- versus even-lined stanzas to convey instability versus stability, he continues: "There is a groundedness in the symmetry of twos, off which threes seem to play" (13). These concepts apply conventionally in "Flowing Stone," where I use couplets for each of three different

animals presented, to reflect the prehistoric painter's organic selection of surfaces that relate to the subjects painted. I use couplets again in "On Handling a Deer Antler Fragment ..." to dramatize the tension between predator and prey and successive species devouring a carcass. I use tercets, on the other hand, both to contain and release energy, and to capture a process, stanza to stanza, and throughout a whole poem. "Turning," the collection's final poem, is an example. Its energy reflects the progression of a day and the change of seasons. In this poem, I also draw on Hass's insight about the relationship between spatial and temporal forms where he notes "the circle is poetry's way of making temporal forms spatial" (367). The energy of "Turning" begins: "Papery elm samaras suspend, / silent above me." The movement of the poem witnesses the vibrant growth of "sunflowers / towering on hairy stalks" and a ladybug disappearing behind a bract. Arriving at stillness again, it ends with a "tendrill of breeze."

I experimented with energy and stanza principles as well, to suit the collection's needs. In "Tool or Toy," two stanzas of eleven lines reflect both the poem's and the title's balanced uncertainty, conveyed through the speaker's detailed investigation. The spectrum of the collection's affect also correlates to form through stanza structure. It ranges from the horror of "Two Twenty-Year-Olds and I, Speechless Before *Guernica*" to the awe of "Flight." "Two Twenty-Year-Olds and I ..." begins and ends without any possible resolution of the traumatic violence of war, as signalled by the imbalance of tercets beginning and ending the poem. By contrast, in "Flight," which reflects an engraving's quasi-triptych arrangement paralleled in three stanzas, reindeer antlers are rendered into what look like wings or fingers on a hollow eagle bone. The stability of the

final quatrain echoes the interrelationship of human and natural energies and the engraver's ecocentric homage to nature's constant transformation of matter.

I display specific poems concretely on the page, deliberately, for particular effect. In *Contours*, the default placement is left justified. However, in multiple cases, placement on the page uses concrete form in support of organic stanza structure and meaning. I centre poems on the page intentionally and/or shape them to focus on the processes of energy at play, as in the case of "The View Is," or on holding vital stasis, as in the case of "Source," or on the relation presented, as in "Attuned." In "Attuned," the pair of reindeer depicted on the diagonal on the page alludes to the visual composition on the wall in Font-de-Gaume. The composition of the painting is central to the image's impact on a viewer. The lines in "Attuned" balance individual and relational energies. Paired comparisons operate organizationally on two scales, focusing on the animals individually in the beginning and ending, and as a couple in the middle. Syntax supports the poem's spatial organization. Long sentences surround the pair of short sentences constructed in parallel. Rhythmic organization of alliteration and assonance works in conjunction with the syntax and enjambment to carry the impulse forward to "his / nostrils gently / flaring." These are some of the ways I enlist poetic form to embody lived spaces.

The temporal craft of rhythm in *Contours* endeavours to present an experience of lived time. To imbue duration and passage with meaning, craft in *Contours* explores kinaesthetic and affective rhythmicity, and related structural opportunities for delivering affect and meaning rhythm presents. I experiment with such opportunities that arise through sequence, the interplay of stasis and movement, moving focus (a technique of Upper Palaeolithic figurative expressions defined below), and resonance. As a vehicle for

motion and emotion, Hass's conception of rhythm was one of the techniques that helped me find and maintain each poem's impulse. He describes it as "the way the poem embodies the energy of the gesture" (3). In "The Tool Shed," for example, momentum established through stanzas enacts a tactile desire, in conjunction with syntax: "the handle's shiny curve, so lathed for contact with a palm, // I wanted to return." The first line of "Spelunking" relies on rhythm's alliteration and assonance to carry trepidation: "Hoodoos haunt the arid hollow, the hill with black maw /."

Experimenting with rhythm and structure introduced me to forces often more subtle than affect, but carrying enormous responsibility for the ultimate delivery of affect and meaning. I learned that attention to the sequence of information presented to a reader's perception is critical for delivering a clear image, and more. An example of this is the second stanza of "Beneath Font-de-Gaume:"

a kiosk line forms behind me

as light lifts.

