Readable and Charming

Tappan Adney; C. Ted Behne, ed.  
The Travel Journals of Tappan Adney: Vol. 1, 1887-1890. Goose Lane $16.95

Tappan Adney; C. Ted Behne, ed.  
The Travel Journals of Tappan Adney: Vol. 2, 1891-1896. Goose Lane $16.95

Reviewed by Misao Dean

The two volumes of The Travel Journals of Tappan Adney are charming books, filled with whimsical stories about animal behaviour, quick sketches of birds and wildlife, and honest observations of wilderness and Indigenous peoples in the New Brunswick of the 1890s. Adney—who is perhaps best known for his historic study of Indigenous watercraft, Bark Canoes and Skin Boats of North America (1964)—was a self-taught naturalist, writer, and artist who first visited New Brunswick in 1887 at the age of nineteen, and over the next nine years documented his adventures hunting, fishing, and camping in the areas of the Tobique and Mamozekel Rivers in handwritten journals. In later life he transcribed these and added details and corrections; the resulting texts have been edited by C. Ted Behne, a retired writer and bark canoe builder, and reproduced in attractive paperback volumes including a generous selection of the original hand-drawn maps and sketches.

Adney was a strange duck. Like his contemporary Ernest Thompson Seton, he attempted to make a living as an amateur naturalist and illustrator at the very moment when these fields were professionalizing. Adney was a prodigy, achieving admission to the University of North Carolina at the tender age of thirteen, but he never completed a university degree.

So Adney sold his stories and illustrations to magazines like Harper’s and Outing, capitalizing on the new popularity of stories that featured outdoor adventure and animal life. He met Charles G. D. Roberts and his brother Goodridge during Roberts’ tenure as a professor at King’s College in Windsor; this led to later friendships with Bliss Carman and Arthur Stringer during the 1890s, when Adney worked as a freelancer in New York. A trip to Alaska and the Yukon for Harper’s led to the publication of a successful book on the Klondike gold rush in 1900, on the strength of which Adney married his New Brunswick sweetheart and moved to Montreal. He continued his research in the fields of ethnography, Maliseet language, and bird and animal behaviour, at one time acting as a consultant on ethnology for the McCord Museum at McGill, but he was in debt and unable to complete the ambitious projects he imagined. His extensive research on Indigenous canoes and boats was completed and published after his death by Howard Chapelle.

The Travel Journals are written with an endearing simplicity and freshness. Adney recounts hunting and prospecting trips taken with a group of young men like himself, and gives in their own words stories about being treed by a moose, or lost a few hundred feet from a campsite, or chased
Secrets, Lies, Worlds Unknown, and the Writer’s Plight

Samuel Archibald; Donald Winkler, trans. Arvida. Biblioasis $19.95

Larry Tremblay; Sheila Fischman, trans. The Orange Grove. Biblioasis $17.95

Reviewed by Anne Marie Miraglia

The Orange Grove is an excellent translation of the Québécois novelist and playwright Larry Tremblay’s fifth novel L’orangeraie (2013), which obtained several awards before it was adapted for the stage and performed in April 2016. Reminiscent in its three-part structure and in its lyrical style of both the fable and theatrical tragedy, The Orange Grove reads like a poem. All three parts bear the names of boys whose identity and struggles raise profound questions and much ideological reflection. Part I, “Amed,” places twin boys, age nine, in an unidentified war-torn country in the Near or Middle East; Part II, “Aziz,” locates the surviving twin, now twenty years old, in the “Latin quarter” of a distant land of snow where he refuses to play “Sony” (Part III), a seven-year-old boy in a play written by Mikhaël, a theatre teacher.

In succinct, poignant sentences, The Orange Grove tells not only the story of brotherly love and complicity between Aziz and Amed, but most importantly it tells the story of misguided martyrdom and the manipulation of family honour and religious faith by a fanatical combatant intent on inciting hatred and revenge against the “dogs” who purportedly launched the bombs killing the boys’ grandparents. The boys’ father is made to choose which of his twin boys will wear the belt of explosives to vindicate his grandparents’ brutal death, the destruction of homes, the confiscation of lands, and gain for himself a martyr’s place in heaven. The Orange Grove raises numerous questions while describing the cruelty and absurdity of all wars. Which of his sons will Zaled choose to sacrifice? How does his wife, Tamara, react to the possibility of losing both sons? Do the boys obey their father and respect his choices? And how does the sacrifice of one twin impact the other? Suspense and reversals abound in this craftily constructed auto-representational novel.

