Though disparate in genre, the texts under review are directly connected by their engagements with and elaborations upon the role of reflexivity—and general emotional involvement—in investigative processes (personal or professional), as well as their considerations of the creation and delivery of narratives. It is no surprise that R. H. Slansky grew up in a family of travelling circus performers. Indeed, her first novel, the 72-page Moss-Haired Girl: The Confessions of a Circus Performer, is clearly derived from an in-depth understanding of carnivalesque performance. The book—a captivating read—details protagonist Joshua Chapman’s search to uncover the truth concerning the life story of circus performer Zara Zalinzi, the “Moss-Haired Girl.” Joshua, while sorting through the belongings of his recently deceased mother, discovers Zalinzi’s autobiography. Struggling to separate fact from fiction in order to update the performer’s narrative, Joshua undertakes a journey through his own family history, eventually coming to question the foundation of folkloric family tales. The novel’s intricate dual narrative—the combined accounts of Zalinzi and Joshua—is, ultimately, a deeply involved, however brief, problematization of the construction of stories and, by extension, knowledge.

Making a substantial contribution to the growing body of scholarship relating to reflexivity in feminist research and writing, Rachel Berman’s Corridor Talk addresses a number of salient issues pertaining to the forging and maintenance of research partnerships. While notably diverse, the articles included in the timely collection are tethered by a shared focus on the significance of not only reflexivity, but also emotional struggle in feminist work. As indicated by the text’s title, the essays contend most specifically with the informal academic and non-academic relationships that lead to knowledge production. Authored by a range of contributors from various backgrounds, and working in different fields, the articles examine differing research relationships from varying vantage points. While several authors concern themselves with academic and community partnerships (community-based research “CBR”), others consider those collaborative investigations in which participants also function as researchers in a mode of research known as participatory action research (“PAR”).

Given that such intricate, egalitarian-style investigation is under-theorized in terms of both approach and outcome, the poignant and highly entertaining pieces in Berman’s collection might also be considered roadmaps for future feminist investigators engaging in potentially productive and
fulfilling, though necessarily difficult, research partnerships. In the book’s third chapter, for example, Colleen Dell and her colleagues discuss their reflections after working on a “large-scale” study involving racialized—Indigenous/First Nations—women suffering from addiction problems, along with service providers and treatment centre directors. In their essay, Dell and her fellow researchers work to assist readers to better understand the reflexivity and emotional labour necessary to conduct truly “respectful research.” Similarly, in chapter four, Berman and her co-author Vappu Tyyskä forewarn that disconcertion surrounding collaborative research may not truly resonate until after a project has been completed. Keeping the socially transformative goal of feminist research in mind, researchers, as Berman argues, may continue to ask themselves for some time after a project’s completion: “whose interests were served anyway?”

Looking On

Sarah Brophy and Janice Hladki, eds.
U of Toronto P $34.95

Lynette Hunter
Disunified Aesthetics: Situated Textuality, Performativity, Collaboration.
McGill-Queen’s UP $39.95
Reviewed by Gillian Whitlock

The aim of Embodied Politics in Visual Autobiography is not so much to survey this emerging contemporary field of autobiographical practice, the editors suggest, as it is to model ways of “thinking with” the embodied politics of visual autobiography. The twelve essays in this collection and the two extended essays by Brophy and Hladki that have the first and last word range across a diverse array of “texts and tactics” that reflect on how contemporary visual autobiographies envision, situate, and circulate multiple forms of critical embodiment. What are these texts and tactics? The essays muster a series of arresting and often confronting case studies. Some feature monstrosities: Virgil Wong and Lee Mingwei’s collaboration POP! The First Male Pregnancy is a cyber-and real-world installation that creates a cybernetic pregnancy, a fantastical embodiment at the threshold of reality and fiction, biology and technology, West and East, male and female, science and art. Pro-anorexic autobiographical representations online construct “Ana” identities that feed on trigger material called “thinspiration,” which draws on mainstream contemporary culture in contradictory and complex ways. Hybrid and collective forms of autobiographical performance, such as Big Judy, create narratives of subjectivity that question the individualization of fat experience and mobilize collective and fantastic performance to transform shame into activism. Others feature bodily transformations: autoethnographies of straight men that re-examine heteromasculine sexualities; the politics of normative depictions of FTM masculinity that draw on individual worth and patriotism; “wound culture” and representations of plastic surgery on reality TV, such as The Swan. Finally a series of essays focus on specific historical and political locations where embodiment is a critical issue in campaigns for social justice: Indigenous epistemological practice in the museum; Mona Hatoum’s video installation Corps étranger that “scopes” her corporeal landscape in connection to autobiographical inscriptions of Al Nakba, the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories in 1947-1948; visual witnessing in okay bye-bye, Rebecca Baron’s independent autobiographical documentary film about US military complicity in the Cambodian genocide; and racial melancholia in Carmin Karasic’s autobiographical digital artwork With Liberty and Justice for All, an interactive engagement with the racist legacies of slavery in the US.
These case studies are “arresting” not only in the diversity of historical, social, and cultural contexts that come into view here but also because much remains to be said about each of them, and no singular reading or interpretation quite satisfies the issues on embodiment that play out here across the fields of visual cultural studies, autobiography studies, and disability studies. In their two extended essays, the editors focus on visual artist Rebecca Belmore (Anishinaabe) and her performance video *Worth*, now archived on YouTube, a “fleeting, poignant, public self-crucifixion” staged on the sidewalk in front of the Vancouver Art Gallery on September 11, 2010, a day when catastrophic national loss is commemorated. Drawing on Jill Bennett (whose “politics of empathy” is a key concept for the book) and Judith Butler, whose theories of precarity, visuality, and embodiment return throughout the essays here, Brophy and Hladki take this text and tactics as a symptomatic example of the uses of the body as a medium for communicating the material conditions that shape both Belmore’s career as an artist and the histories of Indigenous women. Visual autobiographical performances such as this summon us. They suggest, and mobilize affect, although the spectatorial encounter does not necessarily command recognition. So, for example, the testamentary address of Belmore’s performance demands an ethics of spectatorship that reflects on the spectator’s relationship to injustice and (following Butler) the question of what responsibility will look like.

These concerns with summoning the spectator link across to Lynette Hunter’s *Disunified Aesthetics*, the product of an extended project of “embodied research” that might well appear in *Visual Autobiography* as a case study of text and tactics. This book, unexpectedly, gave me a key piece of a puzzle that has eluded me for some time. In 1997 at the “Women and Texts/Les Femmes et les Textes” conference held at the University of Leeds, Hunter, one of the convenors, presented an all-day performance piece that is recalled here by Teresa Smalec, one of the attendees. Throughout the day, dressed in blue overalls, Hunter laboured physically to carry trays of cookies into the building from a van in the parking lot. In the afternoon, to conclude the performance, she removed all her clothes and curled naked inside a small metal box. We waited, and after what seemed like an interminable time of looking and increasing anxiety about the non-response of this naked woman and our right to look—twenty minutes, Smalec recalls—we began to talk amongst ourselves, until the final plenary was announced and the naked woman walked silently out of the room. The consternation remains with me still. This performance, “Bodies in Trouble,” is the focus of a mixed genre script performance, an interview between Hunter and Susan Rudy taped in 1998 and conducted in two parts on the page here.

This performance is a component of an extended project, a series of studies in twenty-first-century aesthetics in the context of recent Canadian writing—on broad topics such as Indigenous women’s writing and women’s writing more generally, on Robert Kroetsch, Frank Davey, Nicole Brossard, Alice Munro, bpNichol. Hunter is looking to challenge the form of the conventional literary critical essay, to explore a “disunified aesthetics” that incorporates performance art pieces that are available online as website materials, or incorporated as typographic and visual art on the pages of the book.

Visual autobiography challenges the book and print-based media. It raises the question of whether disunified aesthetics, for example, can flourish on the limits of the page. I yearned for my iPad when turning the pages of this book, so the weblinks and images could come alive digitally at a touch of an LCD screen. Both of these books testify to the demands on readers, viewers, and communication technologies made by visual autobiographics.
now that flourish off the page on sidewalks, in new media, and in shape-shifting embodiments that remain arresting.

**Questionable Concepts**

Colin Browne  
*The Properties.* Talonbooks $19.95

Dennis Cooley  
*abecedarium.* U of Alberta P $19.95

kevin mcpherson eckhoff  
*Their Biography: an organism of relationships.* BookThug $18.00

Reviewed by Carl Watts

Colin Browne's *The Properties* begins with the epigraph, "But Nature, that knows best its own laws, and the several properties of bodies, knows also best how to adapt and fit them to her designed ends." Taken from *Micrographia* (1665), a work that detailed Robert Hooke's use of magnifying lenses, these words lay out Browne's guiding concept of the ability of unconscious, unknowable, or natural forces to influence social configurations. In a sense, Hooke's words also describe the way the books under review here announce their concept and then stray from it. In *The Properties*, Browne alloys his theme with invocations of language writing and signifiers of the Western Canadian avant-garde. Early on, "prickle operas" invokes a hybrid, difficult-to-decipher multiplicity, calling attention to the arbitrary and spontaneous in its privileging of sound over sense:

- fish sit
- snot floats
- flat stoats
- flip sheets
- fillet milt
- stone boats

The collection also remains in conversation with current conceptual practices, such as when "Les prisonniers ont le droit de s'enfuir" employs passages taken from transcripts of Joan of Arc's trial. The poem resonates with the multivalent wordplay of the collection's shorter pieces while also capturing the particularity of experience and the contingency within the seemingly inevitable:

- This hold on life is slight.
- This grip on this hold on life is slight.
- This grasp on this grip on this hold on life is slight.

"Les prisonniers ont le droit de s'enfuir" also closes with a note that the piece was presented with a score in Vancouver in 2010, and it is precisely this grab-bag quality that slightly dilutes *The Properties*. Despite their strong moments, such standalone pieces establish the book as exemplary of a historical moment in which books of poetry are curated as much as they are written. The agglutinating phrases of "An Inauguration, April 15, 2009" ("who's asked / who's asked to / who's asked to speak for"), for instance, seem inseparable from the fact that the piece was originally performed at a Vancouver shoe store, and the poem comes across as part of a catalogue rather than an integral component of a book. Many of the longer pieces here draw attention to the unknowable interstices of histories and communities; still, by the time a closing quotation from Hooke returns to the book's initial premise, *The Properties* seems like a compilation that has been advertised as a concept album.

Less varied is Dennis Cooley's *abecedarium.* In recalling its titular genre's function as exercise book and devotional text, *abecedarium* at once invokes conceptual writing and remains anchored in the prairie language poetry tradition in which Cooley has been at home for decades. The poems are organized somewhat alphabetically, and Cooley's preface refers to the Latin alphabet's limitations and productive idiosyncrasies; it announces its intentions, however, with the predictable playfulness
of classic language writing: “ours is not to reason why the alphabet is very close to ancient Greek and Roman in sequence and in lettering.” *abecedarium* is best when it conducts a conversation with conceptual writing yet acknowledges its own distance; this perspective allows Cooley’s preface to acknowledge both the institutionalization of the avant-garde (“a young Toronto poet is an avowed and out-and-out lipogrammatist, unrepentant some have said from too much book learning, gives us too much lip”) and, when it replaces “dear poet” with “dear reader,” the coterie of writer-readers that contemporary poetry seems to have instead of a conventional readership. Subtler examples of this stylistic hybridity pop up throughout: “in the book of secret alphabets” gives a historical account of writing systems, including

- the seven alphabets of the learned men
- the four and twenty alphabets of other learned men
- the antediluvian, no more than three in number,
  of which the first Adam spoke

“hyoid,” meanwhile, refers to the organs enabling human speech (“where the bone being disarticulate / brings into art / iculation breaks voices from our necks”), and lines like “what slip page do we risk then / bidden to speech / in wet & cartilagenous zones” combine the bodily imagery of Cooley’s earliest work with his current themes.

It is precisely this long-running consistency, however, that makes *abecedarium* seem somewhat dated. Cooley’s use of bolded text and superscript doesn’t add much to his onomatopoeia, and his employment of alternate typefaces for phrases like “SACRED TEXTS” doesn’t do justice to the inherently aesthetic nature of alphabetical writing he acknowledges via an epigraph from Johanna Drucker. Instead, such moments make it seem as though the poems are waving their arms to get the attention of an uninterested reader. And while “prefer ring” nods to non-Indo-European writing systems with its omission of vowels (“in some languages you do not write vowels, do not dare write them, thx xnspxxxbxlx sxxnds xf gxd”), these moments seldom approach the sophistication of the phonetic, alphabetical, and abjadic experiments conducted in past works by the other authors under review here. Despite its integration of eras of experimental poetry, *abecedarium* is classic Cooley: length and consistency ultimately work against him.

