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PATRICK LANE AND LORNA CROZIER  
ON GARDENS AND CATS:  
MEMOIRS OF LOSS AND SUSTENANCE

When Patrick Lane died in 2019, he and Lorna Crozier, both prominent Canadian poets, had lived together for over forty years, almost twenty as a married couple. While their poetic imaginations differ, Lane's memoir *There Is a Season: A Memoir in a Garden* (2004; published in the US as *What the Stones Remember: A Life Rediscovered*), and Crozier's *Through the Garden: A Love Story (with Cats)* (2020) share a focus on gardens and animals (in particular cats)—a life-long preoccupation of both, as demonstrated by their poetry and their lives. Gardens and animals function as both real-life, tangible entities, whose existence is intertwined with lives of humans, providing sustenance and companionship, and as sources of metaphor and symbolism through which the poet-memoirists approach convoluted changes in their lives, and in particular the minutiae of decline, death and grief. This article is an attempt at putting the two memoirs side by side to demonstrate the authors' specific approaches to ending, loss, death and grief; and to demonstrate how the two texts, based partly on lives lived together, inform one another.

Patrick Lane's *There Is a Season* (2004) is in many ways an addiction and recovery memoir, recording his first year of sobriety. It was written when, at the beginning of this century, he emerged from forty-five years of alcoholism and drug addiction, and was finally able to turn a sober eye on his past and his present. His retrospective narrative focuses on his family, in particu-

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lar his parents and siblings, to a lesser extent his wives and children; on his childhood, youth, adulthood; and, importantly, the deaths and losses he experienced and was still dealing with at the time of his recovery. This allies the text with grief memoirs, in particular the distinctive group of those identified by Amy-Katerini Prodromou (2015), which she calls “memoirs of textured recovery” (18–21). Grief and mourning seem to be his constant companions, with no completion of the process in sight, no clear trajectory of healing or recovery, and though they do not fully dominate his life or his memoir, they definitely form part of his rethinking of the self. The past is reflected upon and confronted as he moves through and works in his garden in Saanichton on Vancouver Island, commenting on plant and animal life, and the convoluted patterns of growth and decay, life and death. This is his present, which he lives with Lorna Crozier, his third wife. His, and to a limited extent, also Crozier’s memoir, participate in a broader trend of life writing focusing on relationality that exceeds the human world, in which “the writer’s connection to the natural world is equally important” (Allister 2001, 3) as his attachment to family and other humans. Both texts definitely diverge from the grief memoirs described by Mark Allister in his *Refiguring the Map of Sorrow. Nature Writing and Autobiography*—their focus on the external elements of the natural world, including animals, is not a way out of depression, and it does not result in reframing and then fully processing grief (1). At the same time, in broader terms, Lane’s memoir in particular fits the trend described by Allister as follows: “metaphorically, the author’s life is written on the land and all its inhabitants, human, animal, plant, and rock, and by turning terrain into text, geography into consciousness, these writers create a new and significant kind of life-writing. Ecology intertwines with culture” (3).

Lorna Crozier’s *Through the Garden* (2020) was published after Lane died in 2019, but she started writing it when he was still alive, recording the final two years of his life, from February 2017 to February 2019, and in the “Postscript: [dated] March 8, 2019” describing the day after his death. Her retrospective focus falls on the story of their lives together as she confronts Lane’s rapidly failing health, the imminent ending of his life and their relationship. It is again, in a sense, a grief memoir, written, however, in expectation and fear of death and grief, rather than describing the process of grieving itself, and thus reworking the genre. The grief that is present and addressed in the text is related to the losses of companion animals, in particular Basho the cat—hence the text is also allied with the pet memoir (cf. Baratay 2022; Caesar 2009; Szalewska 2021). Her text dynamically responds to

Lane's memoir, mirroring its interweaving of the retrospective and present-time narratives, its focus on the interrelations not only between humans, but also between human and non-human; replicating its garden setting, the subtle yet constant presence of cats, at times quoting it and reflecting on it, but at the same time following its own agenda.

