

ALAN ACKERMAN

CAPE BRETON GARTER SNAKE

1

This skin housed
once, I guess, a longer tale,
before the indifferent garden,
forgetful always of chronology,
though present in remainders,
like grass cuttings, onion peel,
wood pile, compost heap,
declared all things equal,
or no more fallen
than a twig of balsam fir.
The moulted cuticle—A trace of being
Curved?—Perhaps
it signifies a crisis
of terrific gravity, the leaving
of one universe for another
no less infinite.

2

Breakers meet and disconnect.
I read that in a poem once
and liked it and stole it,
like a leather jacket
I slipped my arms into
one night after a steak
and dry Bordeaux,
and left that house
invested with a new identity.
The ocean is the same,
on the move,
fluid and dishonest, each wave
taking its essential properties
from one that came before, then
rolling on,
without
acknowledgement.

3

Max struggled in the womb
 To leave his first claustrophobic world—
 a pain, fighting to be born, twisting
 in his cord, bottom to the birth canal,
 insistent, too early, even then, while
 a lecture hall waited for me to appear
 like Hamlet's ghost ...

But I'll slide over sixteen years,
 like Shakespeare's Time, to haunt another stage,
 a plateau stretched like a striped, brown snake
 from Newfoundland to Georgia,
 Bras d'Or terrane.

With the mouth that bit
 his mother's breast,
 the kid recites Shakespeare
 on red cliffs that beetle
 to the base John Cabot touched—
 new world or old—an angry fist
 against an incontinent white sea.
 Caboto, that stateless Venetian, saw it
 beckon, the charging rock, wet with spray,
 to the mother coast it left
 three hundred million years before
 humanity began to mold its shape.

4

Imagine Einstein at Meat Cove,
 the observed of all observers, one
 of modernity's countless émigrés,
 each a cosmos imperfect but complete.

Shed me like a skin, sweet boy,
 and take your place.
There's the respect that makes calamity
Of so long life.
To be king of infinite space—my waxing son
 inside his tender, bounded globe—
 to reach the membrane of the bubble
 and gaze in wonder on the threshold. One expands,
 but this rock will not sustain the race.