VANESSA PAGE

A Vigil

- On the edge of a Montreal winter, I seek out basilicas, naves and prayer candles. Deep-
- distant and navigating the change of season: crimson licks, setting fire to the grey to
- familiar shapes, but with an American twist. This northern-ness is an unkind and ancient
- cold: the Atlantic, its depth, the weight of sturgeon moving deeply, silently

through my own flood.

- It's still early and I sit in a small café, morning-sick and rejecting every offering. An oil
- painting of the Iles de la Madeleine at eye-level, whistles with the threat of ice: a lone
- fisherman casting for mackerel, the precariousness of black rock. I imagine myself
- curled inside a puncheon and set adrift. On a continent of bad coffee, I find a perfect latte,

and the surprise feels warm.

(cont)

- I map the city's narrative. French words a tidal flow bellying out now and then
- in recognition: *éleganté* or *equilibré* or *velouté et volupté*. The architectural signatures
- of grey-rippled cubes and spirals doors weighted against the cold. Maple sugar. Ice hockey.
- Snow removal services. I thread differences on a rosary string: the absence of apostrophes,

and reassurance of possession.

- Arrêt. Arrêt. Arrêt. The wind is a fistful of nails. In the old town, I enter Notre Dame, feeling
- the pull of incubation a graduation from embryo to foetus. I think again of sea
- ice, blooming across the Gulf of St Lawrence. Prayers flicker in red and blue glass a safe
- edifice warm and calm. Newness stirs. Questions form. Deep-coded thought fragments;

nothing I understand yet.

- I came here, hemisphere-distant to shake my uncertainty loose. To run, to stay moving. At
- the marketplace, a woman sells Inuit art from behind an ultrabook. Moose. Maple Leaves.
- Loonies. Rain blooms, darkens the grey: 70s Olympic infrastructure and its futuristic shapes
- of concrete and murals, streets not built for prams. A yellow school bus approaches,

brings bright relief.

- *Je suis Australienne*. I walk on, watch well-dressed college students ribboning through urban
- corridors. Near my lodgings, I watch two children chase off a skunk with sticks. *Pepé le Peu*.
- I'm foreign and heart-sick, thinking of tactile things that centre and cradle. Thunderstorms:
- purpling skies. The click of Asian geckos. Rain on tin roofs lifting out the steam.

Cane toad veneers on wet bitumen.

- I can't imagine this place under snow, can't imagine any place.

 The wild is the cold, is
- the wild. The howl of the wind is an SOS. Puffins. Penguins. Otters. Bearded Atlantic fishermen.
- Où est la sortie? Disappear, to find your way home. All-hour nausea swings: a pendulum,
- marking each day of this desperate sentence. When this star is birthed, it will be mighty.

I too, will be recast.