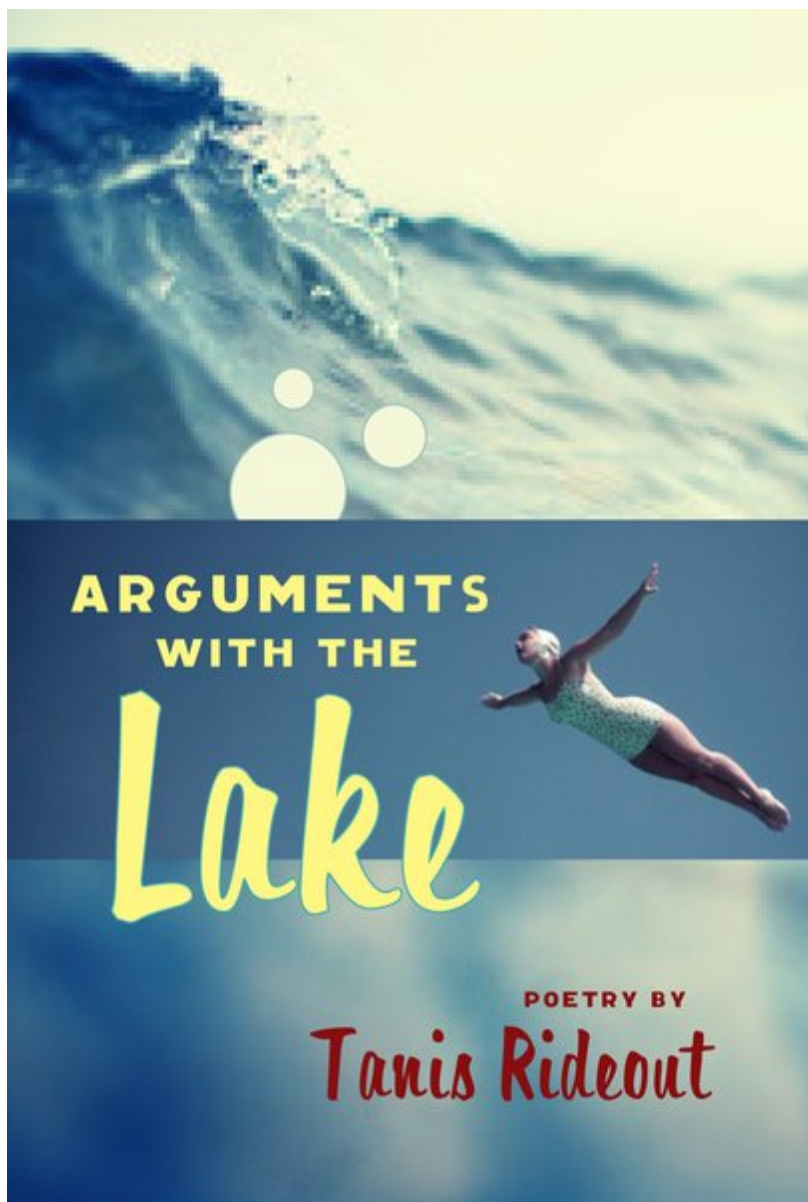


Navigating Shifting Currents: Tanis Rideout's Arguments with the Lake

AP arcpoetry.ca/editorials/navigating-shifting-currents-tanis-rideouts-arguments-with-the-lake



Toronto-based writer Tanis Rideout's acclaimed novel, *Above All Things* (McClelland and Stewart, 2012), was an account of George Mallory's third and final attempt to conquer Mount Everest in 1924, and the wife he left behind, Ruth. The poems in *Arguments with the Lake* are likewise concerned with feats of strength and endurance, and the determination of real people. This time Rideout has compiled a fictionalized account of the rivalry between Marilyn Bell and Shirley Campbell. In 1954, at only 16 years old, Bell became the first person

recorded to swim across Lake Ontario. Bell began her swim at Queens Beach in Niagara-on-the-Lake, and after almost 21 hours arrived at the shore at the Boulevard Club, just west of Toronto's CNE. Campbell twice failed similar attempts in 1955 and 1956.

This is Rideout's second book of poems, following *Delineation* in 2005. A series of poems excerpted from *Arguments with the Lake* won second prize in the 2009 CBC Literary Awards. Rideout was named the Poet Laureate for Lake Ontario by Lake Ontario Waterkeeper, an environmental advocacy group.

The poems take inspiration from newspaper articles, biographies, and most notably from Lake Ontario itself, which becomes its own entity within the lines. The movements of history are brought to life on the page: the creation of the lake in "Begin," its old boarders recalled in "The Fear of Silence," the effect of the barrier erected by the Gardiner Expressway recounted in "The End of the Lake," and in the poems capturing imaged moments in these two women's careers. Both of which, it's worth noting, are still very much alive.

There's a swimsuit-cheesecake element given to Campbell as she revels in the role she's given. From "Sharkgirl vs. Mermaid":

At the Palais Royale, on the rutted boardwalk, near the lawn
that will be named for her. Sun stains our skin and we chirp
about boys and doo-wop. I rub at rebel freckles blooming
on my nose, slip straps off my shoulders, press naked
breasts to a picnic blanket.

The stakes heighten at the poem's conclusion, "...She says mermaid. I say / sharkgirl. All teeth and territorial." Campbell is saltier, in contrast to the freshwater face presented for Bell, who after her successful swim in "Begin Again," is complacent: "She says nothing. Just as she's told. Just smiles."

The swimmers' bodies and their movement take second place to the psychic effect the water has on their minds as the lake takes over: "Inside there's terror. Just her and the lake, / dark as the space under her bed." The swimmers are all interiority, all mind and determination. Physicality belongs to the lake, even on land:

For days you puke and piss the lake, its currents
eddy in shrinking veins and the marshlands
of your lungs. With each move, each dreaming toss
and turn, the lake still sloshes against your skin.

There are risks in writing about real people and real events—that delicate balance between a commitment to the recorded past and the freedom to reinterpret important moments to suit art. Tanis Rideout once again proves adept at navigating these shifting currents.

Nico Mara-McKay is a freelance writer and poet living in Toronto whose work has appeared in numerous journals, recently in *Broken Pencil*, *Poetry is Dead*, and *Quill & Quire*. Nico can be found online at nicomaramckay.com and on Twitter [@plutopsyche](https://twitter.com/plutopsyche).

FOR EVERYONE THE SWIMMER'S MOMENT AT THE WHIRLPOOL COMES; DARE WITH ARC.