The Canadian title of Lane's memoir—*There is a Season: A Memoir in a Garden*—with its clear allusion to Ecclesiastes 3 (“To every thing *there is* a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven” [*New King James Version*, Eccles. 3:1; emphasis in the original]), sets the essential spiritual (though by no means religious) framework of the whole text. Apart from reworking the biblical concept of the garden as the pure paradisaic beginning and a natural utopia, Lane seems to be reflecting on the new, sober season of his life—described as a resurrection, being born again—in the light of further verses from Ecclesiastes 3, never quoted in the memoir, but informing it nevertheless, which read:

Concerning the condition of the sons of men, God tests them, that they may see that they themselves are *like* animals. For what happens to the sons of men also happens to animals; one thing befalls them: as one dies, so dies the other. Surely, they all have one breath; man has no advantage over animals, for all *is* vanity.... So ... nothing is better than that a man should rejoice in his own works, for that *is* his heritage. (Eccles. 3:18–22; emphasis in the original)

Lane starts his memoir by claiming the essential interrelationship between himself as a human being, the world of nature and animals. Even as the reader enters the texts, at the very beginning of chapter one, she stumbles at the motto which sets the tone for the memoir: “*If what we know is what resembles us, / what we know is a garden*” (chap. 1; emphasis in the original). The garden as such is, of course, in the words of Shelley Saguaro, “a familiar, diachronic, and multi-determined trope” (X) in literature: as Lane goes on, he both uses and comments on the meanings of gardens posed by writers and philosophers, giving an intertextual dimension to the text, but he also develops his own, complex vision of a garden.

While the immediate setting of the present of the narrative will be Lane and Crozier's award-winning garden on Vancouver Island, the opening paragraphs broaden the concept of the garden to embrace not just man-made, but also natural “gardens” (meadows, forests, mountains) as paradisaic locations that form us, even on the bodily, literal level. Transported into the past, the autobiographical narrator recalls the feeling of oneness with place he felt as

a ten-year-old boy wandering mountains and meadows of British Columbia. He comments:

My bones remember the water and the stones. I grew my body from that mountain earth, and my cells remember the cactus and pines, the lilies and grasses.... The garden begins with my body. I am this place, though I feel it at the most attenuated level imaginable. Once dead, I am come alive again. Forty-five years of addiction and I am a strangeling in this simple world. (chap. 1)

The interrelation between the physical and the spiritual becomes essential for his elaboration of the self, and of the multiple meanings of gardens. The garden and the human body are an extension of one another, the garden is sustained by the hard gardening work of the body, just as the body might be sustained physically by what grows in the garden, but also, essentially, by its beauty and its spiritual dimension as “premises of transcendence” (chap. 1). Gardening itself is described as a spiritual activity, an occasion for “the daily meditations of earth, air, stone, and water” (chap. 1). The garden, as a specific place and as nature in general, is then both an object of “art” to be contemplated, and, as David E. Cooper (2011) suggests using Arnold Berleant’s term, an “occasion” for “active, engaged experience” (36).

As Lane comes back to life—both physically and emotionally—and heals through the agency of the garden, rejoicing in the work he puts into it, he rediscovers the lost connections to the world, and regains child-like perception: “everything is startlingly new and sharp: ... I am seeing this old garden now with new eyes. This search through my garden is for the naming of things, but more than that it is renewal and endurance, patience, knowing, and acceptance” (chap. 6). Continuing with the biblical allusions, he sees himself then as Adam, naming animals (Genesis 2:18–20), creating—or, in this case recalling and preserving—the world in and through language. Hence, at the end of each chapter, the reader finds two lists: one of the names of plants, and another of animals, birds and insects in English and in Latin, enumerating those that have appeared in the chapter. The naming allows Lane’s autobiographical narrator to “find [himself] among the things of this world” (chap. 6), but it also functions as a lament over another deeply felt loss: “the loss of names” and the history written in their etymology. “It’s as if the elimination of species all over the world is coincidental with a loss of vocabulary. It is a kind of voluntary silencing, a desire not to remember or to know” (chap. 6), the narrator declares. It seems that what he laments is also the loss of the purely linguistic world that he created for himself as a

