

SUSAN MCCASLIN

Lao Tzu Meets the Progress Trap

"A tree as great as a human's embrace springs from a small shoot."

—Lao Tzu

1

Capitalism, not a person of vital flow or sentience
like these breathing trees

Who are you, Lao Tzu?

Sage fresh-born from the Tao flow

2

Our neighbor bought an acreage
along the Fraser filled with Western Red Cedars

Hemlocks, Douglas Firs
rooted like you, and nameless

(though we give them names)
purifiers of the shared air

yet for our neighbor
mere obstacles in the way

3

He summons hackers, hewers
excavators, trucks, diggers

screaming chainsaws
Elders crack, thud

ground reverberates
Banshee wind moans among falling limbs

Months of beeping
silences birdsong

His black truck scuttles up and down the drive
full of purpose and design

Are there city covenants?
Some, but seldom enforced

Council turns away

4

When a woman down the street
phones the city to challenge his doings

he pulls out his mantra:

"A man can do what he wants on his own
private land"

5

One day, landowner out,
Lao Tzu climbs his drive to survey the wreckage

stoops to touch ravaged limbs

Is old Lao Tzu trespassing?

"Great harm," he sighs

The owner drives by

6

Lao Tzu is invisible to the owner
deaf to the ancient voice

A woman weeps over the damage
Lao Tzu whispers in her ear:

Despoilers despoil themselves

Nothing abides outside the Tao

*The Tao flows around and through
breaking down the most adamant stone*

7

Yes, the Tao goes on, the woman interjects
but what of us stumbling

empathetic ones, who wittingly or not
find ourselves caught in the progress trap

despite our gentle mammalian brains
manipulated by faceless corporate kings

Greed-ravaged Gala
the only home we know

In time, though time is but a breath
surely there must be some effective resistance

not patterned on the bloodied fields of war

8

Dear Lao Tzu, how does your wisdom flow
into the arms of a more active yielding?

How does surrender to the Tao
empower the oppressed?

How do we stand
with our brothers and sisters the trees?

Will you dear Lao Tzu, awake in us
the Mysterious Female

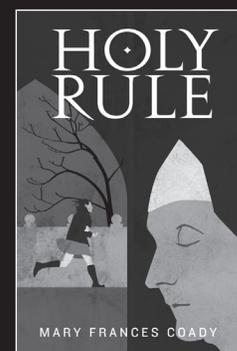
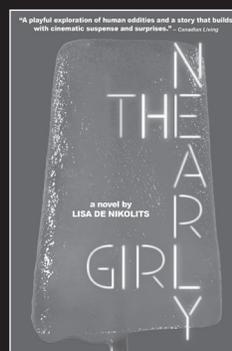
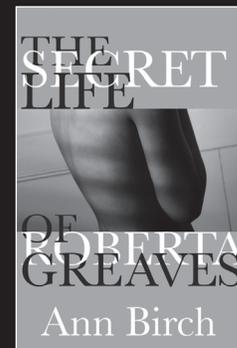
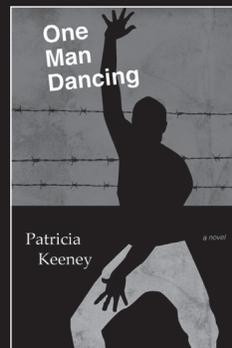
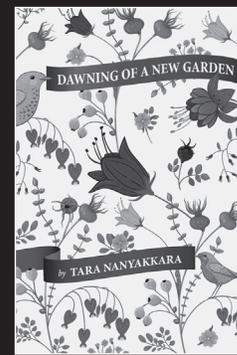
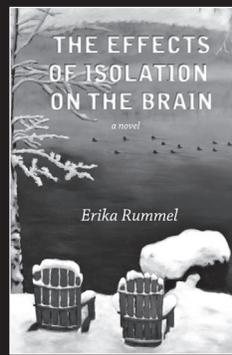
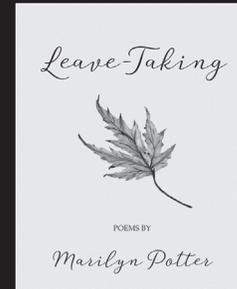
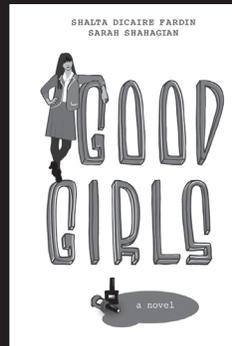
*who plays in all things
and is at the base of all things*

the door from which heaven and earth spring
that which is flowing in us all the time?

Susan McCaslin is the author of thirteen volumes of poetry, including The Disarmed Heart (The St. Thomas Poetry Series, Toronto, 2014), and Demeter Goes Skydiving (University of Alberta Press, 2012), which was short-listed for the BC Book Prize (Dorothy Livesay Award) and the first-place winner of the Alberta Book Publishing Award (Robert Kroetsch Poetry Book Award). Her next volume of poetry is Painter, Poet, Mountain (Quattro Books, Sept. 2016). In the Fall of 2017, Inanna Publications will be publishing her Into the Open: Poems New and Selected. Susan lives in Fort Langley, British Columbia.

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