

A WINDOW UPON THE WORLD: THE POETRY OF HÉLÈNE DORION

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ABSTRACT

Focusing on her most recent collection, *Le hublot des heures* (2008), this article examines the unifying motif of the window in the writing of the Quebec poet Hélène Dorion. The titular ‘hublot’ (an aeroplane’s porthole) is explored not only in relation to the evolving representation of the window in Dorion’s work as a whole (a bloodstained window-pane is, for example, one of her earliest and most disturbing childhood memories), but also, within the composition of the chosen volume, as an emblem of the precarious opening and balance that she doggedly seeks to operate through the momentary reconciliation of opposites in the poem. From the particular to the universal, the private to the public, the local to the global, the trivial to the cosmic, Dorion has gradually shaped the visceral fracture of intimist writing into a more generous and delicately meditative opening, bidding poetic consciousness to function as a window upon our ever-changing world and to probe, amid technology that is increasingly invasive and controlling, what it means to be human.

Keywords: balance; child; consciousness; contradiction; Dorion, Hélène; faith; fracture; oscillation; technology; thread; traveller; void; window; wings; word

REFLECTING ON HER POETIC TRAJECTORY, Hélène Dorion has recognized the gradual replacement of intimist leanings with a more open stance that grapples with the opacity and the precariousness of our shared human condition in a world beset by crisis and unrest. As it has evolved over more than twenty works during four decades, her writing entails neither subjective musing nor meta-physical detachment, but an action, an endlessly willed opening and projection of the self towards the other and the world:

l’ouverture infinie de l’être vers le monde pour qu’à travers le langage se déchiffre – ou à tout le moins s’éclaire – l’énigme dans laquelle nous sommes plongés, et que soit possible notre propre aventure.¹

Early emphasis on internal cracks and fissures that undercut any perception of the solidity or completeness of the self gives way to an important reassessment of void and absence as the very source of writing. ‘J’écris à partir d’une faille, d’un gouffre intérieur qui crée une tension, un élan, et me pousse à rechercher l’unité,’ she declares (*SAT* 12). The generative impulse breaks with emptiness and, once the work is finished, fades anew into this nothingness, until the next

rupture, the next uncertain hatching takes place.² Thus, the initially posited deficit of being holds the promise of being's interminable emergence into the world, periodic poetic advent extending and enriching the principles of biological birth: 'Arrachée au néant par la rencontre de deux cellules, je porte aussi en moi les traces de ce vide qui un jour m'arrachera à la vie' (*SAT* 25). 'Raconter la fracture' is in many respects the fundamental task of this poetry, from the convulsions of childbirth through to utterance itself spilling forth from inner shock and disturbance (*SAT* 38).³ To embrace the turmoil or the trauma of the fracture is, in this writing, to pursue the possibility of our own ceaseless becoming, through and beyond the deficiencies and failings that beleague us: 'Nous advenons à travers ce qui nous défait, et sommes transformés par cela même qui nous brûle' (*SAT* 16).

Born in Quebec city and residing by a lake in the Laurentian Mountains, the poet does not allow her writing to be constrained by the indelible stamp of her cultural origins and upbringing. For her, writing is less an instrument of self-definition than an integral part of identity; selfhood cannot be pursued or grasped outside the inexhaustible concatenation of words themselves:

Plutôt que de tenter de me définir à travers l'écriture, je préfère laisser l'écriture elle-même me définir, tracer les contours flous d'une *identité* toujours en mouvance, et jouer ainsi pleinement son rôle d'éclaireur sur un chemin que je ne découvre jamais qu'à mesure. (*SAT* 12)⁴