Of the works reviewed here, Kevin McPherson Eckhoff’s *Their Biography: an organism of relationships* hews most closely to its concept. Eckhoff’s past work with shorthand and phonetic writing systems suggests he is quite at home in the conceptual (or post-conceptual) moment, but it also indicates that he is interested more in the expansive and idiosyncratic than in the rigidly programmatic. Accordingly, *Their Biography* has been constructed out of solicited contributions that include substitution-based pieces (“the left Macpherson has thicker walls than the right because it needs to pump Eckhoff to most of the memory, while the right Macpherson fills only the voice”), illustrations, visual poems, and prose descriptions from the perspectives of family members, friends, and at least one former student. *Their Biography* also replicates Eckhoff’s trademark solecisms and slippages in register, such as in chapter three: “I ask in return do: any of us really ‘know’ Kevin? Are we aware through observation, inquiry or information about who Kevin is?” Such moments call into question the author’s absence and emphasize the relational nature of both writing and publishing. Has Eckhoff tampered with the pieces to produce some greater consistency? Have the contributors (intentionally or unintentionally) replicated Eckhoff’s style? Does it matter?
eckhoff is sure to mention who contributed, as a retroactive proof of concept but perhaps also to foreground the social network to which the book's subtitle alludes. It seems useful to consider this element of the text with reference to Felix Bernstein's Notes on Post-Conceptual Poetry (2015), which regards a newly foregrounded social network as a survivor of the "death of the writerly and readerly" that is declared by the practitioners of such poetry. Just as all these authors show us the script and then revel in departing from it, the entertaining and intermittently brilliant Their Biography would appear to resist Bernstein's pronouncement, if only to some extent: I'm genuinely glad I read it from cover to cover, even if the contributor list with which it ends suggests my time would have been better spent cultivating my network.

**Future(s) Behind Us**

| Méira Cook |
|Monologue Dogs. Brick $20.00|

| Carolyn Marie Souaid |
|This World We Invented. Brick $20.00|

| Nick Thran |
|Mayor Snow. Nightwood $18.95|

Reviewed by Kyle Kinaschuk

*Monologue Dogs*, the fifth book of poetry published by Winnipeg-based poet, novelist, and literary critic Méira Cook, offers readers a rare chance to read the past anew. Cook deftly summons a panoply of voices from the literary, biblical, and historical archive to unhinge a postlapsarian world by rendering time itself disobedient. In this lively and perceptive collection of poems, Cook creates a polyvocal and "un-Edened" landscape that "drag[s] / the creaking wooden future behind us." *Monologue Dogs* reimagines figures such as Eve, Persephone, Cordelia, and Virginia Woolf to stage monologues that set time out of joint. For example, Cook masterfully cultivates a temporal disobedience in her sequence of poems entitled "CRACKED," which contains a triptych of monologues by "Young Eve," "Her Boyfriend," and "Any Old Snake." In the culminating poem of this set of monologues, "Any Old Snake" appropriates the lines of Andrew Marvell's "The Garden" in an anachronistic gesture that is both comedic and profound.

The vicissitudes of time and anachrony persist throughout Cook's collection, as Persephone and Demeter wait "where the subway gapes" and a "Young Eve, All Grown Up" happens upon an arthritic Gabriel with "ancient / electric sword flashing in the dark" in "crushed-heel slippers / and his scuffed ideals." In these instances, readers will be reminded of the wit and erudition of Anne Carson, whose *Short Talks* Cook alludes to in *Monologue Dogs*. By inhabiting a time where the future is behind us and the past is in front of us, Cook shatters the laws of temporality to limn elegant lyrics that teach us "Disobedience is the way back." Ultimately, *Monologue Dogs* proves a challenging and enduring collection that deserves to be read and reread with the same amount of rigour that Cook consistently demonstrates in her own poetic craft.

While Cook's *Monologue Dogs* upsets linear conceptions of time by way of an anachronous poetics, Carolyn Marie Souaid's seventh collection of poetry *This World We Invented* turns our attention toward another modality of time, that is, the finitude of life. Souaid's lyrical musings uncover the ways in which the threat and chance of time work upon life in both catastrophic and ordinary registers. From the inaugural poem to the concluding poem, *This World We Invented* advances a wave of deeply moving reflections on the fragility of life. "/Time intervenes," the speaker of "Perspective" tells us while observing her son at a birthday party. At the party, the son and his group of friends "never expect the inevitable," although they have "memorized the beautiful/repugnant cycle / for tests:
you’re a cell, / you’re a boy, you’re a man, you’re a corpse.” Souaid is clearly uninterested in abstract theorizations of death in this volume of poetry; rather, each poem yields carefully wrought phenomenological descriptions of life’s affective pulse in its confrontation with the “yes/no of being here for a time, / and then not.”

What is more, This World We Invented is committed to embodied and lived experience, as the speaker of “Space” declares early on in the volume that “Space is not neutral / It depends on who inhabits it / and how.” To this end, Souaid skillfully weaves together a host of perspectives on loss and death that respond to disparate events such as losing a loved one to cancer, the destruction of a new Mazda, apocalyptic visions of the earth becoming mist, and the ecological crisis of mercury contamination in rivers. What is especially striking about This World We Invented is Souaid’s perspicacious ability to capture the transpositions between the unsettling and the banal as well as the plain and the tedious. In “Upon Seeing Life of Pi on the Eve of the Eve of Your Death,” the speaker eats popcorn in a theatre while a friend’s life begins to wither. Souaid thus invites readers to dwell in a world where “there’s no great revelation,” yet one is impelled “to notice everything / in its brevity.” In This World We Invented, Souaid dazzles as she undoes the borders of the eventful and the uneventful.

If Souaid’s collection is oriented around the question of the vulnerability of life, then Nick Thran, in his third volume of poetry, Mayor Snow, pushes on in the wake of loss to ask what it might mean to survive and inherit the past. In Mayor Snow, Thran assembles an eclectic, playful, and bold selection of poems, which are neatly organized into three sections: “Carapace,” “Mayor,” and “River.” Thran composed all eight of the poems found in “Carapace” while living in Al and Eurithe Purdy’s renowned A-frame house in Ameliasburgh, Ontario, and each of these poems reveal Thran’s intimate struggle to come to terms with how he might respond to Purdy’s poetic legacy. After hearing the news of the shooting on Parliament Hill, Thran asks the spectral Purdy, “What would you make of this, Al?” The tone of these poems hence turns away from the elegiac and the nostalgic to earnestly celebrate the “Big guy” and his “Big, big voice” without lapsing into a cloying fantasy of Purdy and his work: “Dug my stay here, / but I will shake him off me.”

In “Mayor,” the first-person perspective that is operative in the opening section of Mayor Snow disappears, and the focus of the collection shifts toward a sprawling account of contemporary political issues. Thran mobilizes innovative constraints to engage concerns such as drones and surveillance. “Mayor Drone,” for instance, relies solely on Martha Stewart’s Time Magazine article “Why I Love My Drone.” Further, “River” marks a return to the first-person perspective where Thran continues to produce incisive and clever poetry that ranges from narratives of intoxicating labour conditions to dialogues with Yusef Komunyakaa Arshile Gorky to a failed book report written in French that is translated through Google Translate. With the advent of Mayor Snow, Thran promises to surprise readers at every turn.

Of Barons and Bacon

Patrick deWitt
Undermajordomo Minor. Anansi $29.95

Adam Lewis Schroeder
All-Day Breakfast. Douglas & McIntyre $22.95

Reviewed by Laura Cameron

The bright red background and bold black and white lettering on the cover of Patrick deWitt’s new novel immediately invite a comparison of Undermajordomo Minor with its immensely successful (and similarly designed) precursor, The Sisters Brothers.
large holes” lurk in the shadows, love might finally be the most dangerous menace of all. *Undermajordomo Minor* is not really about Lucy; he is just a pair of curious eyes, peering at this extraordinary setting and eclectic cast of characters through a telescope in a far-off castle window. Adam Lewis Schroeder’s *All-Day Breakfast*, on the other hand, is a lengthy and often introspective first-person narrative which is all about its protagonist. Peter Giller is, like Lucy, an utterly “minor” sort of person: a substitute teacher in small-town Nebraska, a recent widower and father of two. After he and his eleventh-grade students are accidentally sprayed with mysterious pink goo during a field trip to a plastics factory, they begin to exhibit strange symptoms: superhuman strength, uncontrollable anger, the ability to reattach their limbs with staples and thumbtacks, and, above all, an overwhelming and insatiable craving for bacon. Although they do not eat brains and they have never died—as far as they can tell—Peter and his students determine that they must be zombies, and they set off on a cross-country road trip in search of a cure.

The point of view in *All-Day Breakfast* is fresh and intriguing: it is a first-person zombie thriller, narrated by the man careening down the Interstate in a stolen ambulance full of teenagers missing body parts and craving nitrites. Unfortunately, as Schroeder endeavours to mingle genres and approaches—the novel is meditative, measured, tragic, and literary even as it is ridiculous, goofy, and crude—he does not commit fully enough to any one mood, and the story is consequently muddy and meandering. Who is its intended audience? Is it literary fiction, or is it a straight-up comedy? Lacking direction, much of the humour falls flat; Schroeder’s obsessive references to “brains,” for instance, feel forced and self-conscious (“Funny how the brain works,” Peter remarks repeatedly), and condescending comments about women
Zacharias convincingly analyzes the writing of Mennonite writers of (mostly) Russländer descent. He shows a historic “break event,” the collapse of the Mennonite “Commonwealth” in today’s Ukraine in the early twentieth century, to be the “birth” event or “collective myth” underlying the self-image of Canadian Mennonites in their recent writing. Zacharias illustrates the importance of the memory (following Marianne Hirsch, we might call it post-memory) of the persecution of the Mennonites by formerly exploited Ukrainians and anarchists like the infamous Nestor Makhno.

As we see in this taxonomy, the Mennonites do not necessarily have to be seen as a religious group: often, especially in the context of Canadian multiculturalism, they are viewed as an ethnicity. In his extensive introduction, Zacharias gives an overview of Mennonite migration from Europe to Canada and of the development of their communal identity relating to the “break event.” The chapters of the main part focus on the various literary re-tellings of the historic break event according to Zacharias’ own taxonomy: Al Reimer’s My Harp is Turned to Mourning is a prime example of the “theo-pedagogical strain” insisting on the importance of “faith in fiction” and postulating the importance of an attitude of Gelassenheit, “serene self-surrender and resignation to God’s will.” Arnold Dyck’s Lost in the Steppe represents the “ethnic strain,” which puts less emphasis on the religious message and more on communal identity, whereas Sandra Birdsell’s The Russländer represents the “traumatic strain,” working through the events by re-telling them in the safe haven of Canada. Finally, Zacharias interprets Rudy Wiebe’s complex narrative in The Blue Mountains of China as a “meta-narrative” experimentally problematizing its own act of re-telling and memorization.

That the collapse of the Mennonite Commonwealth is important beyond the field of Mennonite fiction is clearly illustrated in Karen Enns’ second excellent

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**Break Events and Gelassenheit**

*Karen Enns*

*Ordinary Hours.* Brick $20.00

*Robert Zacharias*

*Rewriting the Break Event: Mennonites & Migration in Canadian Literature.* U of Manitoba P $31.95

Reviewed by Martin Kuster

While migration and immigration have always been of central importance in Canadian writing, there is hardly any ethnic or religious group in Canada whose fate has been dominated by migration as much as that of the Mennonites. This applies especially to the “Russian” Mennonites, who started out in Frisia and—after settling in Eastern Prussia and Russia (or Ukraine, in modern terms)—finally came to Canada. There have been a few books on Mennonite Canadian writing and on its surprising success, but Robert Zacharias’ *Rewriting the Break Event* is the best one to date.

Falling back on the theoretical framework of diaspora studies, Zacharias convincingly analyzes the writing of Mennonite writers of (mostly) Russländer descent. He shows a historic “break event,” the collapse of the Mennonite “Commonwealth” in today’s Ukraine in the early twentieth century, to be the “birth” event or “collective myth” underlying the self-image of Canadian Mennonites in their recent writing. Zacharias illustrates the importance of the memory (following Marianne Hirsch, we might call it post-memory) of the persecution of the Mennonites by formerly exploited Ukrainians and anarchists like the infamous Nestor Makhno.

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That the collapse of the Mennonite Commonwealth is important beyond the field of Mennonite fiction is clearly illustrated in Karen Enns’ second excellent
volume of poetry. In *Ordinary Hours*, she insists on the positive force of the ordinary and non-descript in the Canadian Mennonites’ present: “There are no communists in sight, high priests / or seers, prophets or angels,” as she puts it in her introductory “Prelude,” and “There is absence, not emptiness, / and something close to echo.” Her poems, often in the spirit of imagism or rather its musical counterpart, reverberate with the feeling of *Gelassenheit* or supreme surrender described by Zacharias. As she puts it in “Metaphor,” there is “More than words”: “an echo rises to the surface, / but with greater clarity, / greater force.”

**The Heroine’s Audience**

Elizabeth Rollins Epperly


U of Toronto P $27.95

Benjamin Lefebvre, ed.

*The L. M. Montgomery Reader: Volume 3: A Legacy in Review.* U of Toronto P $55.00

Reviewed by Aoife Assumpta Hart

Originally published in 1992, invigorating both academic approaches as well as readers’ receptions, *The Fragrance of Sweet-Grass* has been reissued with a new preface by the author. Now regarded as a cornerstone of Montgomery scholarship, Epperly’s study helped to situate an under-valued and misapprehended Canadian woman novelist within the changing attitudes of both university studies and a national imagination re-evaluating its own literary canon in the early nineties. Indeed, Epperly’s notes on Adrienne Clarkson’s positive relationship to the *Anne* novels are particularly telling of how Montgomery’s legacy is one of Canadian self-recognition beyond literary figure. So by specifically directing our attention to the genre conventions of Romance, and to Montgomery’s feminist confrontations with their limitations and inhibitions, Epperly argues that “Montgomery’s novels call into question and play the concepts that continue to shape the female of the 1990s as much as the female of the turn of the century.”