young man, the early belief that mastery of language gives him control over himself and his surroundings; that language is a world in itself, the only one in which death exists. Nevertheless, at the end of the memoir, he declares that his garden, like himself, is also language: "Every stone in my garden is a story, every tree a poem.... What I know is that I live in this place where words are made. What we are is a garden. I believe that" (chap. 12).

Having earlier established gardens as spaces of vision and creativity at the intersection of the real and the imagined, he thus further links gardening to his craft as a poet, in love with the word, a link that he makes explicit by declaring: "Done well, a garden is a poem, and the old lesson of gardening is the same in poetry: what is not there is just as important as what is" (chap. 7). At the same time, he refuses to see himself as the one who possesses what he creates, though he perceives, and resists, a tendency he has to bend the garden to his will. "Gardens belong to no one," Lane declares. "A garden is a real place imagined and, with time and care, an imagined place made real" (chap. 1). This intertwining of the imagined and the real, the linguistic and the tangible, the spiritual and the corporeal is characteristic of the vision he deploys in the memoir. While he stresses how fleeting his human presence is in the land that endures, he gestures also to the garden of words that is always there:

Nothing is lost. The ancient paradise of metaphor and myth grows under my living feet. The past lives under the nails of my hands, is ground into the soles of my bare feet.... I think at times that, like Adam, I too was thrown from a garden. I too have known the sorrow that follows when he went out into the world to struggle, procreate, love, and someday die. But perhaps I never left and that original garden is of the spirit only. Here where I sit among the lilies is the garden I was thrown from. I have been given it, not to find innocence again but to learn my self. (chap. 6)

The garden is also, appropriately and in keeping with the biblical framework, the site where he confronts bitter knowledge of suffering and death—of his past, of his family members, of squirrels and other creatures. Healing brings back memories, often sparked by the garden itself, its fragrances and busy inhabitants. In the space of the garden he recalls the intertwining of the light and darkness of his early life in poverty and among violence in small mining towns of British Columbia, and human deaths that seem as random as the death of a squirrel he comforts in his hands as it is dying, killed by a car. Multiple deaths and losses set the rhythm of his life, jolt it, but can finally be

fully confronted only now, in his old age, at sixty two, when he manages to choose life and emerge from his addictions. He recalls the death of his five-year-old niece of cancer, followed by the loss of her father, Patrick's brother Johnny, his brother Dick's death of brain haemorrhage at the age of 28—his death for Lane symbolic of the loss of childhood and home; then the unthinkable accident that takes his father's life. He reflects on the dissolution of his three marriages and the resulting loss of his children, and the death of his old mother of cancer. While in the past he was inhabited by the ghosts of his father and his brother, both whispering poetry to him, in the narrative present the unsettled past materialises in visions of his mother, who appears to him in the garden, crawling, engaged in her own obsessive gardening (which she indeed loved in life), frustrated, unhappy, sometimes angry. Lane recognizes himself, his need for a story, or words of praise and recognition, as the source of those spirit visits—but the mother remains silent. The past emerging from “a terrible mental swamp” (chap. 9) of memory is at different times described as a labyrinth, as a disaster, as a pattern he unwittingly replicates in his own life, its mysteries and losses still poignant and unexplained, its happiness remote and often questioned. Even after he makes peace with the past at his parents' graves, his mother reappears and is not at peace. Sarah de Jong Carson (2014) observes that Lane in the memoir explores both themes and some formal features of the elegy. His gestures towards hope for renewal and intergenerational transmission, which would complete the elegiac trajectory, are somewhat ambivalent, however—both when it comes to the recovery of the past and the healing potential of art (96, 100), even though the memoir closes with “seasonal anticipation of spring and renewal; elements generically associated with elegiac consolation” (251).