Part III, (“Sony”), however, raises new questions—these concerning the writer’s art and the portrayal of wars and horrors never experienced by the writer himself: “You don’t know what you are talking about,” yells the surviving twin to Mikhaël who, in doubting his own intentions, tries to encourage his student to tell his painful story himself. Samuel Archibald’s Arvida also cleverly tackles questions about the art of writing worlds unknown and the blurring of lines between fact and fiction. Fourteen entertaining and compelling short stories involving ghosts, monsters, a haunted house, mysterious disappearances and enigmatic returns, hockey games with the Rocket himself, botched attempts at human smuggling and attempted murder, cult-like self-mutilations, and stories of...
suicide are threaded together primarily through colourful portrayals of “an Arvida [Archibald’s hometown] that wasn’t entirely fictional.” Like Marcel Proust and his madeleine-induced experience of involuntary memory, Archibald brings to life the past, worlds inhabited, dreamed, or simply imagined by various male and female narrators. “Honestly,” admits the narrator of the three “ARVIDA” stories evoking Proust, “after a while you can’t tell a real story from an invented one anymore, but I know that’s all the literature I’ll ever get out of a McNugget. And that’s where I always end up. McNuggets aren’t madeleines, forgetting trumps memory, and you can’t write all your life about how hard it is to tell a story.” Thus in all three “ARVIDA” stories, the narrator begins with the sentence “My grandmother, mother of my father, often said: “There are no thieves in Arvida,”” but recounts a tale of pastries stolen by his father as a child before relating grand stories of larceny, gambling, heavy drinking, and decadence.

The “BLOOD SISTERS” (I, II, and III) stories recount, in the third person, unconfirmed incidents or dreams involving the sexual abuse of female children by adult men. In “In the Fields of the Lord BLOOD SISTERS I,” one of the shortest stories of the collection, revives a woman’s memories of the little girl she had been at her grandmother’s funeral and of her discovery on that day of her grandmother’s estranged twin sister. But she “dares not to think of Jim,” her grandmother’s cousin who killed himself months before the funeral. She clearly recalls that the three of them would play cards at the kitchen table but can only wonder: had he not killed himself, would he have taken the little girl she used to be to the blueberry fields where “[he] would have kissed her on the mouth, saying that she was the only one for him,” and would he “have blushed and said that it wasn’t good for her to ask him to touch her the same way you touch a woman or that he touched other girls”?

“The Animal BLOOD SISTERS II” recounts, also in the third person, the story of two sisters aged fourteen and twelve, whose father takes them on many adventures (in a boat and in a small plane) to explore the world around them but fails to provide valuable life lessons: “it’s tempting for a father never to teach [his girls] anything and to hope nothing will ever happen to them and to try to protect them from the world instead of showing them how to live in it.” One of his daughters then accepts a horse ride in the fields of the Lord with the handsome Monsieur Robertson.

In the story “Paris in the Rain BLOOD SISTERS III,” a woman at a funeral parlour tells the corpse before her that she, a “damaged little girl,” is happy he is dead and that she has come to understand that “God is love”: “He loved us, strange bed mates, you the burly man and me the child, he loved your hands on me and your sweaty underclothes, he loved my cold feet and my icy nose.”

Although writers frequently question their art and their abilities to tell stories that “are untellable, or suffer from being formulated” (Archibald), it is clear that both the writers and translators of The Orange Grove and Arvida have produced texts that reveal most eloquently their unquestionable talent in the presentation of the complexities of the human spirit, of the worlds we inhabit, and of those that inhabit us.
Space in [Ab]sence
Juliane Okot Bitek
100 Days. U of Alberta P $19.95

Nicole Markotic
whelmed. Coach House $18.95

Sheryda Warrener
Floating is Everything. Nightwood $18.95
Reviewed by Crystal Hurdle