Accordingly, her autobiographical prose text *Jours de sable* (2003) traces how the self, ever short of the whole, continues to emerge as incalculable slippage through the gaps and interstices of writing. If the void whose mark we bear within us is both our alpha and our omega, then being must be viewed foremost as a state of inbetweenness, that finite something shot through with the infinite nothingness of which we are begotten and to which we will return, that something which is not yet nothing and which writing faithfully accompanies and steadies in the face of nihilism. The emphasis is on maintaining a fragile balance rather than stringing together episodes and attributes into a commanding self-portrait. As the poet warns us in the opening pages of *Jours de sable*, the narrative will resolve nothing, exhibiting until the very end its own undecidability: 'Et au bout, il ne resterait qu'un chemin indistinct, un passage d'ombres et de clartés entre un ici et un ailleurs.'⁵ It is in her orchestration of opposites, in pursuing their interrelatedness, making of words their middle ground, that the poet simultaneously brings the self into sharper focus. To take up the title of the essay in which the following statement appears, the autobiographical pact, whether in prose or in verse, supports the figure of the open window so dear to the writer:

Ce dont témoigne l'extrait *autobiographique* n'est pas un regard narcissique du *je* sur le *moi*, mais l'identité des sujets individuel et universel. Ce que *je* cherche, ce n'est pas *un être*, mais une qualification du rapport à l'être qui saura influencer sur la réalité sociale. ('La fenêtre ouverte', *SAT* 33; author's emphasis)

From the particular to the universal, the private to the public, the local to the global, the trivial to the cosmic, Hélène Dorion has, in the course of her writing, gradually shaped visceral fracture synonymous with gestation into a more generous and delicately meditative opening, bidding poetic consciousness to function as a window upon our ever-changing world:

Mais le monde, – regarde
 le monde s'infiltré par ta fenêtre
 et l'arbre
 et la branche et le bourgeon passent
 en chaque chose
 vois la figure des siècles
 qui se bousculent dans le ciel léger
 l'innombrable jardin de ta vie.⁶

Dorion's most recent collection of verse, *Le hublot des heures* (2008), employs yet again the unifying motif of the window.⁷ Indeed, the title echoes that of a previous work, *Fenêtres du temps* (2000), and like that earlier volume, is bound up with travel.⁸ However, whereas the window of the intercity train or metro provides a visual and mental frame in *Fenêtres du temps* (pp. 664 and 671), 'hublot', which *Le petit Robert* associates etymologically with 'hulot', signifying opening, and 'houle', meaning hole or breach, forms part of an altogether more troubling and oppressive space, an airtight capsule navigating the void, cramped, noisy and racked intermittently by turbulence.

This efficiently programmed machine fragments the continuum of space and time (*HH* 65) and serves to heighten the poet's awareness of her own lack of mastery in the same domain: 'Tu ne connais qu'à peine / les rudiments de la langue du temps / et de l'espace où se déplace ta conscience' (*HH* 12). The hermetically sealed flying 'island' serves as a foil to the receptivity and porousness of poetic consciousness; the disconnectedness enforced by technology is pitted against the poet's ardent search for joinings:

[...] voir la passerelle
 entre les instants, [...]
 laisser entrer en nous
 des mondes de sens. (*HH* 14)

The pulverizing aeronautical trajectory thus unfolds alongside a very different kind of journey, that of thought, also threading its way through the void, as a binding current of consciousness and words.

[T]u n'emportes pour bagage
 que ta propre aventure,
 ce flot de conscience
 que raconte ton poème,

affirms the poet at the head of the work (*HH* 11, cf. *HH* 47).⁹ The technological is subsumed into the sphere of the human, in an ongoing effort to redress the imbalance and polarization she frequently denounces in her prose writings:

Car comment ignorer qu'au moment où je défends la tendresse, la lenteur et la vérité du *je*, de l'autre côté de la fenêtre, l'ère spatiale a ligoté le temps et donné naissance à une société qui [...] tend au bout de ses longs bras mécaniques de nouvelles impostures. (*SAT* 31)