In front of me, a man in a beret,

collar turned up against the rain.

Tickets few for the fragile stone.

Although this was one of the first poems I wrote, this stanza presented problems until the last revision. I realized I had omitted mentioning the time of day in the stanza's sequence of events and details. Including the second line above focuses other images in the stanza, creates character by suggesting the determination of the people in the line, and the worth associated with what lies ahead of them. Beyond the stanza, "as light lifts" underscores

the human experience of morning as shared from the Upper Palaeolithic to the Anthropocene.

European Upper Palaeolithic people needed to observe sequence to survive, something that is evident in their figurative expressions. Steven Mithen provides numerous examples of cave paintings and engravings that include specific plants in bud beside migratory birds that would seasonally precede the return of salmon, then reindeer. As reindeer was a dietary mainstay during much of the Upper Palaeolithic, such images seem to say, “watch for these species, to anticipate reindeer.” He suggests that the purpose of the images may be related to the cognitive development of search behaviours and selective attention, “critical recognition skills for artists and viewers alike” (*Thoughtful Foragers* 238). Such skills included awareness of not only visual and audible signs, but skills that allowed the observers selectively to read the condition of an animal or herd. “We might characterize this as learning how to learn about the environment and its resources” (*Thoughtful Foragers* 246). Mithen points out the imagery indicates the observers “had some form of metacognitive knowledge, i.e. knowledge about their own methods of perception and memory” (*Looking and Learning* 323). He provides another example of the recognition of hoof prints for tracking (*Thoughtful Foragers* 228). The engraver included a two-dimensional view of the animal, on the hoof. Where the hoof meets the ground, the engraver also included a cutaway view of the hoof print, a dissection as if to say, “these tracks lead to this animal.” In “Coevolution,” I combined seeing this illustration in juxtaposition with seeing another where a prehistoric painter paid such careful attention to the detail of ungulates’ legs that it inspired me to look up the precise anatomy of bovines and their evolution. Although spatial images, these

examples pertain to processes in time—evolution, movement of prey and predator, and tracking as a sequence. Although a short poem, “Coevolution” models the development of metacognition, search behaviours, and selective attention through poetic attention and its use of rhythm and embedded rhyme in the form of an aural puzzle to suggest the centrality of bioliteracy to human co-survival.

An example of the interplay between stasis and movement occurs in “Engravings” at the visual and energetic pivot point of the poem: “turn the bison’s head / to face me // eye to eye. / I freeze //as once I froze.” The rhythmic devices of alliteration and assonance support this pivot point. *Contours* explores the relationship between the opposing forces of static tensions and between static and dynamic tensions as well. Etymologically, tension is a time-based concept. Examples of static tensions such as past/present, dead/alive, absence/presence, and silence/sound offer elements of familiarity throughout. Dynamic tensions require remaining engaged, paying attention to shifting, challenging conditions. Some relationships may appear static, but they may also be or become dynamic. For example, the title of “To Pulse and Trill” refers to the name for the action of a whistle’s ball, static in the chamber, until breath makes it oscillate. The poem explores memory, using rhythm’s devices in conjunction with syntax. It considers the emotional resonance that can be invested in objects and sounds to reconnect the living with a lost loved one, and the neurological function of oscillation which allows us to revisit and hold such memories without trauma.

I experimented with replicating flow and moving focus through the use of rhythm, as well. “Seabirds” is an example of rhythm capturing dynamic intersections of hydraulic, Aeolian, and kinaesthetic energies. Moving focus is a phenomenon occurring in cave

painting whereby the painted cave images appear in a stream, as the viewer moves through a passage or around a rotunda. The shapes of the space are partly responsible for the effect. But elements of the paintings, like their lack of frame or the eight legs mentioned in “Engravings” where one might expect to see four, indicate that they were intended to be seen more or less cinematically. The experience of viewing these parietal images is not static, as are experiences of two-dimensional images in most art galleries. The rhythm in “Technicolour,” for example, builds in three stanzas. Syntax and sound support the rhythm’s delivery of a kinaesthetic image in each of the first three stanzas’ final lines. The final line in the third verse, “as a painter’s lamp would waft light,” mimics the interplay of drafts and light, preparing for the cinematic climax of the verbal image: “Bays, sorrels, chestnuts, greys / gallop the gallery.”