Lane's private, new commitment to life, after years of half-life and suicide attempts, forces him also to reflect on his role of a gardener as both a nurturer and killer—the unresolved dilemma brought about by the perceived necessity of the mass extermination of snails (chap. 5). Lane's observations of animals, birds and insects often lead to metaphoric interpretations and provide parallels to his life and feelings. Most of all, however, they feed into his sense of simple joy of being in the world and one with it, the pleasure of physical movement and being in one's own healthy body that he recollects from his boyhood and youth. Recognizing himself as an animal among animals, he resists anthropomorphisation, however, and refuses too easy an equation between humans and animals. While recognizing their mystery and difference, wondering about how and what they might feel, he stresses the

capacity for developing an empathic human-animal understanding and communication: “creature speaks to creature in gesture, look, and sound” (chap. 2), he comments.

This brings me to the two cats, Basho and Roxy, who walk through his memoir on their padded feet, between the house and the garden, appearing independently or accompanying Lorna, the woman Patrick Lane marries in the course of his year of recovery, after 22 years of living together; Lorna who is described as another kind of a garden—of love, safety and refuge (chap. 1). In Lane’s text the cats are simply there as constant but highly independent companions, going about their lives in the garden, appearing and disappearing at will, happy to rest in the safety of the house. In Crozier’s memoir, the cats are given much more importance in her exploration of the forty years of her and Patrick Lane’s love story, and in her contemporary narrative of caring and expectation of loss. As a constant presence in the lives of the couple, the five cats she and Lane have lived with over the years get biographical descriptions in Crozier’s memoir. Special attention is paid to the two who feature in the present-day strand of her narrative: Po Chu-I, who replaced Roxy, and Basho—now an ancient, eighteen-year-old cat. The way these particular animal lives are approached in both memoirs brings to mind John Berger’s reflection that the simultaneous similarity and difference between humans and animals, resting, in particular on the “lack of common language”, results in parallel life lines, which come together only in death. “With their parallel lives, animals offer man a companionship which is different from any offered by human exchange. Different because it is a companionship offered to the loneliness of man as a species” (Berger). The commonality-in-difference, the lack of verbal exchange form, at the same time, the basis of an ethics of embodied, performative care, as understood by Hamington (2017), clearly visible in Crozier’s memoir. The care is conceived here as based on habits of interaction, flexible and responsive, resulting from a deep relationship between people and companion animals, and an aspect of human sense of their own identity (52–53). According to Hamington, it is exactly because we cannot rely on “linguistic narrative” in our relations with companion animals that we are forced to be more attentive to them. This is what “makes companion animals better teachers for certain aspects of caring” (58).

In her memoir, as in her poetry and earlier interviews (cf. Boyd 2013, chap. 5), Crozier stresses her own and Lane’s love of the natural world and their animal companions, and shares her sadness at the human-made destruc-

tion of this world. She comments on the expiatory nature of their physical labour in their successive gardens, which is also an expression of and, alongside words, a source of their deep connection: “This is where we come together, in our garden, our bodies, our poems; our beginning and our end are in these places” (“August, 2017”).

The cats form another unbreakable link between the couple. Like Lane, Crozier interweaves the metaphoric and the literal in her rendition of gardens and animals. In spite of all the deeper meanings of the location and the animal companions, when facing her husband’s frequent hospitalizations, she describes how the garden and the cats, previously cared for jointly, with the responsibilities neatly divided between the couple, become another source of worry and physical and emotional burden.