Once again, the poet's task will be to unite the two sides of the window, to replace separation with interaction, imposing upon the unyielding 'hublot' a multitude of other frames scattered through time: 'la charpente fragile / des fenêtres par lesquelles tu vois / un peu d'espoir [...]' (*HH* 76). In effect, similar to place ('Serais-tu à Bucarest, Belgrade / ou Berlin?'; *HH* 75) and face ('le visage de l'un / où l'on voit tous les autres'; *HH* 75), the figure of the window encompasses an infinite variation of the same and consequently upholds Dorion's perception of an essential oneness underlying the different stages of her unfinishable quest, of the same forever-moving figure that spawns the succession of her works (*SAT* 13). It is hardly surprising, then, that the title *Fenêtres du temps* is inscribed in the text of *Le hublot des heures*, for even as writing advances, it takes up what has gone before, a new whole emerging from an insistent questioning of previous parts.¹⁰

Stemming from a recurrent experience of rupture, Dorion's poetry is concerned foremost with re-establishing equilibrium, with charting amid the unsettling tug of opposites a stubbornly willed middle course. In *Le hublot des heures*, the airy suspension of metal that is flight mirrors that other balance which writing seeks to maintain as it props up being in the face of the void:

[...] Maintenant
dans l'avion, tu n'oublies pas
que tout tient à si peu:
une masse d'air, du vide
et du plein, en équilibre,
comme sur la page où tu écris ce poème. (*HH* 12)

Such a perspective contrasts with the image of the plane inscribed some twenty years previously, on the occasion of the poet's thirtieth birthday, in *Les corridors du temps* (1988):

La nuit je deviens
l'avion broyé
dans les veines du temps. (*MFCF* 224)¹¹

Certainly, the possibility of losing control and plummeting disastrously from on high is still envisaged in *Le hublot des heures*. Having noted the precariousness of her airborne state, the poet begins a new block of verse on p. 13 of *Le hublot des heures* by noting that the plane is suddenly dropping quickly. However, against this morbid pull that grips the subject, writing exerts a decisive counterpull, and

the act of raising the shutter on the window signals a simultaneous reconnection of consciousness with the world: ‘tu relèves le volet du hublot, le ciel, la terre, tout / l’horizon est intact [...]’ (*HH* 13). The spectre of a crushed plane is indeed unearthed in this writing, but to be righted this time by all that remains incontrovertibly whole on the other side of the window. The restoration of balance that takes place bears witness to the shifts that have occurred during those intervening years, in a poetry that has learnt to wed itself to the ebb and flow, diastole and systole, rise and fall of originary forces pulsing through all living things: ‘En chaque figure le monde se renouvelle. / Descente. Remontée. Rythme ancestral,’ notes the poet in her 1989 volume *Pierres invisibles* (*MFCF* 656).¹²

Le hublot des heures also acts as a counterpoint to one of the poet’s earliest childhood memories evoked in *Jours de sable*: ‘[Le sens] ne viendrait, je l’ai compris beaucoup plus tard, que par la fenêtre dont je ne voyais pour l’instant que la vitre lourde tachetée de sang,’ she declares, explaining how unsuspecting birds used to fly into the panes of the white-walled family residence and almost invariably meet with their death (p. 99). Since her supplications that each broken creature be resuscitated go unanswered, the child concludes that the world is godless and senseless. As her following paragraph indicates, writing is a response to the trauma of that daily carnage witnessed all those years ago, poetry now replacing prayer. The birds become words, and the bloodied obstacle silence, in a redemptive recasting of the irreversible scene:

À force de voir les mots être secoués, à force de les voir heurter violemment le silence et se rompre et perdre sens, j’ai dû vouloir demeurer debout et tenir face à l’absurde, ébranler les parois sourdes qui m’entouraient et recueillir les quelques mots qui parvenaient à éviter le mur, – sans doute ai-je cherché à les sauver un à un, [...] et par là à me réconcilier avec eux, avec ma vie qui alors trouvait sens.