*Heroine* has significant thematic import in Epperly’s repositioning of Montgomery’s major characters not as passive vignettes, caught up in the moody happenstances of romance, but instead as women of agency, self-awareness, and with a capacity for voice. In its time, Epperly’s assessments helped to revive Anne and Emily, among others of Montgomery’s female protagon- ists, not as sentimental props in need of rescue but rather as complex personalities negotiating the tensions between psychology, sexism, and irrepressible individuality.

The newly written preface for this reprint offers us Epperly’s own informative self-reflections, as both a reader and scholar of Montgomery for decades, as she contemplates what has changed in the cultural and intellectual interpretation of Montgomery in the time since she began her research. Epperly notes that Montgomery studies continue to expand, rather than collapse into rehearsed interpretations, especially on the relationship between gender and genre. As Epperly invites, “there are always new contexts and new questions to explore”; and she surveys admiringly the critical productivity of the last two decades in what has been a transformation in Montgomery studies, with both literary implications and political ramifications.

Given how much archival material has appeared since 1992—the preface begins with a wry observation on the dearth of publications she had to work with back then—Epperly credits a great number of researchers for making available Montgomery’s private material, such as her diaries, and the insight and information they might provide. Anthologies of critical essays have been a major force in opening
up critical discussion, absolutely, but so has been the release of accessible versions of Montgomery's private papers.

Along with the publication of the journals, Benjamin Lefebvre's comprehensive three-volume set of The L. M. Montgomery Reader is a crucial scholarly intervention of this sort. His work here concludes with the third volume, entitled A Legacy in Review: a compendium of popular criticism, commentary, and reviews—collected from over eight countries—that reveal the contradicting and changing reception of Montgomery's work. Lefebvre's overall achievement in this Reader series is a masterful compilation of archival adeptness and exquisite editing that addresses, through collation, crucial source materials for specialists in Canadian literature and history through the iconic personage of Montgomery as she saw herself and as others saw her work.

Lefebvre brings an annotated focus on the “coverage Montgomery’s books received in these reviews in the context of ads, notices, and best seller lists,” which Lefebvre informatively addresses within the pragmatics of print media and bookselling. Lefebvre's selections depict ways of engagement and influence with the broader reading public in the fashioning of taste and opinion in regards to Montgomery's target audience and how her works were positioned for reception. That Montgomery herself kept a scrapbook of clippings from many of her reviews over her career—"on occasion she also recorded in these scrapbooks moments of resistance in ink”—is part of the interesting authorial reconsiderations she reveals through her own self-indexing as evidenced in this collection. Amidst legal woes, personal problems, and an expanding readership built on expectations of previous novels, Montgomery's ambivalence about literary fame and popularity are quite apparent. As Lefebvre reminds us, Montgomery herself noted, "I gave up trying to fathom the mentality of reviewers years ago.” And Lefebvre reveals, chronologically and geographically, that there never really was unanimity in Montgomery's expected niche in the marketplace of female authorship.

As one reads these reviews—"simple life in a fascinating land” or “harmless and easy reading”—many of Epperly's observations about the nostalgia of opinion in regards to Montgomery's “legacy” become apparent. To look back upon both author and readership is to analyze a relationship of sorts, one in which reception itself is a kind of romance, a kindred thrill at discovered emotional resonances with Montgomery as a writer.

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### Three New Voices in Canadian Poetry

**Aaron Giovannone**  
*The Loneliness Machine*. Insomniac $16.95

**Melissa Bull**  
*Rue. Avril* $18.00

**Debbie Okun Hill**  
*Tarnished Trophies*. Black Moss $17.00

Reviewed by J. A. Weingarten

The only thing that Aaron Giovannone's *The Loneliness Machine*, Debbie Okun Hill's *Tarnished Trophies*, and Melissa Bull's *Rue* have in common is that each book announces a new talent. They are otherwise utterly distinct: Giovannone's poems strive for comedy, Hill's book tours physical sports, and Bull's poems explore Montreal and her own various pasts. Each book has its own project, tone, and merits, and each will find radically different audiences.

It is appropriate that Montreal poet David McGimpsey endorsed Aaron Giovannone’s *The Loneliness Machine*, because its first section is as cheeky as McGimpsey’s own writing. While the tone can be fun, there is inevitably one drawback to comedic poetry: a witty punch line is often the poem's centre. A case in point is one of Giovannone's weakest poems, "A Famous Quotation is
Hidden in ‘This Poem’ (the quotation is, the speaker tells us, from Chaucer). There is no way to navigate the poem without eccentrically focusing on its premise:

Read this line, now this one.
Ha!

*The lyf so short, the craft so lone to lerne.*

Did you get it?
That’s Chaucer.
Ha!

There is a discussion to be had about the speaker’s dialogue with his reader, but I nevertheless find the lines flat. That flatness sometimes happens at inopportune times in Giovannone’s book, when comedic throwaways deflate better lines that hit hard.

Giovannone’s more successful attempts at comedy are his satires of lyric intimacy. In “Pop the Trunk,” for instance, the speaker coaxes the reader into “sending [him] a text message” and pleads, “Please. / My number is / 403-829-1369 / That’s my real number.” The poem is not just funny: it plays on the “I-you” quality of lyric by engaging audience in ways that Whitman could never have imagined. A side note: I tried texting Giovannone, but he never wrote back.

Giovannone’s *The Loneliness Machine*, however, has more than this sharp wit; at times, the poet offers touching lines that are focused, spare lines. The opening poem, “Burnt Offering,” has this quality: “I am trying to get at something, / and I want to talk plainly to you.” That spare style, though, is more typical of Giovannone’s second section: “Beside my mother watching TV, / we’re quiet, faced with a secret / so precious we keep it forever.” Such lines often get to the abstract core of some concrete image, and Giovannone manages to achieve the same sharpness in his comedic poems: “Of my two thousand recommended calories, / more than two thousand / will come from Nutella.” Giovannone cycles: he drifts from comedic lines to poignant ones and back again. That tidal movement proves that profundity and wit are not mutually exclusive in poetry.

There is a similar balance of lightness and emotional weight in Hill’s *Panorama of the Sports World*, *Tarnished Trophies*. The book is a noteworthy accomplishment in some ways: it is thematically coherent, is logically arranged, and has some poems (“It Starts Here” is perhaps the best) that nicely capture the physicality of competitive play. Those good qualities make for an inviting reading experience.

Yet, even if I respect those qualities and appreciate Hill’s evident care for the art of poetry, I still struggled to appreciate the neatness of her poems. She takes no risks with the scenes she depicts. The inoffensive image of sweat, for example, recurs in many poems: “an eye dropper / of perspiration” (“It Starts Here”), “dribble-drip sweat” (“Thirst for First”), “repressed droplets / now leaking in slow motion” (“Hockey Sweat”), and so on. These are physically demanding sports that need more than sweat: where is the deeper emotional or physical exhaustion that athletes suffer? The poems offer nothing violent or visceral. The consequence of that decision is a constant feeling that Hill has not gone beyond the surface details of professional sports or scenes of competition.

Other poems offer scenes that seem tonally inconsistent with the majority of the book. One poem shows children innocently playing: “At four years young, she sits in the middle of soccer field [sic] / like dreamy princess [sic] floating on cloud turf pillow” (the missing articles may be intentional, but it’s difficult to tell). These mawkish scenes undermine their potential power. It happens elsewhere: in Hill’s poem about the suicide of a young athlete, “At the Click of a Stopwatch,” “parents everywhere” are “trying to understand” how to help young athletes balance
“sports and leisure activities in / this confused and changing world.” The pathos and clichés in such poems are unlikely to inspire an emotional reaction from the reader.

Hill's sounds and structures are equally tidy. The use of sibilance and alliteration (“rumble, rolling,” “drifters dreaming,” “lobes and lips”) is so frequent that the sounds quickly lose their effectiveness. Most poems in the book rarely vary their visual appearance, and when there is variation, it is predictable: the back-and-forth bouncing lines in a poem about ping pong (“The Gift of Ping Pong”) or the tumbling lines in a poem about doing laundry (“Tackling Laundry”). When reading poems about fierce competition, one would expect some frenetic visual movement to capture the spirit of the scenes. In short, the book would have benefited from deeper and more poetically daring representations of the athletic industry.

Lastly, there is Melissa Bull’s Rue, which digs very deeply. On the back of this tremendous book, we’re told, “In English, to rue is to regret; in French, la rue is the street”; Bull’s titular word signals much more than these two basic meanings. “Rue” actually has many etymological associations: to repent in a religious sense (German), to mourn (Dutch), a path (Latin, which, of course, gave way to the French meaning of la rue). I raise that point because while “la rue” nicely evokes Bull’s Montreal roots, the other meanings of the word evoke something more vital to the poems: the poignancy and mournfulness of the speaker’s spiritual path, her navigation of complex and conflicting attitudes toward love, sex, and death. The obvious power in those navigations comes from Bull’s sound, brevity, and meaning.

Sound. Bull’s poems sing:

His fickle determination follows me: agog, critical.
He comments on a zit, on the lowness of my brow, my cheerleader thighs.

Bull turns even the most casual and common phrases into something musical. Early in her book, her speaker describes “arrhythmic reverberations,” and that phrase captures her own aesthetic. In the passage above, Bull’s consonant “l’s” and “t’s” trickle down the stanza, the assonant “e’s” and “i’s” softly echo, and the italicized phrase (“cheerleader thighs”) drags out bold sounds in the reader’s mind. It’s a near perfect stanza if only because of what someone hears when they read it out loud.

Brevity and meaning. Bull maximizes the emotional effects of dense, yet readable, lines:

It was all the beats leading up to my eyebrows doing this thing and you downstairs telling me your last name tearing half a page from your notebook and writing your email in all caps saying, Is this it. Will I never see you again. Your voice pitching up. I watched you walk, hands in your hoodie, lights pooling you in and out of dark puddles.

Bull animates scenes: the liveliness of her active participles (“doing,” “tearing,” “writing,” “pitching,” “pooling”) sustain an interplay between two strangers that feels effortlessly genuine. And Bull still, even in such direct lines, finds the heart of her subjects: the awkward exchange of words and feelings here shows the vulnerability of both the lyric speaker and her interlocutor. It’s a spectacularly balanced creation—and the work of a true maker.

Unsettled Empathies
Sherrill Grace
Landscapes of War and Memory: The Two World Wars in Canadian Literature and the Arts, 1917-2007. U of Alberta P $49.95
Reviewed by Lorraine York

In a recent conversation, a colleague at another university reported being told by a teaching assistant that, when she referred to the Second World War in one of her
lectures, a student in her class leaned over to their neighbour and joked, “I didn’t know there was a first one!” Sherrill Grace’s *Landscapes of War and Memory* is a passionate call for general readers to know these two devastating wars and to know them deeply, and for educators to give them greater prominence when we teach twentieth-century Canadian literary and cultural history.

This voluminous study is noteworthy for its generic sweep; Grace, a literary scholar, also traces visual artists’ and filmmakers’ responses to the wars, from the widely recognized wartime paintings of Alex Colville and Frederick Varley to more recent pieces by Gertrude Kearns, Jeff Wall, and multimedia artists Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller, to Paul Gross’ film *Passchendaele* and the McKenna brothers’ controversial documentary *The Valour and the Horror*. Grace is exemplary in giving Canadian drama the sustained attention that Canadian literary scholars do not as often as we might, and that attention is richly repaid by an intensive survey of Canadian plays about both world wars, from the expected *Billy Bishop Goes to War* to actor R. H. Thomson’s *The Lost Boys*, Marie Clements’ *Burning Vision*, Jason Sherman’s *None is Too Many*, and Judith Thompson’s *Such Creatures*.

This is a hybrid text in other ways; its implied audience is wider than its academic publishing venue—the University of Alberta Press—might suggest. Much of the text is devoted to plot/content summary of the many works that Grace considers, and while one might wish for a greater critical analysis-to-summary ratio, I think that this decision to describe the works in generous detail is directly related to the more public position that Grace has taken up.

For Grace, the arts offer the possibility of what Dominick LaCapra calls “empathetic unsettlement”—a term that Grace enthusiastically adopts: a receptivity to victims’ narratives that avoids appropriation. Cynthia Sugars’ and Gerry Turcott’s term “unsettled remains,” which they deploy in reference to Canada’s painful legacy of postcolonial trauma, is even more appropriate to the kinds of dynamics that Grace describes. And like the national narratives that implicate Canadians in our postcolonial pasts and present, Grace’s wartime narratives betray possibilities for both registering critique of those wars and shorting up national mythologies (for example, the national maturation narrative that tells us that Canada “grew up” on the Vimy battlefield). Grace more often sees the arts as offering critique, though, sussing out the lies and hypocrisies that go into the making of celebratory narratives. In the case of the controversy over the McKenna brothers’ *The Valour and the Horror*, Grace readily sees how its presentation of Canada’s military past as less than glorious unsettled patriotic narratives. But in reading Paul Gross’ recuperative filmic narrative *Passchendaele*, she struggles to sort out its ideological investments. Recounting the melodramatic scene in which Gross’ character, Michael Dunne, drags David, the crucified German-Canadian brother of his fiancée, out of No Man’s Land, Grace rightly calls it “exaggerated and overwrought,” particularly in its adoption of the infamous Allied atrocity propaganda narrative of the crucified soldier. But to what end? “The simple answer is that I do not know,” admits Grace, with an admirable critical humility. But Dunne is recuperating David and his German ethnicity into a narrative of Anglo-Canadian heroism, no matter how the film otherwise subscribes to the more critical war-is-hell narrative. Considering the role of production in such narratives can help to clarify these ideological investments. In making *Passchendaele*, the most expensive Canadian film to date, Gross received funding from Ralph Klein’s Alberta government and also from the Dominion (now the Historica) Institute, whose uber-celebratory
“Heritage Minutes” have been critiqued by, among others, the Comedy Network, in their satirical “Canadian Sacrilege Moments.” Grace allows that films are more open to controversy over their representations of Canada’s wars and “held to a higher standard of accountability than a novel or a play because they are funded by the public purse.” True, media coverage of *Passchendaele* routinely mentioned its large (for a Canadian film) budget and its backers. But novels and plays receive public funding too, though not to the tune of the 5.5 million dollars that Ralph Klein kicked in to support *Passchendaele.* “Following the money,” though it can admittedly lead to overly deterministic linkages between funding source and the ideological bearing of the funded product, allows us to read these texts in their full ideological richness as cultural products circulating within a market.