Each of the three cover images urges decoding/translation. Bitek’s is a close-up of calligraphy in an undetermined language—from Julie Mehretu’s Invisible Sun (Algorithm 5, second letter form)—a more vibrant depiction of coding than the black and buff-white of Markotic’s (Floating Data from Laurie Frick’s art installation Quantify-Me). The explicit, brightly coloured image of intersecting circles with their planetary texture/relief (from the Lunar and Planetary Institute) sets the tone of Warrener’s book. The poetry books seem to ask “what to make of the space where those circles // [of a Venn diagram] overlap” (Warrener). Her “Absence accumulates” could be thoughtful commentary for the other collections, too.

whelmed, Markotic’s fourth poetry collection, ambitiously explores the English language devoid of customary prefixes. With cynicism and humour similar to Ambrose Bierce’s The Devil’s Dictionary, Richard Lederer’s Anguished English series, or Lederer’s The Cunning Linguist, but with greater academic intent, it is closest to bpNichol’s The Martyrology, alluded to in “a headstone rephrased St One” from the word-poem “prehend” in the “re-” section. Yeats and Dickinson are mentioned, as is Swift—homage? The unique book is coy, insightful, charming, dense, and perhaps too much of the same thing repeated. It holds a catalogue of words, minus prefixes, such as “chievous” without the “mis-” or “sadaisy” adrift from “up.” The “dexed,” a list of words defined, is a poem unto itself, inviting the reader to determine which prefixes might have come uncoupled from which words. The last segment, “pro-rogued,” includes “snickety,” “undrum” (“buttered philological bacles”), and “trocity.” In “post-,” “humously” is “the last, last error, motivated by burial. an afternoon of asundering vowels and pie whimsy. not so funny now, what? er . . . um . . . it . . . soil, more than bread and cheese. poned piano positions. I mean it: haste and haster. er.” Licious!

Aristotle, mentioned in Markotic’s “ergy” (“en-”), is alluded to in Bitek’s absolutely-must-read 100 Days, an astonishing debut poetry collection, one hundred poems for each day of the Rwandan genocide, examined twenty-odd years later by a “Canadian/Ugandan poet.” “Day 19” begins in medias res—“So this is what the Greek storyteller foretold // first the pity-inducing event”—and ends “& now it is time for catharsis,” the voice simultaneously weary and mocking—the mere telling will do nothing. Bitek’s Author’s Note mentions the initial posting on social media—to accompany photos by Wangechi Mutu—of poems inspired by stories of Rwandan poet Yolande Mukagasana. Pieces are stark and plangent with simple concrete imagery and sensory detail. Pantheistic personification—“nature chattered on” and “earth sobbed”—is striking. Loss runs deep, but “beauty is always undeniable.” A first-person narrator, sometimes plural, adopts varying roles of spouse, parent, sibling, witness, survivor, interrogator, with each story sadder and more haunting than the last—the child who can’t remember the feeling of her mother plaiting her hair, a sister whose laugh alone propelled the family into laughter (“my sister is not here / I wonder if she remembers laughing / I wonder if she remembers anything”), those who look like the dead loved one, “three so far.” How complicit is Christ? Erasure transforms “Savage” to “saved,” questioning the concept of reconciliation.
excellently explores dislocation and the origins of poetry.

Less successful is “Half-Deflated Heart Balloon” with its self-conscious run-ons and occasional wordiness, and the odd forced simile: “My chest / lifts like a page from // the daily calendar I’ve forgotten / to rip off.” However, these are exceptions in an otherwise strong collection. The poem “Pluto Forever” was published in Best Canadian Poetry in English 2013. The well-researched “Long Distance” innovatively imagines the Soviet astronaut Polyakov adjusting to life on earth after 438 days in space. What “[t]ethers” him after the return to the quotidian? How soon his sense of power descends into a Willy Lomanesque plight.

(Three pieces follow this pleasing long poem, which would have better ended the section of the same name and the collection as a whole.) Polyakov’s words have the effect of runes: “[b]lack asterisk on the page its own smashed galaxy.”

What to do because (and not if) humanity and faith are suspect, and even language fails? Bitek wonders, with a question posed as a statement, “if there was a sky / how could it witness what it did / & still maintain the calm hue.” In “lorn” (“for-”), coincidentally, Markotić writes, “to bargain a dreary release that refunds that lugubrious sky hook.” Warrener’s “memory search task” (from “Long Distance”) begins, “Today is made up of a million silver hooks per- turbing the sky,” and ends, “I half-expected the world to reveal something of itself to me just now but it’s only the minuscule hooks of the imagination rearranging air.” In all three worthwhile collections, revelation is elusive, but perhaps the mere possibility, not to mention being alive, is enough?

