

STEPPING OFF THE PLATFORM

NOTES ON MICHAEL deBEYER'S POETRY

JASON CHRISTIE

Michael deBeyer writes achingly lyric scenes wrought in an observant and critical language intended to reveal and then fuzz the boundary that keeps things familiar; line-breaks jar grammar and stack syntax to an eventual bust. His poems enact the uncanny call and response between the language we use to describe real things and a Real that we can never directly access and instead can only annex with language. Rather than relying on familiarity to establish a bond of trust between author and reader with the text as a silent partner, deBeyer reveals his doubts about how language operates in a world that, despite being told is solid, stable and dependable, feels increasingly fragmented, intangible and varying.

In *Rural Night Catalogue* (2002) and *Change in a Razor-backed Season* (2005), both from Gaspereau Press, deBeyer uses echolalia as a means to alter his own poems, a device that amounts to him remembering and writing his poems again. The poems deBeyer processes using echolalia are shorter, make more disjunctive leaps, and reveal a distance from their source similar to the distance from which readers relate to a text. Echolalia serves as a marker for the relationship between talking about things and the things themselves; it is the doubling back of an authentic voice that results in an equally real echo that troubles the existence of "realism." deBeyer's poetry "rings true" and then keeps ringing until we are lost in cascading soundwaves, until truth is lost somewhere amongst the coordinates and we experience nostalgia for a source we no longer recognize. His poems are at once familiar and strange, distant and evocative of the impossibility of reproducing a world in writing.

In his poem "Realizing the Depth Paradigm," from *Rural Night Catalogue*, deBeyer suggests that language resembles an ambivalence hidden inside a supposed surety. In this poem, deBeyer creates a moment with the structures built to investigate darkness and depth, i.e. the unknown. In the poem deBeyer offers an architect and miners, a crane and a large dark opening. It isn't too much of a stretch to envisage the architect of this poem as either reader or writer and the architecture as language made to "effect" some meaning. Architecture involves exploring space, amassing structures over space, constructing, sometimes elaborate, sometimes simple structures that fill previously "empty" space. The architect uses language structures, like a poem, to explain, imagine, or describe something that previously did not exist, to persuade a reader into believing in the presented reality. And like the architect who falls from the crane into the pit below, when you fall from these structures into the unknown "you'll be needing/ yourself, the architect, to catch you" by providing further structures of stability through the architecture of language; a net, some escape, a poem, a finely wrought reading to convey the experience.

The relationship of a writer and a reader where an image of reality is presented has never settled well with me. An air of realism seems condescending when it is not acknowledged as fake or constructed. Many people can point to their media studies degree and savvy deciphering of truly difficult texts as a shield against manipulation, but what if that's all part of the con? Just because there isn't a single driving force organizing all of the aspects that keep people frozen in the face of Capitalist reality, doesn't mean they ain't out to get you. The architect stepping off the crane into the space of the text mirrors the only acceptable way to negotiate language. Bolster yourself against a consumerist attitude towards reading and understanding, avoid neatly packaged products including masterful readings wherever possible, and realize that at the end of the day, when the whistle blows, the only things left are the apparatuses helping us to suspend our disbelief, a crane and a weak scaffold.