In a fascinating passage from *Landscapes of War and Memory,* Grace confronts these conflicts between celebration and critique. She initially describes her response to the CBC coverage of the 2007 dedication of the Vimy monument that figures so prominently in Jane Urquhart’s *The Stone Carvers* in an emotional, celebratory vein that resists political critique: “No doubt skeptics dismissed the rhetoric about a creation story and the making of a nation” (narratives that Grace herself has critiqued earlier in this very text) “and Canadians opposed to war and the glorification of the military must have deplored the emphasis on military protocol, the bearing of arms, the salutes.” In this passage, Grace clearly does not count herself among those “skeptics,” but in the very next paragraph, which reads as though it was composed later in the process of writing this book, she reflects that “In retrospect, I am more critical than I was during the broadcast because now I can reflect on what the event forgot rather than on what it remembered.” And herein lies a key value of *Landscapes of War and Memory:* 

modelling for national subjects how to navigate through the “Heritage-Minute” haze of emotional militarism to find what—and who—these accounts have forgotten.

### Posthuman Passions

**Nalo Hopkinson**  
*Falling in Love with Hominids.* Tachyon $15.95  
*Julie Maroh; David Homel, trans.*  
*Skandalon.* Arsenal Pulp $21.95  
Reviewed by Libe García Zarranz

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.” Charles Dickens’ premonitory words, written almost two centuries ago, seem to accurately describe the turbulent dystopian, post-apocalyptic, and perhaps posthuman worlds depicted by contemporary writers Nalo Hopkinson and Julie Maroh. Combining stories published in the last fifteen years with new material, Hopkinson’s collection *Falling in Love with Hominids* (2015) brings fresh flavours into the heterogeneous genre of black feminist fantasy and speculative fiction. The suggestive title of the collection, borrowed from a ballad by sci-fi writer Cordwainer Smith, entices the reader from the start by anticipating some of the common themes in the stories: the complexity of affective relations; the limitations of the category of the human; the possibilities offered by posthuman bodies and communities; and the creation of an alternative ethics across species.

In an optimistic tone, Hopkinson explains in the foreword to the collection how she believes that working collaboratively can lead “towards positive change,” a trait that has characterized her oeuvre from her first novel, *Brown Girl in the Ring* (1996). Those kinds of coalitions and collaborations recur in stories such as “The Easthound,” where a group of urban children need to find ways to survive in a post-apocalyptic world inhabited by adults who are now child-killing cannibals with monstrous...
close-ups of Tazane's eyes, tongue, and body suggest a continuation between an excessive masculinity and his becoming a monstrous creature in a dominantly patriarchal society. In his own words: “I’m less and less human. . . . I am your double, your shadow, your nervous system. . . . I feel nothing.” The spiral of violence that leads into his arrest is also mirrored in the streets of Paris, where multiple riots take place, shaking the public opinion. Eventually acquitted, the story’s anti-hero thus manages to escape justice but succumbs to a symbolic death through his retreat from society. The last pages of the book, however, are filled with evocative images of water and waves that suggest some form of potential transformation, followed by close-ups of Tazane's body being beaten, until he finally exclaims: “I feel . . . alive.” Readers are then left to question the possibilities and limitations of the vitality of the world that surrounds us; how our passions, our energy, our thirst for life, can make us flourish but can also kill us. In the words of Hopkinson, “We're all on the same spinning ball of dirt, trying to live as best we can.” Our challenge then in this age of global crisis would be to figure out sustainable ways to rethink this “we” in order to generate equitable forms of affective, ethical, and social justice. In this sense, Nalo Hopkinson and Julie Maroh’s passionate fictions are an excellent starting point.

**Reinforcing the Model Minority Myth**

**Kevin Kwan**  
*China Rich Girlfriend. Doubleday $32.00*

Reviewed by Tina Kong

*China Rich Girlfriend*, the second volume of a projected trilogy, is a drama featuring the lives of the Asian elite. At its best, the novel is a literary adaptation of *rich kids of Instagram. China Rich Girlfriend* offers us the opportunity to spy beyond the trappings
of wealth (not just any wealth, but “China rich” wealth) and into the lives and problems of the privileged class, in order to gain some deeper perspective on life. Whatever that deeper perspective is remains ultimately unclear, and will probably be revealed in the next and final instalment, but we can endeavour to make an educated guess in the course of this book review.

Most students and lovers of the written word can appreciate a well-crafted satire, and those who do will share in Kwan’s wariness towards any form of “moralizing” (see his Interview with Ruchika Tulshyan in The Wall Street Journal). A successful satire, beyond the depiction of flaws to be exposed for comedic purposes, must also express an important message in contemporary politics. As well, many Asian people living and working in North America today bear the material and bodily effects of anti-Asian sentiments, persistent orientalization, and the model minority myth. Living under such pressures is difficult, and, as such, it is understandable to want to turn to texts such as China Rich Girlfriend for that sense of familiarity. To deliver as a satire and serve as a mode of escape are two humble requests from the decidedly non-“China rich” wealthy—does China Rich Girlfriend deliver?

The novel is populated with characters made up in clusters of tired tropes: the jealous girlfriend, the monstrous mother-in-law. Despite the author’s protests of wariness towards moralizing, China Rich Girlfriend still ends up prescribing and reifying what defines a desirable Chinese woman. Two notable examples are Astrid Leong, the good wife and mother with a “branded school” upbringing and a sensible head on her shoulders, and the protagonist Rachel Chu, the novel’s fresh-faced ingénue who charms with her lack of pretences and her carefree ponytails. Implicit in this text are the women who are undesirable: the shrew who must be humbled, the gaggle of rich housewives who would rather tear each other down than build each other up, and the insecure ex-girlfriend who poisons a perceived rival to her fortune and is put back in place by being publicly shamed as “a good friend at a time I really needed one.” In other words, China Rich Girlfriend reifies that nebulous essence of Asianness through a carnivalesque spectacle of Otherness. The scene that best portrays such a spectacle would be the Tomb-Sweeping Day festival with matriarch Shang Su Yi and family: the spread of food offerings to the ancestors is described as being “laid out like a Caravaggio still life.” One might argue that the novel is making a statement on profanity and tradition, but even that would be a bit of a stretch.

China Rich Girlfriend is another addition to a string of texts that present an unmediated portrayal of deeply problematic tropes and stereotypes, particularly ones that enact a certain violence on the body of Asian women. As soon as the novel is finished, never mind how entertaining some may find it to be, one returns again to an outside world where the model minority myth bears heavy repercussions on the racialized body, and one cannot help but wonder, in a sober moment, if it was worth it.

It is imperative for me to end this review with a personal anecdote: while I was working at a bookstore, a customer walked in and asked for the directions to the “sociology” section. He was looking for Crazy Rich Asians, Kwan’s prequel to China Rich Girlfriend. Despite my attempts to clarify this misclassification, he persisted until I brought him to the “fiction” section. He was looking for Crazy Rich Asians, Kwan’s prequel to China Rich Girlfriend. Despite my attempts to clarify this misclassification, he persisted until I brought him to the “fiction” section. While unsuccessful in finding any nuance or message in this self-proclaimed satire, I wait with bated breath for that “deeper perspective” that will be revealed to us in the next book. Will Kwan surprise us with an unpacking of culturally and ideologically loaded terms “Asians” and “China Rich”? Until then, I return to the humdrum

On ne résume pas un roman d’enquête policière ; ce serait en nier le principe. Il suffit de mentionner que les personnages de Lessard évoluent dans un cercle restreint où les occurrences parmi les plus banales concourent à faire se croiser tout un chacun. Des juxtapositions de lieux offrent quant à elles rapprochements mentaux à rabais et inconfort généralisé : garderie et bennes à ordure ; salon de massage et casse-croûte de poulet frit ; prêteur sur gage et commissariat. Le narrateur entretient une connivence sourde avec son lecteur. Il faut que la poisse se sente dans l’air, que les surfaces graisseuses soient palpables. Le crime qui surgira là-dedans ne pourra qu’être sale. *Excellence poulet* est d’autre part un véritable roman montréalais contemporain, à savoir qu’il a le tact de situer son action *juste en marge* des lieux attendus. Le coin des rues Saint-Zotique et Papineau n’ est plus ouvrier comme il l’était naguère ; il n’ est pas homogène comme il le deviendra sans doute demain. Y dominent encore les maisons de chambres, les piétras commerces et une absence impressionnante d’ auto-indulgence. On y parle sans ambages, c'est-à-dire sans arrière-pensées. *Excellence poulet* donne envie d’ajouter qu’on y parle comme partout ailleurs. Je n’ai pas souvenir d’un roman récent au Québec qui déploie un talent équivalent pour la représentation écrite de l’argot francophone lié à la vie ordinaire. C’est peut-être là son plus vif triomphe dans l’authenticité. Faut-il passer par un roman noir comme celui dont Lessard nous donne l’exemple éclatant pour ressaisir aujourd’hui, comme par la bande, la texture de cette parure québécoise de...
The desire for methodologies that unsettle hegemonic practices of creating knowledge is, in most cases, commonly felt among scholars who aim to document the lives of those who are traditionally excluded or marginalized from official histories. Lisa Lowe and Alison R. Marshall share this sentiment as they challenge the limitations of nationalist and colonial modes of archival methods and knowledge production by focusing on the relations between people who have been elided or underrepresented in historical records. While Lowe reads broadly across archives to make linkages between groups of colonized people, Marshall applies an ethnographic lens in her examination of the experiences of Chinese migrants on the Canadian prairies through their affective connections and networks. Yet both works push us to reimagine intimacy or affect as an archive-in-motion—of “intimate” relations produced through migrations that move us beyond temporally and spatially fixed histories.

In The Intimacies of Four Continents, Lowe uses intimacy as a heuristic to observe how global processes and colonial histories enable the dominant notion of intimacy as associated with liberal interiority and personhood. She argues that the connections and associations between slaves, Indigenous peoples, and colonized labourers, which she formulates as “the intimacies of four continents,” disrupts universalized ideas around intimacy such as Anglo-American liberal subjectivity, sexual relations, domesticity, and family. Lowe’s method of reading across archives and continents—Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Americas—to interpret the past and reorient the boundaries of knowledge production moves beyond nationalist and colonial understandings of historical narratives. Her chapters examine a range of “intimacies” from the late-eighteenth to early-nineteenth centuries, particularly linkages between settler colonialism in the Americas, African slavery, Asian contract labour, and the British imperial trade.

Of particular interest is Lowe’s last chapter on the connection between Chinese labour and Black historical accounts. Lowe reads C. L. R. James’ Black Jacobins and W. E. B. Du Bois’ Black Reconstruction in America for their philosophical perspectives on history and methods of determining the colonial influences that shape received historical narratives. She argues that the global mass mobilization of Chinese workers after 1840 not only influenced European and US American liberal humanist ideologies, but also Black ideas of decolonization and emancipation in the contexts of anticolonialism and antislavery.

Lowe’s reconceptualization of intimacy not only frames the dominant meaning of intimacy as associated with Anglo-American interiority and privacy, and undermines the presumed power of dominant forms of relation, it also provides us with a broad and imaginative methodology for cultural analysis. “We are left,” she concludes, “with the project of imagining, mourning, and reckoning ‘other humanities’ within the received genealogy of ‘the human.’”

While Lowe engages with intimacy as a heuristic process, Marshall focuses on affect as interiority, namely how emotional relations, connections, and networks create and sustain communities. Drawing from archival materials she collected during the course of completing her previous book, The Way of...
the Bachelor, in Cultivating Connections: The Making of Chinese Prairie Canada, Marshall argues for the critical role of affect in examining local and global relations between Chinese migrants in Manitoba and Saskatchewan, and with China, in the early twentieth century. Rather than solely relying on written archival materials—including letters, photographs, newspaper articles, and Kuomintang (KMT, Chinese Nationalist League) membership documents—she uses an embodied ethnographic approach consisting of participant observation fieldwork and 300 oral history interviews. By tracing Chinese settlers’ emotional connections through her research, Marshall argues that the perpetuation and preservation of networks was critical in their endurance of living through experiences of migration and racism on the prairies.

In her first chapter Marshall discusses the global influence of the KMT, a political organization that functioned as an “affective regime” by connecting the Chinese in the prairies through Chinese nationalist infrastructure. The rest of the chapters depict intimate portraits of Chinese migrant settlers who navigated life on the prairies. Notably, half of the book focuses on the lives of Chinese Canadian women. As there are few written records documenting their experiences, Marshall draws from oral histories, fieldwork, handicrafts, and objects to represent the range of everyday life for Chinese women and their emotional, domestic, and religious connections.