The antithesis of ‘se rompre’ and ‘tenir’ again underpins the composition of *Le hublot des heures*, not just with the initial recognition that everything is balanced precariously (*HH* 12) but with the continual interruption and resumption of the succession of thoughts and words that determine the poem’s ‘*toute fragile avancée*’ (*HH* 39).¹³ The brutally terminated flight of the hapless birds yields to the uncertain but nevertheless ongoing trajectory of the traveller and her writing, suspended for much of the volume in mid-air.¹⁴ Decades later, suturing with its threadlike form the wounds of existence, past and present, poetry allows the adult to anticipate through words what each day had led the child to despair of:

enfoncez des mots
dans le silence des pages,
laissez résonner ton poème
parmi le fracas du monde,
attendre, attendre
que les oiseaux recommencent à voler. (*HH* 63)

The chaos and destruction transferred by the child from the unthinkable fate of the birds to the unruly onslaught of words prompt a practice that, while powerless to remedy the accumulation of catastrophes which the media daily thrust upon us, keeps being aloft amid the void, combating terror and collapse with a rekindling of belief and faith that is wholly dependent on the properties of language (*HH* 18). In effect, the primitive scene ingrained in memory becomes a kind of prototype of existential calamity whose ineluctability is to be resisted through words again and again. What the child formerly beheld, ‘l’oiseau qui gisait, immobile, le corps cassé’ (*Jours de sable*, p. 99), continues to be reproduced in human form, not least through the events of 9/11 that have changed for ever our perception of air travel: ‘la chute des oiseaux blessés, des tours décapitées’ (*HH* 22). However, it is through tending to the living, breathing substance of words that the poet attends to all things and keeps faith in their indissoluble linkage. The screen of consciousness, the frame of the page, the window of the poem fashion together a view of the world entirely at odds with the implacable assault of televisual images. The latter display what little disaster leaves in its wake, ruined remains that would merely seem to perpetuate the drama of the bloodstained window: ‘[. . .] l’on recueille / les corps, les âmes, le peu de vie / qui reste, les noms cassés’ (*HH* 64). Poetry, on the other hand, in binding words, binds all things anew, past places and faces that, gathered into a resplendent whole, promote expectancy rather than mourning, herald all that is yet to come from all that has been, in a form that is far less a reliquary than a viaticum, sustaining the traveller along the way:

et comme lentement s’édifie un poème,
à l’intérieur de toi,
tu recueilles un à un ces lieux,
ces visages, tu touches à l’amour,
à tout ce qui peut encore être vrai
et beau, comme une promesse. (*HH* 76)¹⁵

If the corrective thread of words evolves diachronically from volume to volume, what the author names elsewhere the ‘grand balancier du voyage’ (*MFCF* 772) also takes on an important synchronic dimension. At any given moment, like the airborne vehicle, being must strive to steady itself so as not to succumb to the dizzying void on which it is perched aloft. Writing not only weaves an Ariadne’s thread through time, it also forms a tightrope: ‘tu marches aussi sur le fil / des mots que déroule ton poème [. . .]’ (*HH* 26).¹⁶ And this tightrope is to be negotiated by the attempted conjoining of opposites, as the intrepid tightrope walker (*HH* 26), endeavouring to brave the turbulence of our times, tries not to teeter too far this side or that. ‘Secouer’, ‘chanceler’ and ‘ébranler’ are just some of the verbs in *Le hublot des heures* that signal the difficulty of such a task hampered by instability and fragility. Balance has to be tirelessly worked for, monitored, reconstructed, and this meticulous process of adjustment

is enacted in the text through the succession of numerous antithetical stances or statements between which the poem seeks out an improbable foothold. As Dorion confirms in her essays, poetry involves, on the one hand, an implacable weight experienced with each step taken (*SAT* 22). On the other hand, the renewed step confirms in itself that, however provisionally, balance has once again been regained, that the poem, endowed with its own internal necessity and cohesiveness, 'réinvente des équilibres' (*SAT* 47).