Moving focus has cultural implications related to Upper Palaeolithic social organization. Hussain and Floss make the case that movement was and is so central to the hunter gatherer way of life that rivers, and migration by way of rivers, defined the principal entanglement framing their relationship with the natural world (1174). As mentioned previously, European Upper Palaeolithic painters and engravers used meanders to suggest metaphorical, ontological meaning. Their use of moving focus suggests a possible metacognitive appreciation as well, of the parallel between, for instance, the flow of streams in nature and the flow of human perception and thought. R.E. Jones articulated such an appreciation of thought related to modern film theory, noting that “[m]otion pictures are our thoughts made visible and audible. They flow in a swift succession of images, precisely as our thoughts do, and their speed ... approximates very closely the speed of our thinking. They have the rhythm of the thought-stream and the same uncanny ability to move forward or backward in space or time. ... They project pure thought, pure dream, pure inner life” (17-18). Jones captures vis à vis film the experience of what in modern literature is referred to as



stream of consciousness. One difference I notice between the experience of film and stream of consciousness on the one hand generally, and the effect of moving focus in Upper Palaeolithic figurative expressions on the other, is that moving focus contributes to an immediacy of the ecocentric experience. In addition to its aesthetic function, moving focus may have social ramifications. Unlike static focus, which privileges a single vantage, moving focus validates an array of impressions from multiple vantages. Moving focus thus contributes to diversity. Inviting multiple perspectives is by definition heterarchical. Aesthetically and socially, moving focus contributes to creating a compelling experience for a viewer. From when I first experienced Font-de-Gaume and throughout my mentorship, I referred to the attraction I experienced as correspondence.

Outside the cave, I endeavoured to capture the immediacy of moving focus also, as well as what I think may be its central feature—its capacity for ecocentric witness. I adapted moving focus through the poetic speaker’s point of view, reporting natural sequences as in “On Handling a Deer Antler Fragment . . .,” or motion through landscape as in “Soundings.” The speaker’s channels I experimented with in order to correspond with a specific subject are most often visual, aural, tactile, and proprioceptive.<sup>6</sup> A channel can also be human memory as in “Lessons Miss Davis Inspired,” or the blur of human trauma where personal and political collide as in “Two Twenty-Year-Olds and I . . . .” While the speaker’s voice delivers the moving focus in the poems, at times that voice becomes a witness, for example, as a member of a tour group, one viewer among the stream of humanity to whom Font-de-Gaume is accessible. But natural features and nature itself are also invoked as witness. In “Arrival: Les Eyzies, the Centre of

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<sup>6</sup> “Proprioception is the sense of body position that is perceived both at the conscious and unconscious levels” (Johnson et al. 159).

Prehistory,” a “Limestone cliff looms above the village.” In “Soundings,” “Lombardy poplars / sentinel the way the river wends.” I use circular structure and rhythms to evoke seasonal change in the final poem, suggesting ecocentricity and nature as the ultimate witness.

Rhythm inherently relates to resonance. Jan Zwicky writes of the experience in similar terms. “[It] is an attempt to sing along with reality, to respond in kind, to co-respond; and thus it, too, traces and awakens sympathetic vibrations (“Poetry and Meaninglessness: Part III” 49). In her description of resonant structures, Zwicky suggests that the resonant experience of meaning “is evolutionarily adaptive.” She goes on to say “Language is the mental avatar of the grasping hand” (*The Experience of Meaning* 50). Rhythm plays a role by remaining connected to that grasping hand as a kinaesthetic force for the cognition and re-cognition *Gestalt*<sup>7</sup> affords. According to Zwicky, “The present planetary crisis is in large measure a result of our neglect of meaning” (*The Experience of Meaning* 49). She continues: “A culture that denies or derogates *Gestalt* comprehension will thus be missing out on an important way in which the world is. . . . People in such a culture will be encouraged to regard aspects of ecologies as facts; but they won’t be encouraged to pick up on how or that those facts *matter*” (*The Experience of Meaning* 50). “Lessons Miss Davis Inspired” addresses the ecological imperatives of *Gestalt* comprehension in “I hadn’t grasped *contour*,” and asks what the exchange of energy “might mean to us.” In “Engravings,” these lines allude to *Gestalt* experience: “poll, chest, dorsal ridge, / *et voilà*, a bison in three lines.” “FE<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>” enacts *Gestalt* in “Urge // grasps ochre’s unexpected weight.” “Flute II” invites the reader to make the leap from