The table of contents begins with the sense of a countdown in two directions:

1 Day 100
2 Day 99
3 Day 98.

Will moving backward from “Day 100” (disturbing) bring closure or a sense of a beginning? The book furthers the sense of relentlessness never-ending, one day as horror-filled as the one before or the next. The University of Alberta Press has produced a tall, beautiful book. It is pleasant to hold and leaves more than the usual amount of white space on a page. Absence. “Day 53” is an abecedarium, mentioning “echoes” of war in other countries:

Tonga
Uganda
Vietnam
Wales
there were echoes in xenophobic attacks everywhere
Yugoslavia
Zimbabwe.

While specific, the book’s range is far-reaching. The simple image of the cut flowers at commemoration, “all dead from the moment they were cut . . . just like the children,” haunts.

Poems, lyric and prose, are literally and figuratively all over the map in Floating is Everything. Warrener’s second collection, with wide-ranging epigraphs, from David Letterman to Elizabeth Bachinsky (“Repetition is not rhyme, missy”). “Trace Objects,” one of the three long poems that show Warrener at her best, successfully explores loss in the face of familial death: “Who inherits the sound when I’m no longer around?” ends a section. The enigmatic “[t]here’s an underside to everything!” means much. Poignantly, the poet/narrator discovers her name taped to the bottom of a dusty figurine, heir to porcelain. Poems feature or allude to visual art and music. “A Sudden Gust,” based on a Jeff Wall photo,
Writing Regions

George Bowering
Writing the Okanagan. Talonbooks $24.95

Don Gillmor
Long Change. Random House $30.00

Tom Wayman
The Shadows We Mistake for Love.
Douglas & McIntyre $19.95

Reviewed by Joel Martineau

In the 1992/1993 academic year I participated in a 400-level course about Canadian novels. The professor had an avid following, the course was over-subscribed, and visitors to campus often sat in. Most meetings were standing room only. Terms such as “meta-fiction”, “postmodernism,” “self-reflexivity,” and “histories” peppered our discussions. Only one author appeared on the fall and the spring reading lists: George Bowering. Burning Water had earned the Governor General’s Award for Fiction in 1980, and it provoked the most heated responses among the twelve works we read. Caprice had appeared in 1988 to less acclaim, but when we read the novel that spring it became, for me, an all-time favourite.

Writing the Okanagan encourages such reminiscing. The volume collects pieces from thirty-nine Bowering works written throughout his illustrious career, beginning with his first novel, Delsing (1961, unpublished), and ending with a speech he presented at Ryerson University then published in 2015. He introduces each of the thirty-nine selections with a page or two contextualizing his career to that point and describing the impetus that motivated the particular work. As always, Bowering positions himself prominently in his writing, so the current introductions connect the long-ago pieces into a writerly autobiography. Personal photos add to the sense of continuity and progress, illustrating the overlap of individual, academic, and writer.

The pieces selected from Bowering’s prodigious oeuvre all pertain to some degree to the Okanagan Valley, a fascinating micro-climate situated inland from the British Columbia coast. Bowering was raised in the Okanagan when the valley featured small orchards, many operated by Portuguese or Italian Canadians encouraged to settle there by federal immigration policies, and when communities took pride in their baseball teams. Bowering’s parents—the father of English stock, the mother a learned Bostonian—took to the region in colourful ways, and their influences imbue the early writing. Bowering’s fondness for the region (and baseball) never wanes. As academia leads him to urban centres, he returns to the Okanagan with his family for annual visits and special events, such as a high school reunion. While the selections ooze nostalgia, they also construct a compelling history that honours the simpler ethos that followed World War II, even as the Okanagan region now reinvents itself into a magnet for international capital that transforms the family-run orchards into “boutique” and “estate” wineries specializing in tourism. Bowering is no curmudgeon regretting change; he is wistful for the place and period that launched his lifetime path.