Ultimately, both texts are important assets to anyone interested in not just themes of colonialism, labour, trade, and slavery, and of Chinese Canadian prairie history, respectively, but also critical methodologies—of how to read intimately for relations between people and communities and in relation across time and space—in order to grasp the possibilities of knowing that lie among what has been assumed unknowable, erased, or forgotten.

**Geography and its Boundary-Conditions**

*Ghadeer Malek and Ghaida Moussa, eds.*

_Min Fami: Arab Feminist Reflections on Identity, Space, and Resistance._ Inanna $29.95

**Don Chapman**

_The Lost Canadians: A Struggle for Citizenship Rights, Equality, and Identity._ Pugwash $21.95

Reviewed by Ranbir K. Banwait

In *Min Fami: Arab Feminist Reflections on Identity, Space, and Resistance*, editors Ghadeer Malek and Ghaida Moussa compile a compelling and thought-provoking collection of essays, fiction, poetry, and photographs that historicize the lives of Arab women around the world. Calling for historical, geographical, cultural, and socio-political specificity, *Min Fami’s* is nuanced in its treatment of Arab feminisms and the complexity of women’s lived experiences. In contrast to *Min Fami’s* transnational focus on political struggle and agency, Don Chapman’s _The Lost Canadians: A Struggle for Citizenship Rights, Equality, and Identity_ localizes the abnegation of rights in the Canadian context. _The Lost Canadians_ is a rant against political and bureaucratic inefficiency, as Chapman outlines the creation of an entire group of stateless people through the 1947 Canadian Citizenship Act. What follows is a detailed account of Chapman’s struggle to change the terrain of citizenship in Canada.

One of *Min Fami’s* major tasks is to trouble a singular understanding of feminism; feminism becomes a transnational phenomenon in the text, taking shape differently in different political moments and spaces. As Jihan Rabah asserts, “The forces behind peoples’ acts are located in the spaces or the countries they have occupied. Therefore, the reality of my oppression may be entangled in transnational forces and spaces as much as in specific geographical locations or other social, political, and economic factors.” For Rabah, Arab feminisms
can never be understood in the singular; rather, they are plural in praxis and practice, emerging out of geographical specificity and every woman’s unique experiences. Malek and Moussa’s choice to include a diverse selection of works mirrors this emphasis on the plural, as form and language create unruly spaces of creative response to this multiplicity. One poignant example of this desire to create space in language is Rauda Marcos’ poem “Departing a City.” Writing evocatively of how the violence she experiences becomes her body’s knowledge, she asserts, “The city of my presence I am leaving you / I am displaced in my land . . . / Illegal in every place / Even my identity does not exist / Without ‘status’ or poems.” Subjectivity emerges through poems here—if not through the legal trail associated with having “status” in a country. This focus on how geography is interlaced with identity in all its forms—be it legal, social, or political—is a preoccupation taken up in the rest of the text.

Space is far from being a stable configuration in Min Fami, since its writers and artists tackle spatial dynamics as layered and shifting forms of power. Consequently, Min Fami thinks through imaginative geographies and the boundaries of borders to reflect on the ways in which gendering folds into space. One example of this focus is Jacinthe A. Assaad’s fascinating article, in which she argues that women as artists must employ emergent spaces of representation in order to exercise agency in Egypt. While Assaad tackles the notion of representation as space, Nayrouz Abu Hatoum considers the bordering effects of Israeli rule for Palestinians in her work. Hatoum’s brilliant personal essay explores the visual and imaginative disruption that accompanies the fracturing of space, and yet she writes how, “even though the state does not contain me, the land always will.” The bordering effects of occupation, Hatoum reflects, have a doubling effect on women who have been both

“socially and symbolically confined to endless boundaries” as they cross through Israeli borders that are “bureaucratic, physical, racial, national, economic, based on citizenship, underground, areal or aerial.” In this sense, borders extend beyond the physical to reshape social relations and thus create new ways of imagining belonging.

While in Min Fami space and place become the boundary-conditions where belonging is lost, The Lost Canadians shows how the categories of gender, race, and nationality can come together to adjudicate the legal doctrine of citizenship. Dwelling on another set of narratives about displacement and loss, Chapman explains how provisions in the 1947 Canadian Citizenship Act left an estimated one million people without Canadian citizenship. Some of these cases include women who married non-Canadians, thus losing their citizenship because they were seen as extensions of their husbands’ legal identities. Some people became stateless when, as children, their parents became citizens of another country. Outlining his years of political activism on Parliament Hill, Chapman offers insight into some of these individual stories, ultimately arguing for a more inclusive notion of Canadian citizenship.

One thing that The Lost Canadians has in common with Min Fami is that it, too, draws attention to national borders, and the ways in which such borders re-articulate social connections that typically cut across borders. For instance, in these stories, the Canadian-American border functions as a prominent signifier for many Lost Canadians, often undercutting individuals’ sense of belonging. One such example of a First Nations family illustrates how border politics violate the inherent rights of Indigenous peoples to sovereignty and mobility. As Heather Harnois writes in a letter to Chapman: “I am part of generations of Canadian aboriginals . . .

Unfortunately, I was born in the USA. (Indians have the right to live or work in either country—Canada or USA by way of
treaty.) . . . My mother moved me to Canada when I was a child to be near the rest of our family . . . but after turning age 18 I was no longer allowed to be here." As Harnois explains, the Indian Registration Act, together with the Citizenship Act, construct her lack of status in Canada.

Another letter, from Donovan McGlaughlin to Chapman, also sheds light on the colonial history of identity documents such as birth certificates. As McGlaughlin reveals, registering births meant that authorities would be able to remove Indigenous children from their families and send them to Residential schools: "My mother and father were victims of the Residential schools. In 1954 they knew the only way to keep me from being also rounded up and taken away . . . was not to register my birth. . . . I have never had a real job before because I have no SIN, no driver's licence, no birth certificate. . . . what I need is the right to be a person." McGlaughlin's case draws attention to not only how legal identity is interwoven with the social, but also to the systemic forms of bureaucratic violence faced by First Nations communities in Canada. Indeed, although Chapman outlines at length how the Lost Canadians category includes Second World War veterans, war brides and children, and people born on military bases abroad, the Harnois and McGlaughlin examples perhaps best highlight Canadian citizenship's colonial legacy.

Thus, both Min Fami and The Lost Canadians explore how imaginative geographies—or spaces as places of belonging—can challenge border practices and the states that impose them. In highlighting the plurality of Arab feminisms, Malek and Moussa invest in a remarkable critical project. By contrast, one drawback of The Lost Canadians is the text's persistent comparison of those who are born Canadians and those (immigrants) who become Canadian, a comparison that overlooks the dangers of citizenship as a two-tiered system.

**Narratives of Canadian Women**

**Mary McDonald-Rissanen**  
*In the Interval of the Wave: Prince Edward Island Women's Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Life Writing.* McGill-Queen's UP $27.96

**Althea Prince, ed.**  
*Beyond the Journey: Women's Stories of Settlement and Community Building in Canada.* Insomniac $19.95

Reviewed by Emily Allen-Williams

Mary McDonald-Rissanen's *In the Interval of the Wave* provides a close reading of the historical nature as well as the literary and cultural value of diaries written by Prince Edward Island women in Canada during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the Prologue, McDonald-Rissanen gives credit for the book's title to the PEI poet Anne Compton from a phrase extracted from one of her poems in *Opening the Island* (2002). Critically, McDonald-Rissanen maintains emotional distance in her presentation of a genre that enabled women to construct identities as subject rather than object. McDonald-Rissanen takes a sweeping view of the genre with a foundation built on in-depth historical and statistical research through her use of archival materials, which previously received little to no scholarly investigation. While she discusses the "scribblings" (as diarist writer Lucy Maud Montgomery referred to her writing) of PEI women during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the Prologue, McDonald-Rissanen gives credit for the book's title to the PEI poet Anne Compton from a phrase extracted from one of her poems in *Opening the Island* (2002). Critically, McDonald-Rissanen maintains emotional distance in her presentation of a genre that enabled women to construct identities as subject rather than object. McDonald-Rissanen takes a sweeping view of the genre with a foundation built on in-depth historical and statistical research through her use of archival materials, which previously received little to no scholarly investigation. While she discusses the "scribblings" (as diarist writer Lucy Maud Montgomery referred to her writing) of PEI women during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the Prologue, McDonald-Rissanen gives credit for the book's title to the PEI poet Anne Compton from a phrase extracted from one of her poems in *Opening the Island* (2002). Critically, McDonald-Rissanen maintains emotional distance in her presentation of a genre that enabled women to construct identities as subject rather than object. McDonald-Rissanen takes a sweeping view of the genre with a foundation built on in-depth historical and statistical research through her use of archival materials, which previously received little to no scholarly investigation. While she discusses the "scribblings" (as diarist writer Lucy Maud Montgomery referred to her writing) of PEI women during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the Prologue, McDonald-Rissanen gives credit for the book's title to the PEI poet Anne Compton from a phrase extracted from one of her poems in *Opening the Island* (2002). Critically, McDonald-Rissanen maintains emotional distance in her presentation of a genre that enabled women to construct identities as subject rather than object. McDonald-Rissanen takes a sweeping view of the genre with a foundation built on in-depth historical and statistical research through her use of archival materials, which previously received little to no scholarly investigation. While she discusses the "scribblings" (as diarist writer Lucy Maud Montgomery referred to her writing) of PEI women during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the Prologue, McDonald-Rissanen gives credit for the book's title to the PEI poet Anne Compton from a phrase extracted from one of her poems in *Opening the Island* (2002). Critically, McDonald-Rissanen maintains emotional distance in her presentation of a genre that enabled women to construct identities as subject rather than object. McDonald-Rissanen takes a sweeping view of the genre with a foundation built on in-depth historical and statistical research through her use of archival materials, which previously received little to no scholarly investigation. While she discusses the "scribblings" (as diarist writer Lucy Maud Montgomery referred to her writing) of PEI women during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the Prologue, McDonald-Rissanen gives credit for the book's title to the PEI poet Anne Compton from a phrase extracted from one of her poems in *Opening the Island* (2002). Critically, McDonald-Rissanen maintains emotional distance in her presentation of a genre that enabled women to construct identities as subject rather than object. McDonald-Rissanen takes a sweeping view of the genre with a foundation built on in-depth historical and statistical research through her use of archival materials, which previously received little to no scholarly investigation. While she discusses the "scribblings" (as diarist writer Lucy Maud Montgomery referred to her writing) of PEI women during the nineteen
well-crafted thesis—that various aspects of the diaries such as the types of paper, handwriting styles, sketches, and linguistic turns of phrase(s) contribute to the “subversive” potential inherent in such writing. She further contends that these women used their writings subversively to more effectively negotiate Victorianism (which was adopted in nineteenth-century PEI) in tandem with the challenges of their everyday lives. Extracting from the life-writings of eighteen diarists, McDonald-Rissanen is effective in presenting the reader with a respectable range of diarist writings so as to include various female subjects—pioneer, rural, teacher/professional, and urban bourgeois. In one chapter, she highlights the journeys of five “travel” diarists throughout the British Empire and Canada. What makes McDonald-Rissanen’s work most compelling and worthy of critical importance is her intertextual readings of the diaries with documents such as letters, other diaries, period newspapers, histories, and anecdotes, which further extend her emphasis on historical and statistical information in her cultural and literary discussion of PEI women’s life writings of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Essays and poems in *Beyond the Journey: Women’s Stories of Settlement and Community Building in Canada* emanate from various levels of culturally and politically informed emotion. In this collection, Althea Prince assembles the writing of an eclectic group of women from Albania, Antigua, Barbados, China, Germany, Grenada, India, Iran, Sri Lanka, and Jamaica. In so doing, Prince avoids the all too convenient literary pitfall of narrowly compartmentalizing the narratives of immigrant women in Canada. Of particular note is Prince’s demarcation of the voices within, as some are women who came to Canada as children (with their parent or parents) and others immigrated to Canada as adults. In the introduction, Prince provides a critical yet cursory and “exposing” mention of Canada’s immigration policy as one of exclusion rather than inclusion, which (may be) counter to more popular and pervasively held views.

The women’s narratives, as well as the poems of one of the contributors, are most compelling in that they resist singularity of focus and voice. Instead, the selections more accurately reflect the diversity of the Canadian landscape due (largely) to its immigrant population. This reflection is a testament to Prince’s ability as editor to selectively present narratives and poems not only of journeys that portray varied cultural, ethnic, and religious foundations, but also of those that portray a full range of emotions—joy, anger, sadness, pain, and those shaded/combined subtleties of the same. At the core of Prince’s collection is her embedded thesis that systemic racism and gender bias continue to be ignored even in landscapes as diverse as many areas of Canada. She suggests that such writing as in *Beyond the Journey: Women’s Stories of Settlement and Community Building in Canada* can spark the dialectic of difference as opposed to cultural absorption and assimilation.