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<sup>7</sup> “Gestalt thinking fundamentally involves the spontaneous perception of structure: not analytic order...but what might be called resonant internal relations.” (Zwicky *The Experience of Meaning* 19).

touch to creative imagination, “to lip the embouchure.” The kinaesthetic, aesthetic, and abstract are all channels to resonant energies.

Finally, *Contours* presents alternate modes of cognitive processing beyond contemporary culture’s androcentric emphasis on sequence and logic. Poems such as “Spelunking” use enjambment and odd-numbered stanzas, for example, to invite a proprioceptive response to unfamiliar environments. Such exposure to alternate cognitive processing enhances interdependence, empathy, and imagination. The collection’s final poem, “Turning,” uses poetic attention to generate heightened awareness and reflect the multiple modes of cognitive processing at play: synaesthesia, proprioception, and entrainment<sup>8</sup> to ambient energies of other life forms. Listening, hearing, and aural images form the collection’s soundscape, designed to honour poetry’s root as an aural art, and to rebalance our culture’s perceptual dependence on ocularcentrism. The speaker recalls “the deep reliability of bells,” the music of multiple flutes, the songs of nightingale and thrush. The speaker remembers the dissonance of a sharp blade’s possibilities. She measures her fear against “the dampered clang of footsteps,” and “its single light bulb third-eyeing / squealing sinews of the scorched world.” As the term “soundscape” implies, aurality in *Contours* functions spatially “to sound” in the sense that by dropping a pebble in prehistory’s well, we may begin to understand how deep our humanity is.

I endeavoured to write poetry that corresponds in some measure with the figurative expressions produced by bioliterate, heterarchical Upper Palaeolithic cultures. It’s my wish that *Contours* foster an interest in the context of its complex and nuanced legacy beyond what could be represented here. To that end, additional information is

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<sup>8</sup> “In biological uses, ... entrainment can refer to all linkages between the regular life patterns of organisms and regularities of their environments” (Tomlinson 78).

provided in Notes. I chose to rely on the spatiotemporal crafts of form and rhythm especially, and other poetic craft elements including syntax and image, to reflect the spatiotemporality of the human condition and the planet. *Contours* attempts to raise questions about the dominant social organization of the Anthropocene, and generate interest in the Upper Palaeolithic, a period which “was the effective environment within which some portion of human biological evolution occurred, shaping our cognition and physiology” (Ames 364). *Contours* also suggests that attunement and resonance are not only part of our human heritage, but capacities and experiences we can cultivate in the Anthropocene through collective and personal choices such as social organization, education, and attention. Communication and poetry can play key roles in these processes, avoiding historic biases and cultivating receptive attention to the ecocentric energies of place and planet. I hope that through the poems’ reflections, I have achieved a collection that engages and provokes readers to contribute to more constructive change and co-flourishing in the Anthropocene.

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September 2020

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## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Map 1. The contours of western Europe showing glacial and coastline variation during three time periods: the Last Glacial Maximum of the Upper Palaeolithic around 20,000 years Before Present (BP); around 10,000 years BP; and currently; with contemporary cities for reference, and the areas of detail in Maps 2 and 3. Pyrenees glaciers, at 10,000 years BP and currently, are too small to be visible at a 1:10m scale. Sept. 17, 2020.

Figure 2: Map 2. Inset from Map 1, Map 2 additionally shows locations of European Upper Palaeolithic caves, rock shelters, and artefacts which have been found in contemporary France and Germany and are mentioned in *Contours*.

Figure 3: Map 3. Inset from map 1, Map 3 shows locations of Upper Palaeolithic caves, rock shelters, and artefacts found in the Vézère Valley and mentioned in *Contours*. The French word for rock shelter is *abri*. Sept 17, 2020.



CREATIVE MANUSCRIPT

**CONTOURS: POEMS**

By

Susie Hammond

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