Soon after that 1992/1993 academic year, I found myself standing in front of large classes of first-year students who were taking some required 100-level English course. Many resented being there; they would have preferred another science, or perhaps computer science, course. My goal became to win them over quickly by illustrating that they need not fear literature, that they could “relate” to texts, that they could make sense of (some) poetry, and especially that they could write about their responses. Tom Wayman became an ally. At the time, he wrote “work poetry” about everyday people performing everyday jobs—nimble poems that typically argued for workers’ rights and gender equality. I found his poems
in chapbooks and odd little anthologies, included a few in my course packs, and had great success delivering them to students who gained enough confidence to tackle the next text.

*The Shadows We Mistake for Love* reveals another side of Tom Wayman. It collects fourteen short stories, most previously published in literary journals, into a hefty volume focusing on the West Kootenay region in southern British Columbia. The Kootenay lakes and valleys run north to south, paralleling the Okanagan Valley but a mountain range or two farther east, more distanced from the province’s urban centres, and traditionally inclined towards more marginalized social and economic spheres. Wayman’s attention to the everyman morphs into study of a particular subculture: the hippie or back-to-earth movement galvanized by anti-war sentiment in the Vietnam decades. Late in the 1960s and in the 1970s, youths flocked to the Kootenays, often adopting communal or alternative living arrangements. Wayman’s linked stories limn a fascinating history as this generation matures and their initial zeal yields to ensuing responsibilities—providing for progeny, for example.

The stories burst with details that coalesce into a study worthy of a major novel. Characters we come to know in one story provide context in another; places that we picture from one angle reappear from another; buildings and businesses become foci for comparisons; and, crucially, issues raised are revisited. Wayman appreciates the beliefs and dreams that bring his cast to the Kootenays, but concentrates on the ways that time conditions their hopes. In the novella-length title story, a University of British Columbia graduate student travels to the region to visit a friend and becomes intrigued by environmental issues and the dashing spokesperson for these matters; she disregards warnings about his history as a serial seducer, has their child, and finds herself a single parent and sole provider for her son, her unfinished Masters thesis long forgotten. In the magnificent “Three Jimmys,” three like-named friends build and operate the first motel in the region, an incipient enterprise that becomes a local icon and treasured platform for their friendship—until a jealous spouse undermines their partnership. After a chain buys and mismanages the motel, changing its name, the story ends with a promising turn as new owners buy the business and restore its original name. In “Many Rivers,” a Vietnam veteran immigrates and starts a war surplus and agricultural supply outlet that seems to clandestinely service the region’s thriving marijuana economy. He attracts local youths with dark tales of his glory days as a warrior, but remains shadowy and furtive. The thrust of the story isn’t the mystery man, but the effect he will have on the impressionable (or not) locals.

Don Gillmor undertakes an epic project in *Long Change*: the 351-page novel sketches a history of exploration and deal making in the oil industry, beginning with wildcatting in Texas in 1951, ranging to Alberta and the Beaufort Sea in the ensuing decades, and becoming increasingly global at the turn of the century, with forays to equatorial Africa, Azerbaijan, and the Barents Sea. He channels this saga through protagonist Ritt Devlin, who begins working as a roughneck at age fifteen in Texas and soon migrates—with a posse in hot pursuit—to Alberta, his locus of operations as he becomes an increasingly significant player in the increasingly crucial and global industry. The novel portrays the pursuit of oil as a twentieth-century enactment of man attacking nature with greed as the driving force, politicians and international capital the devil’s dealmakers.

Devlin—note the anagrammatic connotations—represents oil, a manifestation of capital, always restless, always willing to meet the devil down at the crossroads,
always willing to sell its soul. Remarkably, Devlin is also synecdochic for Alberta. The province functions as a stage for the potential and ascendance of the resource; it also complies with the lies, arrogance, and bluster typical of rapacious resource extraction. When fracking coal seams becomes the latest lucrative technology and consequently rampant, an eleven-year-old boy living on a ranch in the foothills south of Calgary finds dead frogs in a pool on the property. A few weeks later, the family’s drinking water becomes effervescent; the boy develops a rash; his mother takes him to the hospital (the father died when the boy was three), where initial tests are inconclusive. She contacts the Environment Ministry and the oil company drilling wells nearby. Both stonewall, so that she has to enlist the media to air her concerns.