The story of Basho’s final decline runs parallel to the story of Patrick Lane’s series of mysterious illnesses, decline and death. While Crozier picks up Lane’s horticultural setting and some of the meanings he endowed gardens with in her title—*Through the Garden: A Love Story (with Cats)*, it is Basho’s story that opens the text as Crozier pets his body ravaged by time, memorizes the patterns on his fur, and feels rising panic at the thought of “the world without him” (“February, 2017”). The garden, of course, is still there, a place demanding physical labour as the spring begins, but also a place of mental refuge and existential comfort, “a good place in this season of woe and worry to remember that energy transmutes into energy: nothing disappears” (“February, 2017”). Like Lane, Crozier works with different meanings of the garden, which also comes to signify a literal and metaphoric place of illusory safety: “We had tricked ourselves into thinking we were in control, into believing we could protect what we cared for. We hadn’t factored in herons and otters and weasels. We hadn’t entertained the possibility of an illness breaking down the gates and fences we’d tried to build around each other” (“November, 2018”).

Looking into the past, Crozier recounts the explosive and scandalous nature of her affair with Patrick, which ended two marriages; their companionship, the happy and unhappy times together. “Our love affair,” she concludes, “... was built on poetry and lust. Who knew there’d be time or space for domestic complacency, addiction, a devastating illness, a durable abiding respect and affection, the common banality of a man and woman living together year after year after year, a garden, a house, a cat and a cat and a cat” (“September, 2018”).



Patrick's treatment of the cats serves often to illuminate his character: his patience, calm, persistence and self-assurance that allowed him to entice feral Po to cuddle with her human cohabitants, and give Basho his injections. In Crozier's memoir the narrative of the present, which begins with the advent of Patrick's illness, full of love and sadness, laments the change that the decline of the body brings to his character and behaviour. The parallel story of the final years in the life of Basho the cat is a mirror to Patrick's. It is clearly not given to pose some mysterious connection between the two, however, though Crozier's autobiographical narrator does stress the importance of the connection the man and the cat share. "Basho's calm presence has been part of the silence between the lines in Patrick's poems, part of the animal spirit that comes alive in his writing, circling and lying down in the white space in the margins of the page" ("September, 2018"), she comments. Nevertheless, at this point their story is a coincidental story of two ailing animals who have happened to share a sizeable portion of their lives and in different ways care about each other. Still, the narrator in both cases notes physical frailty—Basho, like Patrick, loses his strength and "has trouble balancing" ("June, 2018")—and change in character and behaviour; and she braces herself for the loss of the cat and the loss of the man, both of whom she loves deeply. Her meditations on her private love, joy, sadness and grief in this context rekindle her awareness of the necessity of respecting emotions of other species, the neglect of which, she suggests, might be the source of destructive attitudes of humanity to other animals, and a source of private diminishment and loss for individuals. Here, as in her poetry, she demonstrates, in the words of Marilyn Rose, "her egalitarian acknowledgment of the equal status of other parts of the natural world to which we belong, her capacity for listening and for resonance in reaction to other forms of life, her yearning to receive and to process, however inadequately, the truths that lie beyond human consciousness" (61).

Basho's death, which comes before Patrick's, and seems to be metonymically related to it, is—unlike his—described in detail, alongside the poem commemorating the cat and his burial. Tragic in itself, it is also an impossible preparation of sorts, a rehearsal of what is to come, the death of Crozier's husband. Patrick's death is instead elided, it inhabits a gap in the memoir, addressed, but not described, only in the brief postscript recounting the morning after it happened. Lorna wakes up to Patrick's voice reading one of his poems, the announcement of his death on the radio, unable to imagine how she can go on, unable to move. It is Po the cat who almost physically

pushes Lorna from her bed, and into life, with her demand to be fed. The physical needs of the tiny body of the animal companion are her only reason to move—without ascribing to the cat intentions other than the desire to be fed, Crozier follows habits of care (cf. Hamington 2017), which at that moment prove redemptive, pushing her out of the inertia of grief into a minor, but still life-affirming action. A further glimpse of somewhat ambivalent solace, and a possibility of a future, come likewise from the natural world, from behind the window, where “there’s just a hint of light, thin enough to slip inside any kind of wound” (“Postscript”).