The contrasts and contradictions of *Le hublot des heures* are indeed multiple, and it is only through words that the poet can hope to escape their vortex:

les mots dénouent le fil à peine visible
de tes pas, et c'est à eux que tu dois
d'échapper au torrent, au poids du désordre,
à la brûlure des ailes, à la chute
de l'oiseau [...]. (*HH* 46)

Internally and as they unfold consecutively, the poems of the collection attest to the same overriding concern: 'retrouver / l'équilibre fragile' (*HH* 46). In line with Dorion's belief that poetry has the power to invest with fresh significance the ordinary details of our everyday existence (see e.g. *SAT* 27 and 35), movement between opposites in the volume embraces the most routine aspects of air travel: packing and unpacking, passenger formalities for departure and re-entry, crew instructions for take-off and landing, lowering and raising seatback and tray, opening and closing window shutters, and so forth. However, this rather humdrum framework, in which language and gesture risk being emptied of meaning through deadening repetition, also accommodates the sensorial screen and circuitry of a consciousness whose pulses and shifts connect with a much broader elemental canvas. Amid technology that is increasingly invasive and controlling, the poet urgently probes what it is to be human. Beyond the thread of banalities spun by the media (*HH* 64), she patiently weaves a deeply reflective and resonant counter-thread of words. Thus, the up and down of the window shutter can be grasped in this writing as an emblem of the existential oscillation Dorion ascribes to all poetic activity: 'Vie d'aveugle et de voyante, qui arpente l'envers et l'au-delà, creuse vers le haut, creuse vers le bas' (*SAT* 76–77). The antithesis of closing and opening the shutter (*HH* 13) can be associated not only with other curtains, windows or doors pulled open or shut in various locations, but, more essentially, with the alternate opening and shutting of the eyes and the mind: 'Tu rouvres les yeux' (*HH* 27, cf. 28); 'ce flot de conscience / que raconte ton poème' (*HH* 11, cf. 13). Poetry is this mixture of vision and blind spots, of revelation and opacity, of lucidity and perplexity. In this respect, the window blind operates like the shutter of a camera, allowing images to be imprinted upon consciousness and teased out thereafter upon the plate of the page, or what the poet insistently refers to as 'l'espace ligné de tes cahiers noirs'.¹⁷ The lowered blind or lid also marks a retreat into the darkroom of memory, where a rich storehouse of images can be harvested at leisure:

[. . .] tu préfères
fermer les yeux, retourner
vers les paysages de jadis où tout
apparaît, sur la photo [. . .]. (HH 19)

Furthermore, the window can act as a reversible lens, an optical instrument whose double perspective reveals both the grandeur of life and its smallness (HH 38), an existence of both humble and cosmic proportions, now viewed up close, now perceived from afar (cf. SAT 19). The frame of the window contains the uncontainable, lends measure to the incommensurable, suddenly captures the whole all too frequently obscured by countless disparate parts:

[. . .] le ciel,
la mer, toute l'immensité
– on dirait presque le mystère –
qui tient à travers un hublot. (HH 51)

If the figure of the 'hublot' is a locus of antinomy in the volume, it is set into a broader conflictual fabric. The jet engines are now comforting (HH 47), now torturing (HH 52). The traveller herself is alternately rebellious ('défiant le douanier chaque fois / qu'on te demande de retirer tes chaussures,' HH 14) and submissive ('Cette fois, tu étais déterminée / à retirer tes chaussures, / si on l'exigeait,' HH 27). Such atmospheric and behavioural volatility can in turn be linked to the doing and undoing perpetually wrought by nature: '*vous apercevez la montagne et le lac / qui égrènent les saisons, / les glaces nouées*' (HH 39, cf. 47). Each moment can bring a reversal of the last, a 'remous intérieur' (HH 15) mirroring outer turbulence. However, the poem ensures that the degree of swing, tilt or drag can be absorbed into a coherent, onward quest. Thus, the negative assertion 'Tu ne connais jamais le monde' (HH 16) yields further on to the affirmation 'Tu commences maintenant / à connaître le monde' (HH 22), and in a similar overturning of a fatalistic 'never', fearful supposition – 'Mais la fenêtre, mais le monde, sais-tu, / peuvent bien ne jamais s'ouvrir' (HH 45) – is shown almost immediately to be baseless: 'la fenêtre – et le monde avec elle – / s'entrouvre soudain' (HH 46). The poems dip and rise, lurch from suffocation to reanimation (HH 50–51), from gnawing doubt (HH 65) to joyous affirmation ('déjà tu entends / les oiseaux qui reviennent [. . .],' HH 65).