Gillmor turns punchy phrases, such as “[t]hat is oil’s great gift. It makes men dream,” or “[t]he North was the future, the tense every politician is happiest in.” Occasionally, technique slides towards cliché: “there were two detectives in the room, wearing cheap suits and hard expressions.” However, Long Change works with a large canvas that admirably represents the vicissitudes of the industry. When an interrogator addresses Devlin, “You’re oil, is that right,” and Devlin replies, “We’re all oil,” the novel reminds us that we are all complicit. I strive to be energy efficient, but that is a culturally relevant concept. I recognize that North Americans use vastly more than our share of the world’s resources, and that our consumption of fossil fuels remains particularly reprehensible.

An Intertextual Approach to Women’s Stories

Rebecca Bromwich and Monique Marie DeJong, eds.

Mothers, Mothering and Sex Work. Demeter $29.95

Reviewed by Lourdes Arciniega

Rebecca Bromwich and Monique Marie DeJong have compiled a thought-provoking and timely anthology addressing the often marginalized, seldom heard, and precarious experiences of sex workers who are also mothers. The editors apply a multidisciplinary lens to an often “binary political debate,” in the hopes of highlighting the complexity of the issues and players involved, which cannot, and the editors argue should not, be compartmentalized into rigid categories. By presenting their case through essays, short stories, photographs, drawings, and personal accounts, the editors not only elicit a more comprehensive understanding from readers, but also generate a more empathetic response. The stories are not limited to the North American experience, but also feature tales of the sex trade in Africa and South America, finding similarities in women’s roles, prejudices, and lack of agency through a globalized perspective.

This anthology contributes to an emerging field on maternal studies that explores the complexity of the traditional, nurturing mother role, as it moves women from a passive, domestic setting into a public, activist forum. Focusing on sex workers who are mothers implies not only a transgressing of boundaries, but also a delineation of a new space for study, a new “venue to explore and appreciate the maternalities of sex workers as subjects,” as the editors argue. There is often mention of a need for sex workers to create two different personae in order to survive. Sex workers need to keep home life separate from street life, to live life as a constant negotiation and redesigning of these
two roles, often to the detriment of their mental and physical health.

One of the key perspectives addressed by several of the contributors is the violence and constant erosion of self-confidence entailed in sex work. How does their upbringing, their own experience of motherhood, lead sex workers into this trade? More importantly perhaps, are there avenues and resources for them to escape a job that preys on their vulnerability and keeps them in a constant state of fear? Indeed, the contributors call attention to a confusing and conflicted law system that does not often act in the best interest of the sex worker by not consulting them with regards to laws that directly affect their livelihood.

The anthology forges new ground in academic feminist writing by approaching the well-known polarization of women as “virgins” or “whores” from a new perspective, as the sex worker is the cultural embodiment of both of these roles. By addressing the ways in which women’s labour, be it as mother or as sex worker, serves a patriarchal agenda, it is possible to call attention to how women’s identities, sexual desires, and social roles as reproducers continue to be repressed by a hegemonic social structure. To contest this binary, the anthology explores in a detailed and compelling manner the traumas and social shaming associated with sex work. Therefore, several of the contributors note how women look to representations of motherhood to redefine themselves, to regain control of their narrative, and to reinvent their social identities.

With its interdisciplinary nature and appeal, this anthology becomes a provocative and useful springboard for further cross-disciplinary research. In fact, the collection itself is a model of intercultural engagement where art, sociology, psychology, and civil action can provide the basis for successful dialogue, and, more importantly, provide guidelines for practical agency that could impact the lives of women workers.

### Mind and Body

**Nicole Brossard; Angela Carr, trans.**  
*Ardour*. Coach House $18.95

**Jan Zwicky**  
*Wittgenstein Elegies*. Brick $20.00

Reviewed by Myra Bloom

In Raphael’s famous fresco *The School of Athens,* Plato and Aristotle are depicted walking side by side, the former pointing up at the heavens, realm of the immutable forms, the latter pointing down to the empirical world. This image captures the relationship of Jan Zwicky’s *Wittgenstein Elegies* to Nicole Brossard’s *Ardour.* While diametrically opposed in topic and technique, both works are preoccupied by the link between language and reality: a revised version of Raphael’s painting would depict Zwicky in Plato’s pose, her upward gesture announcing the cerebral nature of the undertaking, while Brossard’s downward motion would, by contrast, return us to the sensual body. To the extent that these two works emblematize their writers’ respective philosophies, *Wittgenstein Elegies* and *Ardour* provide insight into two very distinct traditions of Canadian poetry.

