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665 Gerrard St E
Toronto, ON M4M 1Y2
www.invisiblepublishing.com
promotion@invisiblepublishing.com

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READING GUIDE

ryan fitzpatrick's *Sunny Ways*

Dear reader,

My name is ryan fitzpatrick and I wrote the poetry book *Sunny Ways*.

Poetry can be estranging and tough to deal with. Poets love ambiguity, contradiction, and confronting things that aren't so easily understandable, like deep feelings or global systems. So let me try to give you a foothold.

Put simply, *Sunny Ways* reflects on climate change denialism in the face of environmental catastrophe. On their surface, neither of the two long poems that make up the book are particularly personal. Despite that, both poems come from a very personal place: the experience of growing up in Calgary from the 1980s to the late 2000s during a series of booms and busts in the oil industry. My family, like many in Calgary, depended on the unpredictable realities of oil's price as it swung, boom or bust, feast or famine. Caught in that kind of economic dependency, people can get a little defensive.

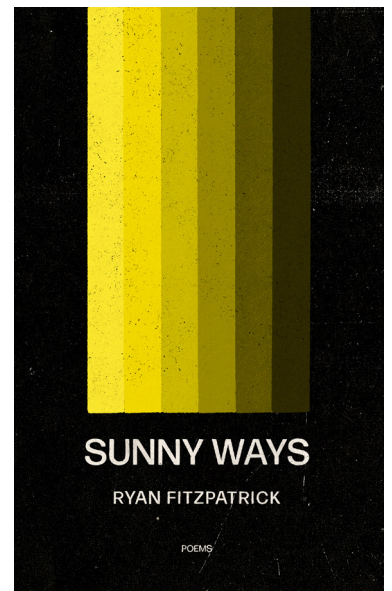
As a group, Calgarians are infamously warm and friendly, but question the oil industry and the knives start to come out. Just think about the insults slung at Hollywood elites Leonardo DiCaprio and Neil Young when they dared to criticize the tar sands. DiCaprio blamed some unseasonably warm winter weather on climate change and Calgarians lampooned him for not knowing what a chinook is. Young compared the tar sands to the aftermath of the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the end of World War II and some folks in Fort MacMurray posted snapshots of pristine natural vistas on Instagram captioned “#myhiroshima.” While the initial statements were overblown, climate change is a global problem, and the tar sands are a catastrophically scaled destructive event. So why the jokes and invective? Why the denial of something so undeniably true?

I've thought about this dynamic for years, and writing this book is the closest I've come to understanding it. But how do I give you a way into understanding my understanding of such things that can't be easily reduced to a soundbite?

The key to understanding *Sunny Ways* might be its title.

What are “sunny ways”? On one hand, the title is political. It's taken from Justin Trudeau's 2015 election victory speech, in which he celebrated a move toward a more optimistic approach to federal politics.

On the other hand, the idea of “sunny ways” takes on a more sinister connotation when we think about rising global temperatures. I wanted to understand the collision of the sunny ways of optimistic thinking and the sunny ways of climate



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crisis. What do people have to forget, deny, and ignore to keep things moving forward in the way they have been? Or, to put it more optimistically, how do we deal with a global crisis when it puts food on the table?

Another key to understanding the book might be in Megan Fildes' beautiful cover design, which suggests a guide or manual to global crisis. The cover's striking spectrum makes me imagine the sun setting on an imperial column.

As you read these poems, it also might help to think about bullshit. No, seriously! To deny something that's true takes a great deal of obfuscation. Both of the poems in this book use bullshit as a poetic device. In the first poem "Hibernia Mon Amour", this comes from a stream of dismissal (and the repeated use of "but" and "no"). The second poem "Field Guide" plays around with citation, quoting from other texts in ways that aren't always so accurate. I was definitely inspired by our current worries about misinformation and conspiracy!

I wrote "Field Guide" as a poetic essay. Or maybe it's the description of a long walk where the speaker reflects on their constantly shifting surroundings. Geography is important to the poem. It starts hip-deep in the tailings ponds of Northern Alberta and ends in the condo towers along False Creek, but moves to location after location. One minute, the poem is set in the Glen Stewart Ravine in Toronto. The next, the poem has moved to Jeff Bezos' city in space.

You might also want to think about the two poems' length. "Field Guide" is over 80 pages! That's excessive, yet making the decision to write a poem that long forced me to think about multiple parts of the problem at once. It allowed me to unpack the conceptual and emotional mess of climate disaster without feeling like I needed to sum it up in a soundbite or rhyming couplet. I don't know if reading my poem will similarly help you dwell on your place in the problem, but writing it helped me. Some of the stranger turns in the book are flavours I've added to keep myself (and hopefully you) interested.

I edited much of *Sunny Ways* orally. I've read the entirety of the book aloud to myself probably 20 times. If you have the time and inclination, it might help to read the book aloud to yourself or with friends. I've found that reading it aloud opens a different sense of time and attention within these pages. It might do the same for you.

Warmly,

ryan