**Unarresting Borders**

Linda M. Morra

*Unarrested Archives: Case Studies in Twentieth-Century Canadian Women’s Authorship.*

U of Toronto P $29.95

Gillian Roberts

*Discrepant Parallels: Cultural Implications of the Canada-US Border.* McGill-Queen’s UP $34.95

Reviewed by Lorraine York

These two distinguished volumes take part in a crucial and exciting cultural-studies-inflected conversation about the politics of Canadian cultural production. Turning our attention away from a search for a distinctive Canadian culture defined by a search for common elements, towards the ethically
challenging analysis of intra-national (and, indeed, contra-national) relations of power, these studies disclose the exclusions practiced by the search for a national culture.

Linda Morra’s *Unarrested Archives* draws from Derrida’s foundational *Archive Fever*, in particular his etymological exploration of the term archive, which stems from the Greek *arkheion*, the home of the superior magistrates or *archons*, where official documents were kept, in Derrida’s suggestive words, under “house arrest.” In her study of twentieth-century Canadian women writers Pauline Johnson, Emily Carr, Sheila Watson, Jane Rule, and Marlene NourbeSe Philip, Morra perceptively expands upon this notion of “arrest” in order to examine “how the literary archives of Canadian women writers came to be forged within, against, or outside centralized repositories of official records.” That might mean, in Pauline Johnson’s case, the loss of pre-1929 archives during their transfer from the University of Reading to the Harry Ransom Centre at the University of Texas at Austin, which points synecdochally to the contemporary disregard for the value of literary women’s documents. It also means, in Morra’s reading of Johnson’s stage career, performance is an evanescent archive of embodied cultural memory. (Performance theorist Peggy Phelan’s observation that “Performance’s being . . . becomes itself through disappearance” is apt.) For Carr and Watson, it means operating through male agents to ensure access to a public sphere that devalued women’s cultural production. And, in the most fascinating case of all, that of Marlene NourbeSe Philip, it means refusing to deposit one’s archives in a traditional repository as an act of resistance to the nation-building cultural exercise that those repositories undergird. These case studies expand our notions of archive, making us aware of the many manifestations of archival practice that resist “arrest” and exceed the boundaries of traditional archival repositories. In so reading these five very different engagements with archive, Morra tends to resolve each instance of “unarrest” into resistant cultural practice. It is tempting to do so, but there are times when, for instance, Carr’s collaboration with powerful male mentors and intermediaries can also be seen as complicit, just as Morra fully recognizes the complicity with nation-building ideologies that Carr enacted in her attempts to build an artistic archive out of Indigenous material culture, denying “Indigenous persons the very agencies she was seeking for herself.” Notwithstanding this understandable desire to read these arrested and unarrested archives for evidence of women’s resistant practices, Morra brilliantly succeeds in her objectives to “enlarge[ ] critical scholarship about what constitutes the archive” and to encourage researchers to “reconsider how to expand their methods from arrested to unarrested archives”—how to see the powerful operations of archival production in acts that might look, from a conventional viewpoint, like archival absence or failure.

Gillian Roberts also draws inspiration from Derrida, in this case his theories of hospitality, as she did in her previous study of prize culture, *Prizing Literature: The Celebration and Circulation of National Culture* (2011). In *Discrepant Parallels*, Roberts engages with Derrida’s coinage “hostipitality,” that amalgam of hostility and welcome that Derrida sees contradictorily at work in acts of hospitality, to read Canadian border texts that are similarly mixed in their gestures of welcome and renunciation. Like Morra’s reading of Canadian women’s literary archives, Roberts turns her attention to the border as a site of intra-national engagements. Wary of a reading of the border that seeks to construct a monolithic Canadianness by distinguishing it from a similarly monolithic Americanness (what one might call the Molson “I Am
Canadian” approach), Roberts shows how engagements with the border—whether in Anglo-Canadian nationalist texts such as David McFadden’s Great Lakes Suite, or from Indigenous perspectives by writers Jeannette Armstrong, Thomas King, and Drew Hayden Taylor, or in African-Canadian texts by Lawrence Hill, Djanet Sears, and Wayde Compton—“puncture, temper, supplement, or contradict the culturally dominant view of the border’s significance to Canada” as the marking off of the mythic peaceable kingdom.

Several contributions made by this thoughtful book deserve special mention: Roberts devotes a chapter to televisual representations of the border in Bordertown (1989-1991), Due South (1994-1999), and The Border (2008-2010) in which she compellingly reads these texts, like others in her study, alongside their respective contemporary historical events: the Free Trade Agreement, the North American Free Trade Agreement, and 9/11. Roberts also considers, as many analyses of the Canada-US borderland condition do not, its hemispheric context; this “critical borderlands practice” allows Roberts to think about the ways in which the Canada-US border, so often read by Canadian observers as a space of disempowerment, can also look like a site of privilege when one thinks about the politics of the Canada-Mexico border. Once again, though, Roberts brings these relations of power inside her study of Canadian cultural politics; in readings of Janette Turner Hospital’s Borderline, Jane Urquhart’s Sanctuary Line, and Guillermo Verdecchia’s Fronteras Americanas/American Borders, Roberts ponders how power relations “are manifested at the 49th parallel at the same time as negotiations of power at other border sites in the Americas are brought to bear on Canada's relationship to the United States.” This is sophisticated, assumption-breaking transnational criticism.

In studying archives that may be “unarrested,” that may rupture our notions of the archive as physical, state-sanctioned repository of documents, and in studying a border that undeniably imposes material inequities and yet is the site of radically different imaginations and political meanings, Linda Morra and Gillian Roberts offer us a Canadian cultural analysis that urges us to look inside Canadian cultural practices, acknowledging within them both the “arresting” of meaning by privilege and the “discrepancies” that can empower decolonizing acts of “unarresting.”

L’histoire de l’art pas à pas

Maxime Olivier Moutier

Journal d’un étudiant en histoire de l’art. Éditions Marchand de feuilles 34.95 $

Compte rendu par Ariane Noël de Tilly

Adoptant la forme d’un journal intime, le dixième livre de Maxime Olivier Moutier invite le lecteur à suivre, au fil des saisons et des sessions universitaires, le parcours d’un étudiant inscrit au Certificat en histoire de l’art à l’Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM). Pensées, réflexions, émotions et fantasmes, mais aussi événement réels, dont la grève des professeurs de l’UQAM à l’hiver 2009 et la pandémie de grippe A (H1N1) de 2009 à 2010, tissent la trame du récit qui peu à peu se développe entre le 30 novembre 2008 et le 22 avril 2011.

Dès la première entrée du journal, le lecteur apprend que l’homme qui tient ce dernier est psychanalyste de formation, auteur de quelques romans, marié et père de trois enfants. Son nom ne sera jamais dévoilé alors que celui des professeurs et chargés de cours du département d’histoire de l’art de l’UQAM le sera. Moutier brouille donc les cartes et, conséquemment, il s’avère difficile de discerner ce qui relève de l’invention ou de la réalité. En entrevue au journal Le Devoir (22 août 2015), Moutier
dit ressentir le besoin d'écrire sur ses propres expériences et, dans ce cas particulier, sur son retour aux études. La démarche était donc à la fois personnelle et littéraire.

De manière générale, il est intéressant de découvrir quels artistes l’auteur estime et quels historiens de l’art il lit. Il est clair qu’il parle davantage des artistes que des œuvres. La lecture de ces dernières demeure d’ailleurs plutôt superficielle. Si le nom d’artistes de différentes époques est parfois mentionné, c’est l’appréciation personnelle qui prévaut au détriment d’un positionnement analytique. Étant donné le titre du journal, le lecteur pouvait-il s’attendre à une analyse plus poussée du point de vue de l’histoire de l’art ? D’ailleurs, un lecteur averti notera une erreur de chronologie majeure : Moutier écrit que Marcel Duchamp a peint son Nu descendant l’escalier, sans préciser lequel, dix ans après avoir réalisé son ready-made le plus connu, Fontaine (1917), alors que Duchamp complète le Nu descendant l’escalier no 1 en 1911 et le Nu descendant l’escalier no 2 en 1912.

Au fil des entrées du journal, l’auteur rapporte de manière très détaillée son cheminement académique tout en faisait allusion à ses soucis familiaux et à ceux du quotidien. Malgré la panoplie d’étudiants et d’étudiantes qu’il côtoiera pendant ses études, seule une consœur de classe, Prunella, rencontrée à la première session sera fréquemment mentionnée. De leur camaraderie initiale naîtra une relation beaucoup plus intime et donnant lieu à des retombées fâcheuses. Les autres étudiants seront surtout évoqués en référence à leur comportement en classe. Sur ce dernier plan, Moutier a bien su dépeindre la réalité du monde universitaire d’aujourd’hui où l’utilisation de nombreux appareils électroniques fait en sorte que les étudiants se laissent entraîner dans des mondes virtuels et détourner leur attention du propos des professeurs.

Le point fort du roman est la justesse avec laquelle Moutier décrit la vie étudiante : l’enthousiasme des débuts de session, le stress des fins de session, les travaux rédigés à la dernière minute, mais aussi la crainte de ne pas être en mesure de compléter son programme. Il met aussi en lumière le fait que l’histoire de l’art est une discipline qui s’enseigne à travers les reproductions publiées dans des ouvrages ou projetées dans des salles de cours bien sombres. Dans ses descriptions, au commencement du journal, l’engouement du début de ses études en histoire de l’art trouve écho dans les entrées nombreuses et quasi quotidiennes, tandis que la fatigue et le manque de motivation de la fin de son certificat sont évoqués ou accentués par des entrées rédigées à des intervalles de moins en moins réguliers. Ce changement dans le mode de rédaction du journal a un effet sur la lecture : au début, le livre est difficile à poser alors qu’à la fin, il est facile de le mettre de côté. Le lecteur ressent moins l’urgence de savoir comment le récit va se terminer. D’ailleurs, le dénouement est quelque peu surprenant puisque Moutier a fait le choix de mettre fin au roman avant que son personnage ne se rende à Venise pour y suivre le dernier cours qui lui permettra de compléter son programme d’études. Le choix pourrait-il s’expliquer par le fait que le compte-rendu d’une telle aventure ferait appel à un autre genre littéraire que celui du journal intime, soit le récit de voyage ?

Kafka’s Metamorphosis
Patrick O’Neill
Transforming Kafka: Translation Effects. U of Toronto P $55.00
Reviewed by Andre Furlani

The French-speaking protagonist of Vladimir Nabokov’s dystopian 1945 novel Bend Sinister calls his boot-remover Gregoire, because the utensil takes the Samsa-shape of a giant scarab. Nabokov’s character has entered and extended what, in Transforming Kafka, Patrick
O'Neill calls “the worldwide Kafka system,” a “macrotext” assembled out of the variously-redacted editions of his work, the cumulative translations these editions enable, and the consequent international renown of the Habsburg writer. He explains that “the boundaries of Kafka’s text are extended by its multilingual translations” rather than merely approximated by it, and the object of this absorbing and revelatory study is that extension.

Those who have furthered the macrotext include Jorge Luis Borges, the first Spanish-language promoter of Kafka's work; his Italian translator, the Auschwitz survivor Primo Levi; and his Polish translator Bruno Schulz, shot by an SS officer. Kafka's earliest translator, his Czech companion Milena Jesenská, died at the Ravensbrück concentration camp. Seemingly phantasmagorical, fabular fictions foresaw the Nazi horrors that would consume the writer’s family as well as several of his translators.

“Kafka’s texts,” writes O’Neill, professor emeritus in the Department of Languages at Queen's University, “whether encountered in the original or in translation, are invariably characterized by their unrelenting challenge to the reader to make them make sense: it is clear that that challenge begins no later than their title.” The posthumously published novels were entitled not by the author but by his close friend and first editor, Max Brod. Amerika or Der Verschollene or neither? How to render Der Prozeß: Trial or Process? Metamorphosis or Transformation?

Nabokov, a lepidopterist who believed he had once glimpsed Kafka in a Berlin tram, told his Cornell University students, including Thomas Pynchon, that the monstrously transformed Gregor was nonetheless an entomologically exact dung beetle. He objected to Willa and Edwin Muir's translation of Die Verwandlung as The Metamorphosis, a title that subsumed the biological denotation beneath a mythological connotation, even as Kafka had pointedly not entitled the 1915 novella Die Metamorphose. When in 1938 Borges translated the story literally as La transformación, the publisher overruled him in favour of La metamorfosis. Yet, in contrast to his coeval James Joyce, who began Ulysses in the Habsburg harbour town of Trieste (and on whom O’Neill has written two extraordinary macrotextual studies), for land-locked Kafka mythology is largely an exhausted resource that his fiction (if not his essay on the sirens) dispenses with. As O’Neill painstakingly shows, while the title is always The Metamorphosis, rarely is the verb-form of Kafka’s actual title (verwandelt) as it appears in the novella’s opening sentence translated as versions of “metamorphosed,” reverting instead to versions of “transformed.”

O’Neill traces the fascinating permutations of the lexical as well as situational ambiguities for which Kafka is notorious in translations into Norwegian, Russian, Dutch, Portuguese, Spanish, Italian and French as well as English. O’Neill’s comparison, for instance, of the opening of The Trial, presents a characteristically indeterminate narrative focalization. The German “mußte” rendered in the English phrase, “Someone must have traduced Joseph K.,” implies, according to O’Neill, focalization through the character by means of free indirect discourse. (My impression is that, like many of Kafka’s narrators, this one simply exercises a scrupulously limited omniscience. Who in Kafka could be all-knowing?) The main clause follows: “denn ohne daß er etwas Böses getan hätte, wurde er eines Morgens verhaftet”: “for without having done anything wrong he was arrested one morning.” O’Neill notes that it is not only translators into English, a language deficient in subjunctives, but also translators into those that are not, such as the Romance languages, who elide the ambiguity of that cautiously inflected hätte. Yet two of his very examples, Nesme’s into French and Raja’s into Italian, in fact do reproduce without elision the vaguening
expound Kafka, yet, far from being a forbidding technical treatment of a specialized subject, *Transforming Kafka* is a peculiarly original and rewarding introduction to the author’s corpus as well as to its transmutations beyond German. By deftly comparing opening paragraphs, titles, and proper names of five canonical texts in a range of translations, O’Neill elucidates prevailing themes and isolates pervasive ambiguities in Kafka, all the while illuminating the subtleties and aporias of his deceptively classical expository language, which has posed such an irresistible challenge to his translators and provocation to his expositors.