Zwicky’s poems, like those of her contemporaries Anne Carson and Robert Bringhurst, mine the Western philosophical tradition for creative inspiration. *Wittgenstein Elegies* is an enduring affirmation of her intellectual sensibility: originally published in 1986, the collection has been newly revised and reissued by Brick Books on the occasion of the publisher’s fortieth anniversary. The predominant speaker in the book’s “collage of voices” is the German philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951), whose writings form its main intertext. In the new edition, Zwicky has included in the margin the names of the particular speaker and work being referenced to aid the reader. Although poetry may seem an incongruous mode for a
Can one learn this knowledge? Yes, some can.

But not by taking courses. It has rules that form no system: life alone learns to apply them right.

If the rules of language are ultimately arbitrary and intersubjective, it is incumbent upon people to make ethical choices about their discourse: "None can speak the truth who have not mastered their own souls," states Zwicky's Wittgenstein; "our words are a refinement of our deeds." Moreover, if language always points toward its own limits, then the job of poetry is to move ever closer to the “unsayable itself / directly echoed.”

Nicole Brossard is similarly interested in the relationship between word and world, although she approaches the issue from a very different social and ideological position. One of Quebec’s pre-eminent writers and literary theorists, Brossard’s formalist poetics encodes the female body and lesbian desire in its explosion of rigid generic and syntactic structures. Where Zwicky looks to philosophy for her poetry, Brossard’s poetry enacts her philosophy. In Ardour, capably translated by Angela Carr, Brossard creates what Kate Zambreno has aptly named a “grammar of desire”:

tonight can i suggest a little punctuation circle half-moon vertical line of astonishment a pause that transforms light and breath into language and threshold of fire

More than an extended metaphor, Brossard’s elision of sexuality and language corresponds to an understanding that experience and expression are intimately linked. She productively mines the tension between the assertion that “living is / ncessarily all à l’intérieur du langage” and the observation that “we are speechless with / every kiss.” Like Zwicky’s Wittgenstein, Brossard is acutely aware both of the power of language to define reality and of “all that’s
At one point, he speculates provocatively that Foucault’s discovery of “new relational modes” in California’s then-hedonistic Bay Area “stimulated his historical and philosophical production” in a fashion that would not have been possible had he remained within the stultifying confines of the Parisian Collège de France nexus at the time.

In another interview, French art historian Georges Didi-Huberman dwells on Foucault’s modelling of an “archaeological” modus operandi for “orient[ing] yourself within thought.” He goes on to characterize his own approach to art history as immensely indebted to Foucault’s archival methodology and aesthetics in seminal texts like The Birth of the Clinic and The Archaeology of Knowledge. In a comparison that would have made Foucault bristle, Didi-Huberman observes, “What he wrote about Manet . . . doesn’t interest me. We could say the same thing about Freud. When he discusses a Leonardo da Vinci painting, he’s not at his most fascinating. But when Freud looks at hysteria, he gives a veritable lesson in seeing. . . . [Likewise,] when Foucault describes what the clinical gaze is, for me that’s a basic lesson for art history.”

As a general introduction to Foucault’s life and work, Foucault Against Himself strikes a competent balance between biography (at times bordering on hagiography) and popular philosophy; nevertheless, there are two significant problems with Caillat’s approach. Firstly, the filmmaker circumscribes the field of scholarship to a small handful of Foucault’s popular books and shows little evidence of having read much else. Given his own stated intention of tracking Foucault’s constantly metamorphosing understanding of power, it is difficult to forgive him for overlooking the entire Collège de France seminar series (especially his genealogy of neoliberalism in The Birth of Biopolitics) and neglecting to discuss Foucault’s influential concepts of “biopolitics” and “biopower.”
Secondly, if Caillat were to immerse himself in Foucault’s body of work and the broader field of Foucault scholarship, he would quickly relinquish the premise that it would benefit scholars to view him as a thinker who, in his work and life, was fundamentally “against himself.” This has been commonsensical doxa (about not only Foucault but everyone) for so long that critics could only scratch their heads at Caillat’s posture of having made an incisive intervention on the Foucault archive.