The volume's epilogue summarizes this dynamics of contradiction and the faith that sustains it:

[. . .] les oiseaux
piquent du nez puis rebondissent
au dernier instant, à partir de rien,
recommencent l'envol,
recommencent la chute – (HH 71)

Poetry is this endless oscillation between flight and fall, and the trajectory traced in Dorion's book reiterates the lessons of previous collections. In *Jours de sable*, the figure of the trapeze artist remembered from childhood again embodies the principle of equilibrium (p. 92) as does that other lesson of relentless reversal that is Camus's Sisyphus.¹⁸ Just as an analogy with the latter appears in the third part of *Le hublot des heures* – 'tu roules ton bagage / comme une pierre le long de ta vie' (HH 43) –, so too does the former resurface in the epilogue, the traveller's take-offs and landings now likened to an acrobatic spectacle:

*ce doit être
chacune des envolées vers l'aube,
chaque descente,
et le monde redevient un vaste chapiteau
où se succèdent ces jongleurs,
acrobates, saltimbanques
que jamais nous ne cessons d'être. (HH 71)*

Balance, then, can only ever be grasped as it is disrupted or impeded. It is that middle point of rest that elusively inhabits persistent vacillation. The poem is made up of numerous fluctuations and flutterings, and it is this undulatory rhythm of words, this mixture of gravity and weightlessness, of peak and trough, of daring and vulnerability, that reintroduces into writing the vital beat of outspread wings (HH 85).

Conjoining the thread of writing and the traveller's formidable itinerary ('ce séjour / de plusieurs mois sur quatre / des cinq continents,' HH 35), Hélène Dorion is as much concerned with our voyage through time as with our traversal of space. Through the window of the poem, she beholds less the wonders of distinct cities and their cultures – capitals are simply enumerated, hotels are imprecisely situated, 'des images touristiques / de sites enchanteurs' are spurned (HH 63) – than the pendulum of time swinging now backwards through all that once was, now forwards to all that yet might be. Travel, then, reveals the mystery of the traveller's passingness, in iterative rather than linear mode ('tu seras *de nouveau* à Paris, à Los Angeles ou à Rome,' HH 33; emphasis added), as the forward swing of departure holds in prospect the reverse swing of return (HH 44). Indeed, for the poet, departure entails in many respects a fuller embrace of home, a setting forth that prompts a continual looking back, not only at the moment of stepping out ('Tu [...] te retournes pour regarder / la maison que tu quittes [...],' HH 21), but throughout the course of the subsequent journey as the familiar landscape is resurrected repeatedly in writing (see e.g. HH 54). In the same way, the traveller's passage is never a running away, but a means of entering more fully into that very passingness that defines her, of undertaking a journey towards self (HH 38), illuminating in time 'par le hublot ta propre histoire' (HH 73). Going forward proves inherently reflexive:

Tu avances
comme pour rejoindre

une part de toi-même
demeurée inconnue [...]. (HH 44)

The verb ‘avancer’ at the head of this passage is to be understood primarily in terms of the repetition of ‘rejoindre’ and ‘revenir’, to which it gives rise. Travel is this constant revisiting of the self, the thread of an onward trajectory that simultaneously retrieves and binds together fragments and scraps of the self scattered in time, ‘images / minuscules, recueillies patiemment / comme des heures frêles [...]’ (HH 74). Conversely, once the pendulum has swung back through time, to home, to childhood, to vital origins (HH 72), it can then trace the path forward again, countering present falsehood and violence (HH 31) with what has been patiently pieced together in the poem, ‘tout ce qui peut encore être vrai / et beau, comme une promesse’ (HH 76).