Resurgent Indigenous Identities in Urban Spaces

Evelyn Peters and Chris Andersen, eds. *Indigenous in the City: Contemporary Identities and Cultural Innovation*. U of British Columbia P $34.95

Reviewed by Dallas Hunt

The cumulative effects of centuries of colonial discourse have led to representations of Indigenous peoples that position them as “out of place” in the city. In response to these racist representations of urban Indigeneity (or the lack thereof), there is a small but growing body of work that emphasizes cities as spaces of Indigenous community and belonging. The collection *Indigenous in the City*, edited by Evelyn Peters and Chris Andersen, charts an approach that attends to the vibrancy of urban Indigenous life, but also refuses to minimize the many challenges Indigenous peoples face in city settings as the result of ongoing colonialism. In doing so, the collection engages the complexities of the accumulated assemblages of colonial policies, internal community dynamics, and individual experiences that have led to Indigenous migrations to cities. At the same time, the contributors consider how urban Indigenous peoples embody and enact their Indigeneity in textured,
nuanced, and at times contradictory ways that might challenge colonial expectations, as well as notions of Indigeneity that are often imagined within Indigenous communities themselves.

The text is divided into four sections: Canada, the US, Australia, and New Zealand. Each grouping is preceded by a succinct historical account of urbanization in the area under review. While these summations are brief, they nonetheless illuminate the many similarities of colonial policies and the corresponding responses to them in countries that are on opposite sides of the globe. Although the ambitious scope of the collection makes summary difficult, there are some noteworthy contributions that should be addressed in brief detail.

A standout in the collection is Jay T. Johnson’s “Dancing into Place.” Johnson outlines how US Indigenous peoples assert their presence through urban powwows and create new forms of community that enable them to honour their ancestral territories and the lands they currently inhabit. Another significant chapter is Yale Belanger’s work on the Canada v. Misquadis decision and how legal policies illuminate the multiple jurisdictional parameters through which Indigenous peoples must navigate. Although the sections on Australia and New Zealand take up considerably less space in the collection, Kelly Greenop and Paul Memmott provide an invaluable look into the workings of kinship relations in Brisbane, Australia, while Brad Coombes’ work on environmental racism, focused specifically on the Otara Creek in South Auckland, is perceptive and resonates with the issues facing Indigenous peoples globally. While there are numerous significant contributions to the collection, these chapters in particular are highlighted because they take a different approach than the statistical analyses that dominate most of the collection. Indeed, if the text has one shortcoming, it is the constant appeal to statistics and population demographics that often obscure or detract from more nuanced explorations of urban Indigenous experiences.

As Peters and Andersen themselves note, a “detailed history of the mechanisms through which Indigenous people in different countries were excluded from urban spaces has yet to be written,” and “the characteristics of urban Indigeneity are still poorly understood.” This collection tries to remedy these persistent and pervasive misunderstandings in earnest, and offers an important contribution to what must necessarily be an ongoing conversation not only about urban Indigenous life today, but also about the rich histories of Indigenous peoples in urban settings and the place of the city in Indigenous futures.

**Peripheries of Belonging**

**Alison Pick**
*Between Gods.* Doubleday $29.95

**Camilla Gibb**
*This is Happy.* Doubleday $29.95

Reviewed by Emily Ballantyne

Belonging is a vulnerable and uncertain process that can be burdened by difficult feelings—the desire to belong is often coupled with rejection, exclusion, isolation, and despair. Award-winning Toronto authors Alison Pick and Camilla Gibb each describe in memoir their respective journeys toward building a sense of community that is fraught with depression and displacement. These women use literary memoir to better understand their relational identities—as mothers, writers, friends, and descendants—alongside grief, mourning, and loss. Their texts dig deep into the affective consequences of fostering community and the emotional labour behind formal and informal affiliations.

Pick’s memoir *Between Gods* describes her depression and spiritual uncertainty as she negotiates her family’s suppressed Jewish
heritage by undertaking the process of conversion. While she was researching her award-winning novel *Far to Go* (2010), she could not fully separate her book from her own family’s escape from the Holocaust and her grandparents’ subsequent decision to keep their Jewish origins a secret. As she unravels and researches her past, she feels an intense desire to connect with and understand her Jewish origins, and is confronted by personal and communal boundaries that bar her access. Because Judaism is matrilineal, and her Jewish heritage comes from her father, she must have her conversion formally approved by a rabbinical court. During this two-year process, she looks for other ways to understand and belong to Judaism—from taking courses to observing holidays and attending synagogue—all while having her commitment to the faith actively discouraged or questioned because of her simultaneous desires to marry and start a family with a non-Jewish partner.

The way that Pick understands affiliation extends backward in time through shared loss. She makes a strong case for intergenerational, emotional connections with her ancestors that she describes as “bad blood.” She suggests that the unexpressed grief of her family is manifest in her own emotional responses. Her relationship with her ancestors is primarily understood through feeling—in particular through trying to understand and grapple with the fear and despair of those who were lost in concentration camps, and the shame and guilt of her grandparents as they meticulously hid their identity from their own children. Pick compellingly evokes the ways in which she feels collectively while experiencing individually. The memoir accounts a suffering and redemption that is incomplete, but masterfully recounted.

Where Pick wrote primarily about the liminal two-year period in which she was “between gods,” Gibb’s *This is Happy* works in broader strokes to craft her relationship to community from childhood into early motherhood. Much of her early life is troubled with isolation from a broken family. Her father suffers from mental illness, and is abusive and itinerant. She grows up in multiple locations and environments, often building relationships that are broken and unrecovered. She is interested in the coherence and security of family, but is caught up in depression and isolation. Her experiences are wide reaching: she pursues graduate work in anthropology at Oxford and in Ethiopia, spends time in a mental hospital, and finally finds a sense of family with a partner in Toronto. When this partner leaves her during the early stages of pregnancy, she must cope with a solitary identity when she most desires community. She effectively starts over, rebuilding her life from the ground up.

Gibb’s work is broken into parts based on the gestation of a bird from incubation to flight, developing a metaphor from within the text. These divisions mark emotional divisions in the text and structure Gibb’s sense of growth and development. As she frankly discusses her depression during her pregnancy, she also reaches out to networks of support for those who are alone not by choice, and experiences limited access. Prenatal classes are either for families or for women who are single by choice; her friends are divided when her marriage dissolves. But amidst the losses and disappointments, Gibb finds other single people and starts to craft a new support network.

Perhaps the strongest feature of Gibb’s text is the way she interweaves other narratives of loneliness into her own in the latter half of the memoir. Her sense of identity grows to encompass new members, bringing with it an unintended happiness that comes from collectivity. Gibb’s experiences of early motherhood are interspersed with the stories of her own chosen community: Tita, her nanny; Micah, her brother; and Melissa, a new friend far from home. Tita is supporting a large family in the Philippines,
recovering from an abusive past employer, and trying to navigate her husband’s move to Canada. Micah is recovering from a drug addiction and looking for stable work, while Melissa is looking for love and trying to complete her doctoral thesis. This small collective works and lives together to raise Gibb’s infant daughter and prepare for the future. This is Happy emphasizes the value and strength of circumstantial kinship—the way compassion can heal, even if the bonds are temporary. Gibb evokes the difficult transition period of new motherhood and reframes some of its anguish as the space of happiness and renewal.

Both of these memoirs attest to the emotional labour of belonging. The authors demonstrate the boundaries that limit access to support networks and the isolation that comes from family trauma and relationship dissolution. Both writers struggle to understand family intergenerationally, acknowledging that they are shaped by their parents, and are subsequently shaping their daughters, even in utero. While Pick ultimately draws strength from recovering her family history and restoring Jewish culture in her home, Gibb focuses her energy on defining herself within the structure of a new, chosen family that remains shifting and in flux. These are both memoirs that attest to ways of belonging on the peripheries of existing communities. They attest to the emotional costs of this belonging, and at the same time articulate so clearly the value of connecting with others to better understand the self.

L’imaginaire de l’exil

Rodney Saint-Éloi

Je suis la fille du baobab brûlé.

Mémoire d’encrier 17,00 $

Compte rendu par Kristen Stern

« Ceci n’est pas un poème », déclare le poète dans le prologue de Je suis la fille du baobab brûlé, le recueil le plus récent de Rodney Saint-Éloi, écrivain et fondateur de la maison d’édition Mémoire d’encrier. Le poète offre une méditation sur l’exil et la migration, méditation qui reprend certains motifs habituellement associés à l’expatriation tout en modulant cette expérience à travers son parcours personnel.


C’est la fille du baobab du titre qui prend la parole dans tout le poème, jouant ainsi le rôle de masque fictif du poète. Pourtant, vers la fin, ce masque se complique. La grand-mère Tida, qui apparaît dans d’autres poèmes de Saint-Éloi et qui, comme l’auteur a lui-même dévoilé lors d’entretiens, l’a inspiré alors qu’il faisait ses premiers pas dans la littérature, se révèle être aussi la grand-mère de la fille du baobab. Ce détail, qui n’échappera pas aux lecteurs déjà familiers avec l’œuvre et la figure publique de Rodney Saint-Éloi, situe rétrospectivement le livre, cette fois-ci en faisant plus de place à la fiction autobiographique (ou faudrait-il plutôt dire autobiographie fictive ?) qu’à la première lecture. Comme son compatriote et camarade en migrations Haïti-Québec, Dany Laferrière, Saint-Éloi tire profit de
Books in Review

Canadian Literature 226 / Autumn 2015

Immoderate Families

Jocelyne Saucier; Rhonda Mullins, trans.
Twenty-One Cardinals. Coach House $19.95

Marina Endicott
Close to Hugh. Doubleday $32.95

Reviewed by Tina Northrup

Published originally as Les héritiers de la mine, Jocelyne Saucier’s novel about a scattered, semi-mythical clan of estranged siblings becomes the captivating Twenty-One Cardinals in the hands of its translator, Rhonda Mullins. “We’re nothing like other families,” says the first of the novel’s six narrators as the story begins to unfold. “We are self-made. We are an essence unto ourselves, unique and dissonant, the only members of our species.”

The novel’s frame narrative is subtly reminiscent of a closed circle mystery. The year is 1995, and the adult Cardinal siblings, nearly two dozen of them, have gathered from the far corners of the earth to congregate in a hotel at the southern edge of Val-d’Or. In the midst of their family reunion, an unspoken secret looms large. Like the Cardinal clan’s own history, the hotel is a “labyrinth of corridors and illusion,” and as the siblings gather together within this space, readers may begin to wonder if a body will soon be discovered.

The novel unfolds compellingly through the voices of six of the Cardinal children, and in Mullins’ hands each of these voices is realized deftly, with subtle shifts in tone and style that allow discrete perspectives and personalities to emerge. The mystery at the heart of the novel comes steadily into view as each narrator recounts their memories, and the result is a gripping narrative that this reviewer, for one, found impossible to put down. For this reason, it is disappointing to find that the seventh and last chapter is also the most laboured. Like Agatha Christie’s Hercule Poirot, Saucier cannot resist bringing all of the novel’s characters together in the final act for a much-anticipated revelation of the truth. Although readers will no doubt welcome this climax and closure, the exposition is uncharacteristically melodramatic, and the moral of the story is laid on rather thick. Not having read the original, I cannot say if this is an effect of the translation from one idiom to another. Happily, however, this weakness is outweighed by the novel’s many strengths.

Whereas the interwoven perspectives in Twenty-One Cardinals combine to create a cohesive and harmonious whole, the interlocking elements that Marina Endicott brings together in Close to Hugh create something of a puzzle. On the one hand, the novel is intensely literary. It sustains an intimate free-indirect style that is often reminiscent of Woolf’s To the Lighthouse; it incorporates rich and perceptive ekphrases on various visual arts, and it embeds significant commentary on works such as A Streetcar Named Desire, Twelfth Night, and The Importance of Being Earnest. On the other hand, Endicott makes use of a
number of devices that hold the novel’s seriousness in check. Most chapters have been given the names of popular phrases, song titles, and film titles in which the word “you” has been replaced consistently with “Hugh,” as in: “I Only Have Eyes for Hugh” and “Guess Hugh’s Coming to Dinner.” While these are often charming, other elements tend towards kitsch. Most sections include epigraphs that have been excerpted from Wikipedia entries on Buddhism, and although they might be said to offer some commentary on the collaborative nature of knowledge, it is difficult to feel that they are integral to the work as a whole.

