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Decompositions

Ken Belford

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If language is an index of belonging, then *Decompositions* is the writing of an exile, a tribe of one.

For much of his life, Ken Belford has lived in the north, in the pristine region of the headwaters of the Nass River. His careful (de)compositions disclose the land as a complex living organism, articulate the names of it, see the whole of it. Yet the landscape of these poems is not a matter of latitude and longitude, but that unroaded place which begins at the edge of the rancher's ?eld, wherever that boundary is, and looks back at "civilization" with a vision and a voice that is unique and new. These poems catch their readers up in a surprising social engagement that is at once larger and other than the consumer discourse of trade and ownership.

The construction of the lyric in contemporary poetry is most often grounded in a gaze from shelter, out onto a common ?eld that is captured, and thus appropriated—an "aboutism" or constructed estrangement of the other that is challenged by these decompositions of that sheltered and privileged "I." For Belford, poetry is a social process that explores linguistic and political particulars from a gaze that is opposite to the shelters of convention, the academy, the city, or the south. It is a writing that rules out the anticipation and doubt of traditional narrative. These are not safe poems, they resist more than they assure.

While Belford's self-taught language of subsistence isn't aligned with the well-worn ancestral narratives of our forefathers, its sub-text remains rooted in questions of both origin and evolution, foregrounding a consciousness informed by the latest recognitions of science and technology. Uncolonized spaces are represented here not as a return to a golden age, but as bright openings to our undisclosed future

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