Whereas *Jours de sable* recalls the repeated collision of wing and window, *Le hublot des heures* makes of both enduring models of equilibration, not only as they are incorporated into the larger technological feat of the aeroplane, but as they perform in and of themselves, prevailing against all manner of existential discord and turbulence. Irrevocable ruin is transformed into the precarious but nevertheless persistent action of the poem by way of these recurrent figures. ‘Sur le balancier où oscillent l’Un et le multiple, [...] le temps et l’éternité, le “moi” consent au mouvement qui le déplace et [...] fait de cette quête le sens même du voyage’ (SAT 17): wings and window become the concrete embodiment, the poetic interface, of such inexhaustible oscillation, without which there can be no achievement of balance. Decidedly, everything hangs on a thread but in the beating of the poem’s wings, the opening of the poem’s window, Dorion reminds us that this little may not only suffice, but may yet enfold our all:

*ce doit être le plus petit
mouvement des choses*

*dans le jardin magique
de ta vie
que célèbre le voyage – (HH 71)*

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This study stems from research completed with the assistance of the Government of Canada.

NOTES

¹ H. Dorion, *Sous l'arche du temps* (Montreal: Leméac, 2003), p. 66. References to this volume will be abbreviated as *SAT* followed by page number. See also pp. 11–19 for the writer's assessment of her poetic itinerary. This collection comprises 13 short essays written between 1986 and 2003, in which the author ponders the relationship between being, literature and life. Her poetic production from 1983 to 2000 has been gathered in the voluminous but elegant *Mondes fragiles, choses frêles* (Montreal: L'Hexagone, 2006), references to which will be abbreviated as *MFCE* followed by page number. An anthology of her poems, presented by Pierre Nepveu, appeared previously under the title *D'argile et de souffle* (Montreal: Typo, 2002). Both in her native Quebec and abroad, Dorion's work has earned many awards, not least the 'Prix de l'Académie Mallarmé' (2005) and the Canadian Governor General's Award (2006).

² 'Après avoir terminé un livre, il m'arrive de ressentir un vide profond,' confesses the poet. 'Autre avenue possible: le livre achevé a créé des brèches qu'explorera le suivant' (*SAT* 23).

³ *Ibid.*, p. 38. See also François Paré's view of the subject in Dorion's poetry: '[L]e sujet féminin ne s'énonce que dans la conscience d'une faille fondamentale, sur laquelle tout le présent semble reposer comme un pont. Mais l'énonciatrice reste coupée de sa propre cohérence historique. En effet, faite de poussières et de fragments non identifiables, l'histoire, toujours liée au drame de la figure maternelle, est un ensemble de signes, véritables vestiges qui exigent l'éloignement et l'abandon'; 'Hélène Dorion, hors champ', *Voix et images*, 24:2 (1999), 337–47 (p. 346).

⁴ Far from fostering certainty, what might normally be considered the determinants of identity converge in this writing on the indeterminate: 'La langue, le pays, le corps: à partir de là résonne un espace singulier [...] aussi difficile à décrire qu'à saisir' (*SAT* 18). Madeleine Gagnon declares that 'cette fille pourrait venir de tous les continents, toutes les civilisations, grandes ou petites. Ses frontières géographiques sont en quelque sorte accidentelles – elle est, de toute façon, appuyée contre le monde entier'; 'Fille d'argile et de souffle', in *Nous voyagerons au cœur de l'être. Autour d'Hélène Dorion*, edited by Paul Bélanger (Montreal: Le Noroît, 2004), pp. 9–15 (p. 11).