Close to Hugh spans roughly two weeks in the life of one Hugh Argyll—“an Everyman for our times,” as the book’s jacket copy declares—and as the narration dips in and out of the lives of the characters who orbit Hugh, the novel creates a composite portrait of a close-knit and familial community in an invented Peterborough. Some of the novel’s characters are merely types: Hugh’s mother, Mimi, is distinctly reminiscent of the legendary Margaret Trudeau; Burton, a large gay man whose appetites are made menacing, is exploited as both villain and jester. Although Endicott has a gift for free-indirect style, the undeniable beauty of her narration does not always allow for strong differentiation between the voices of the novel’s many characters. The teenagers suffer most in this regard: apart from being exceptionally talented in each of their chosen arts, they are rendered exceptionally well-spoken as well. This makes them seem airbrushed and glossy, and also, somehow, somewhat quaint.

Overall, Close to Hugh is an ambitious book that does not succeed at every level, but remains in many ways an impressive and captivating read.
Martin John's moments of seeming lucidity
reminders of the at-times thin line that
separates everyone from gripping illnesses.

Nino Ricci’s most recent novel, Sleep, also
takes us into the grim depths of a male pro-
tagonist who is coming apart at the seams.
Sleep’s protagonist, David Pace, is an academic,
a historian, who has found widespread success
with his first book. He has also developed
what is diagnosed as a sleep disorder. We
meet him, at first, on his way back from a
trip to the zoo with his young son Marcus,
where a near miss on the highway caused by
David’s drowsiness leads to an argument at
home with his wife Julia. On the one hand,
the narrative begins with this moment, and
it seems to be the moment at which David’s
life begins to unravel. But, on the other hand,
perhaps it has already unravelled, years ago,
before any of his sleep problems begin. David
has issues with both of his parents, is distant
from everyone, is a pathological liar and
womanizer, and, whenever he is confronted
about anything, no matter how small, he
reacts in anger and by turning the accusa-
tions back on his interrogators—often those
who love him the most, each of whom give
up on him, one by one.

From this drowsy beginning point, we
watch David’s life spiral out of control. As
he begins to take medication for his sleep,
he finds himself traveling on an ever more
outlandish cocktail of drugs that he con-
ceals from everyone around him. His ability
to sleep disappears, his hold on reality slips,
but his anger only grows. We watch him
lose his marriage and access to his son, and
then he is put on unpaid leave from his
academic position after a series of errors
and debauches. A long-time friend from
his grad school days attempts to throw him
a lifeline, but David only squanders that
goodwill, in turn, through the shadiest of
acts. We find him eventually washed up and
traveling in an unnamed and very danger-
ous failed state, attempting to track down
the thread that will lead him to be able to
write his next book, an act that he somehow stupidly thinks will save him.

Sleep is deeply frustrating because David is so boneheaded. Late in the book, the third-person narrator observes that David “is a man of history who wants to stand outside it,” and that although he “claims such an interest in history,” he “has not even bothered to understand his own.” Perhaps he believes himself to be better than everyone else. What is so irksome about this superiority is his utter inability to apologize or to show even the slightest sign of contrition for any of his acts. He is given many, many opportunities to apologize or to change, and yet he does nothing different, plunging headlong down his self-destructive path. His self-assessments are damning, yet he does not translate this awareness of his failures into action that could lead to forgiveness, instead clinging to his impossibly wide-ranging follow-up book, a project that is clearly never going to materialize.

Both Nino Ricci’s Sleep and Anakana Schofield’s Martin John present us with fully realized, deeply problematic protagonists who display shadow sides of masculinity. The depths that these characters reach are frightening; their impact on the worlds around them are alarming; and the result is two novels that are difficult to put down.

Past, Present, and Future North

Edward Struzik
Future Arctic: Field Notes from a World on the Edge. Island $27.00

Emilie Cameron
Far Off Metal River: Inuit Lands, Settler Stories, and the Making of the Contemporary Arctic. U of British Columbia P $32.95
Reviewed by Margery Fee

These books survey a site exemplifying climate change and concerns about sovereignty, extinctions, and resource extraction. That the Northwest Passage might become an international shipping route and that oil, gas, and minerals might become accessible for development has increased pressure on the land and all who live there.

Struzik is an award-winning journalist, explorer, writer, and photographer, and a fellow of the School of Policy Studies at Queen’s Institute for Energy and Environmental Policy. He starts with a forest fire that burned for 222 days in 1950 on the British Columbia-Yukon border, comparing it to more recent fires in 2004, 2007, and 2014. In a drastic turn, the tundra itself burned in 2007, releasing the carbon sequestered there for millions of years. He notes other shifts driven by a warming climate: orcas coming north to kill narwhals; grizzly bears mating with polar bears; and oil exploration companies coming north to the territories of Dene, Athabaskan, and Inuit peoples. He discusses much else, including storms, the freshwater flows and winds that maintain the Arctic ecosystem, the ice, polar bears, caribou, birds, and finally development. Only recently, these frozen lands were seen as worthless—in 1949, the west coast of Hudson Bay was proposed as a nuclear test site. The Exxon Valdez oil spill on the Alaska coast in 1989 is one of Struzik’s touchstones. His main point is that pressure for oil and other development overlooks the fact that spills on ice cannot be cleaned up. In a region with no deep-sea port and a wholly inadequate number of outdated icebreakers, such projects as the $300 million all-season road from Inuvik (2011, pop. 3,484) to Tuktoyaktuk (2011, pop. 854) risk advancing resource extraction without similarly expensive infrastructure to respond to disasters that risk the environment, human lives, and livelihoods. He concludes that an Arctic Treaty made with the support of scientific evidence is the best way to mitigate change that we cannot stop but that we should try to predict and manage in the
best possible way. Although he thanks the “people who live in the Arctic,” he does not engage much with how they might be involved in working out such a treaty. Emilie Cameron’s book provides some of that missing focus.

Cameron (Geography, Carleton University) writes a fascinating interdisciplinary account focalized through Samuel Hearne’s 1771 overland expedition in search of copper for the Hudson’s Bay Company. Hearne’s “iconic” story, published twenty-four years later, about a massacre of Inuit by his Dene guides, has been used to consolidate Qablunaaq (white) hegemony, Cameron argues. She shows how stories, whether true or not, can have important and continuing social impacts. Hearne’s account has been questioned, as have the representations of the human skeletal remains supposedly discovered at Bloody Falls by a later expedition in 1819–22. Hearne’s story features his self-representation as “impotent” to stop the savage killings and includes a Gothic account of an Inuit girl speared to death, clutching his legs. Cameron connects this story not only to Inuit accounts, but also to the ways in which Inuit peoples have responded to southerners’ attempts to memorialize this event at a site that has long been an important fishing ground. In the 1950s, during an attempt to erect a cairn there, ostensibly to draw tourists to this still-inaccessible location, the Inuit reaction was to push back, forming new solidarity. She also shows how Hearne’s search for copper relates to later economic ventures. His representation of northern peoples as incomprehensibly savage persists in a new era of “helpful” colonialism where the Inuit are still represented as unable to conduct their own affairs. From a literary perspective, Cameron’s book is most interesting for its ethical consideration of how stories—both traditional and contemporary—can best be read by those who have grown up within the mainstream Western epistemology and discourses that naturalize white and scientific authority. She suggests to Struzik and Canadians in general that we need “to unlearn our certainty, our narcissism, and our attachments to being good, and to acknowledge that our learning is specific to our experiences and relationships.” Any Arctic treaty needs to emerge out of remade and respectful relationships with the Inuit, the Dene, and other northern peoples whose experiential and traditional knowledge were integral to maintaining the land’s sustainability long before Hearne discovered a single lump of copper near Kugluk.

Looking Back, Thinking Forward

Nancy J. Turner

Ancient Pathways, Ancestral Knowledge: Ethnobotany and Ecological Wisdom of Indigenous Peoples of Northwestern North America Vol 1 & 2. McGill-Queen’s UP $100.00

Reviewed by Rafael Madeja

In Ancient Pathways, Ancestral Knowledge, Nancy J. Turner provides an insightful ethno-botanical analysis of the Traditional Ecological Knowledge of Indigenous peoples of British Columbia and neighbouring areas in two integrated volumes. Having worked with Indigenous botanical and cultural experts in British Columbia and beyond over the span of four decades, Turner delves into numerous concepts, values, and perspectives that explain the deep and inextricable bond—based on recognition, respect, and continuity—between humans and all plants and environments. In order to better understand how various plant resources and habitats were manipulated and managed within traditional Indigenous economies, she explores through the multi-scalar lenses of geographic space and time certain patterns in Indigenous knowledge of how various
animals and plants interrelate, how the ecosystems function as a whole, and how people used their ecosystems to sustain themselves on a subsistence basis. Turner attempts to take under the scrutinizing eye the pathways and processes of knowledge acquisition and dissemination that have taken place since time immemorial with a keen interest in how particular plant resources and their applications have been developed, applied, expanded, and handed down over generations.

In Volume 1, Turner investigates the historical aspects of the complex knowledge systems built up by Indigenous peoples in this vast region before and after the arrival of European newcomers. The emphasis is placed upon the fact that while Indigenous peoples availed themselves of resources in the region characterized by geographical immensity with productive and fertile forests, river valleys, and estuaries with respect and appreciation, they were also forced to adapt to disruptive changes, such as times of alternate cooling and warming, floods, glaciation, and shifting ocean currents. Thus, Turner presents the history and dynamics of human-environment interactions across a range of cultures and linguistic groups in northwestern North America that were subject to numerous cultural, ecological, and social context shifts. Consequently, Indigenous peoples, seeking new opportunities to sustain their resources and thrive in different environments, integrated new information and ideas with already existing place-based knowledge systems, allowing them to adapt to changing conditions and ensure the survival of Indigenous peoples across times of immense change.

Exploring the context of the rich history of Indigenous peoples and the environment, the author provides a valuable insight into human-plant relationships during ancient times, based on the observation of animal habits and the life cycles and productivity of valued plant resources. Notably, on the basis of specific archaeological findings at various food-processing sites in the interior and coastal regions, she examines developments in plant harvesting, processing, and storage technologies as well as elaborate technologies for fishing and hunting. For the sake of illustrating the way Indigenous peoples used and interacted with plants, the book describes similarities and differences in the use of plant resources both in living form and as a product of trade across different Indigenous communities. To delve into people-plant relationships further, Turner mentions that plant names are considered a reflection of the cultural salience of plant species, and since they are attached to places and seasons, they play an essential role in communicating local ecological knowledge. Hence, she provides a list of approximately 260 examples of descriptive plant names present in more than fifty Indigenous languages that may shed more light upon the value-laden knowledge associated with the plant, its importance, use among Indigenous communities, and relevant social and economic factors responsible for knowledge dissemination from one territory and language to another. At this point, Turner observes that certain aspects of Indigenous knowledge—such as Indigenous food systems and resource management techniques—have undergone tremendous changes since the era of European exploration and trade in their territories, and that the composition of Indigenous ecosystems has dramatically changed due to the introduction and encroachment of new species.

Furthermore, Volume 2 addresses intergenerational knowledge transfer pre-occupied with the traditional know-how of seasonal clues in nature, which can determine optimal resource-harvesting times. Turner brings readers an array of phenological indicators that help to estimate the timing of harvesting resources within the four seasons. Significantly, since Indigenous
peoples have been dependent upon their skills to decipher phenological indicators for plant life cycles in order to survive in all seasons, they have been capable of predicting what to expect and what sort of anomalies might take place in the near future. Moreover, as explained by Turner, Indigenous peoples—for the purposes of nurturing healthy and interdependent relationships with nature and leading sustainable harvesting activities—developed certain organizational systems characterized by ecological and biological dimensions. In her discussion of the high levels of complex resource harvesting organization required to process and distribute plants as nutritious, valuable, and storable products, Turner touches upon the stratification and diversification of societal roles involved in resource stewardship. This was not only required in the regulation of harvesting cycle timing and the level of sustainable harvest but also in the allocation and sharing of seasonal resources between relatives and other tribal communities.

Along with Indigenous peoples’ ecological knowledge of the management and preservation of resources and habitats came an integrated body of worldviews and philosophies referring to various spiritual aspects of Indigenous peoples’ relationships with plants and animals. Turner addresses kin-centric ecology, which delineates that life forms and non-living entities are perceived as filled with human characteristics that sacrifice themselves so that people are able to survive. In other words, this worldview, at the heart of which lies the Nuu-chah-nulth expression *hishuk-ish t’sawalk*, states that all things are one and, thus, humans, animals, nature, and the spiritual world are tied together in a sort of mystical circle. Thus, people availed themselves of resources with respect and appreciation to secure the natural harmony. Ultimately, what the reader gets is origin stories and narratives from throughout the region which, full of references to plant and animal use in everyday life, convey critically essential ideas to future generations in a meaningful manner and, in turn, tackle numerous questions related to the acquisition and transmission of ecological knowledge and practices. Finally, the last chapter of Volume 2 focuses on the most effective means of retaining and renewing a series of ecologically sound principles and subsistence strategies drawn from ecological wisdom to cope with biocultural erosion and to provide motivation for restoring connections with local environments and food systems in recent decades of environmental and cultural change.

All in all, *Ancient Pathways, Ancestral Knowledge* offers compelling insights into the Traditional Ecological Knowledge of Indigenous peoples of northwestern North America and brings into light the fact that, over countless generations, Indigenous communities have been actively preoccupied with managing their ecosystems and making use of their resources in a sustainable manner. As resources are becoming limited in predominantly urbanized and industrialized societies, this place-based knowledge may play a pivotal role not only in creating more respectful relationships with local ecosystems but also in promoting sustainable environments and more conservation-oriented ways of living in the face of increasing global climate change.