In Lane’s and Crozier’s memoirs visions of death and loss are counterbalanced by—sometimes ambivalent—visions of hope and sustenance, both being addressed, among others, through the deployment of multifaceted imagery related to nature, in particular gardens and animals (in particular, but not only, cats). The hope and sustenance, tinged with sadness, come primarily from two sources. One is the interrelationship the autobiographical narrators feel with the world that surrounds them, and the understanding of life and death as a circulation of energy that human and non-human worlds participate in. The other, the beauty and enduring power of language—words which guide and define their lives.

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PATRICK LANE AND LORNA CROZIER ON GARDENS AND CATS:  
MEMOIRS OF LOSS AND SUSTENANCE

Summary

Patrick Lane and Lorna Crozier, both prominent Canadian poets, spent together over four decades as partners and later as a married couple. While original and unique in their respective visions and concepts they present in their poetry, both often focus on the deep links between human and non-human, people and the world of animate and inanimate nature. This focus is also prominent in their memoirs: Lane's *There Is a Season: A Memoir in a Garden* (2004; published in the US as *What the Stones Remember: A Life Rediscovered*), and Crozier's *Through the Garden: A Love Story (With Cats)* (2020). This article focuses specifically on the literal and metaphorical meanings and roles of gardens and cats in the process of coming to terms with loss (in particular death) and change as described in the two memoirs. The former is Lane's meditation on the process of recovery from alcoholism and drug addiction, which is accompanied by a reflection on his past, in particular his relationship with his mother—all told in the context of his work on developing his garden. One of his poignant conclusions is "What we are is a garden", picked up by Crozier in *Through the Garden*, which explores the last two years of Lane's life, marked by grave illness, and the story of their relationship—a life lived with cats.

**Keywords:** Patrick Lane; Lorna Crozier; memoir; life writing; addiction and recovery memoir; grief memoir; cats; gardens

PATRICK LANE I LORNA CROZIER O OGRODACH I KOTACH:  
PAMIĘTNIKI UTRATY I OTUCHY

Streszczenie

Znany poeta kanadyjski Patrick Lane i równie wybitna kanadyjska poetka Lorna Crozier żyli razem ponad czterdzieści lat. Ich odrębne wizje poetyckie łączy skupienie na związkach między tym co ludzkie i pozaludzkie, między ludźmi a światem ożywionej i nieożywionej przyrody. Ta

tematyka jest wyraźnie zarysowana także w pamiętnikach poetyckiej pary: *There Is a Season: A Memoir in a Garden* (2004; opublikowany w USA jako *What the Stones Remember: A Life Rediscovered*) Patricka Lane'a oraz *Through the Garden: A Love Story (With Cats)* (2020) Lorny Crozier. Przedstawiona w artykule analiza tych tekstów skupia się na dosłownych i metaforycznych znaczeniach oraz rolach, jakie w procesie przeżywania straty (w szczególności śmierci bliskich osób) i zmiany przypisywane są w obu pamiętnikach ogrodom oraz kotom. Pamiętnik Lane'a stanowi zapis pierwszego „trzeźwego” roku poety, bez alkoholu i narkotyków, i jego refleksji nad przeszłością, w szczególności nad związkiem z matką. Kontekstem i tłem tych rozmyślań jest ogród Lane'a. Jedna z konkluzji poety — „Wszyscy jesteśmy ogrodem” — zostaje podchwyciona przez Crozier w jej pamiętniku, *Through the Garden*, opisującym ostatnie dwa lata życia Lane'a, naznaczone ciężką chorobą, i historię ich związku — życia spędzonego w towarzystwie kotów.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Patrick Lane; Lorna Crozier; pamiętnik; pamiętnik żałoby; pamiętnik nałogu; literatura dokumentu osobistego; koty; ogrody