⁵ H. Dorion, *Jours de sable* (Paris: La Différence, 2003), p. 8.

⁶ H. Dorion, *Rawir: les lieux* (Paris: La Différence, 2005), p. 21.

⁷ H. Dorion, *Le hublot des heures* (Paris: La Différence, 2008). References to this book will appear as *HH* followed by page number.

⁸ H. Dorion, *Fenêtres du temps* (2000) in *MFCE*, pp. 657–75. In a note on the work, the author indicates that the poems were taken from a travel journal written during a trip to Germany and Austria in March 2000.

⁹ Upon arrival, it is the journey within self that merits telling, the adventure that has crystallized on the page: 'Sur la terrasse de l'hôtel / [...] / tu raconteras peut-être ce voyage / en toi-même où te conduisent les mots, / les pages lignées de ton cahier noir / où il ne reste plus de blanc' (*HH* 60). The line, the thread, the steady accumulation of clauses and sentences, all point to Dorion's concern with composing narrative and broadening the realm of the narratable in verse.

¹⁰ 'Le soleil pénètre / par les fenêtres du temps,' declares the poet in the penultimate text of the volume (*HH* 75). For Dorion's view of the non-linear development of her doubt-ridden *œuvre*, see *SAT* 9–10: 'L'écriture ne cesse de m'apprendre à aller vers le doute. // Une figure surgit ici, – la spirale. Certains des pas reviennent sur eux-mêmes pour reprendre élan, pousser ailleurs les mots, mener plus loin l'interrogation et, ultimement, créer à partir d'un même noyau de nouvelles brèches.'

¹¹ On the previous page, the plane is also associated with destruction: 'L'avion s'écrase / contre une montagne / qui est la hanche.'

¹² See also *Portraits de mers* (2000): 'Vois mon âme qui oscille, – chute et envol / noirceur et luminosité. / [...] / – ondes millénaires/qui vibrent en moi' (*MFCE* 764).

¹³ Dorion blends roman and italics in her work, the latter frequently isolating various forms of social discourse which, all too familiar, are held up to somewhat ironic scrutiny.

¹⁴ ‘Un gouffre s’ouvre sous les mots,’ declares the poet in *Jours de sable*, p. 100, and *Le hublot des heures* is the further creative embodiment of this statement.

¹⁵ The traveller is also sustained by the many other writers and artists who offer an alternative lens on reality, and whose names mark out in the volume an ever-extended filiation across the globe and the centuries: ‘[...] tu vois le monde / peu à peu qui s’avance / à travers les poèmes de Tsvétaïva, / *Les Liens* de Giordano Bruno, et jusqu’aux paysages / de Richter [...]’ (*HH* 36).

¹⁶ See also in this respect Jean-Michel Maulpoix’s *Le poète perplexe* (Paris: Corti, 2002), p. 23: ‘Funambule, le poète avance sur une corde en mesurant ses pas. Son existence tient à un fil: celui des lignes que sa main trace et qui dévident, page après page, l’écheveau de sa propre vie.’ In a variation of this balancing act that resonates with Dorion’s vision, Pierre Ouellet attributes to utterance ‘[ce] seul mouvement par lequel l’homme découvre qu’il ne se rencontre jamais qu’au bout du monde, au bord, même, où le poème se tient dans un équilibre instable, à deux doigts de tomber dans le silence le plus abyssal; *Où suis-je? Paroles des Égarés* (Montreal: VLB, 2010), p. 17.

¹⁷ ‘Tu seras bientôt entourée de visages,’ she declares, for example, ‘[...] et ces visages imprégnent / l’espace ligné de tes cahiers noirs [...]’ (*HH* 18).

¹⁸ ‘Espoir, puis vertige, et vide. Il faut recommencer, à nouveau soulever le rocher, à nouveau remonter la pente. [...] La vie, chaque fois autre et même, mille fois recommencée à travers des milliers de petites choses qui se répètent’ (*Jours de sable*, p. 12).