Moreover, against the grain of his insistent questions about “which Foucault” (“the militant” or “the scholar”) engaged in a certain political action or wrote a certain text, it is hard not to hear Foucault’s own spectral response from the end of “What is an Author?”: “Behind all these questions we would hear little more than the murmur of indifference: ‘What matter who’s speaking?’”

Poetry Actually

Dina Del Bucchia and Daniel Zomparelli
Rom Com. Talonbooks $19.95

Kathryn Mockler
The Purpose Pitch. Mansfield $17.00

Reviewed by Carl Watts

The Purpose Pitch, Kathryn Mockler’s third poetry collection, is described on its back cover as both drawing from “contemporary poetic traditions” and taking the form of “brutal police reports, invented biographies of real people, Google search results, and celebrity-interview mash-ups.” Rom Com, a collaborative effort by Dina Del Bucchia and Daniel Zomparelli, “both celebrates and capsizes the romantic comedy.” These descriptions say a lot about our present poetic moment of diffuse conceptualism; Mockler at once lifts from and generates the genres described, while Del Bucchia and Zomparelli work with characters and clichés so plentiful as to require a large degree of authorial assembly. Perhaps some avant-garde purists would refer disparagingly to these blends of selection and versification as “conceptual lite” poetry; regardless of their pedigree, however, these collections deal yet another blow to mainstream-versus-experimental binaries.

The Purpose Pitch is most effective when its snarky drollery yields depressingly comprehensive insights. Take, for example, statements such as “the English teacher is not a credible source because she wants to kill herself,” or exhortations to “World” such as “I’m sure you’ve racked up a pretty pension. If you don’t like your job anymore, just quit.” Yet while Mockler’s previous collections didn’t always add a formal wallop to her directness, here her multivalent candour uses the prosaic to advantage. In “Poetry—you’re Popular, Okay,” an assault on the proudly embattled genre, strings of monosyllables mark the poet’s complexes as especially banal and petty: “Don’t get your nose so out of joint all the time... One day you might have a street named after you.”

Mockler’s use of found text also works in tandem with her darker themes. “April—May, 2014” consists of eleven pages of police alerts relating to sexual assault. The sequence resembles the infamous fourth section of Roberto Bolaño’s, but the inclusion of Canadian localities (as well as the very need to reiterate the prevalence of violence against women) enhances the repulsive power of Bolaño’s precedent. Mockler also brings patterns out of her raw data. After dozens of alerts that begin with constructions such as “A WOMAN WAS” or “POLICE SAY,” two entries on the final page begin, “A 22-YEAR-OLD TORONTO MAN IS FACING” and “A TEENAGER HAS BEEN ARRESTED,” respectively; one realizes at this point that only four of the sixty-seven entries have implicated the perpetrators by marking them as initial grammatical subjects. Whether it’s employing this kind of stricter conceptualism or just strafing sharp lyrical insights
with ready-made phrases, *The Purpose Pitch* consistently makes the case that it is Mockler’s strongest work.

*Rom Com*’s concept, if it could be described as such, is simple: Del Bucchia and Zomparelli employ verse, prose, lists, quizzes, and found text to converse with the tropes of their book’s titular genre. It’s a product not of the Internet Age as much as a vaguely consistent postwar era of mass packaging and advertising. The authors have stated that their writing process was deeply collaborative, but many poems resemble the work of one more than the other. It’s hard not to see Del Bucchia behind a questionnaire such as “Ever Wondered If You Might Be the Best Friend of a Romantic Lead?” Poems such as “Montage,” with lines such as “Change clothes, change accessories, change your hairstyle, change the colour of your hair, change styles, change your clothes,” recreate the sequence- and permutation-based poems that cropped up throughout Zomparelli’s *Davie Street Translations*.

Most of the collection, however, consists of more seamlessly blended verse and prose treatments of particular actors, characters, and films. The result is a wry jocularity that sometimes slides into vulnerability, much as Mockler’s poems do. But where Mockler disarms with an awkward honesty that doesn’t seem remotely performative, Del Bucchia and Zomparelli are comparatively guarded. “What’s Your Number” expresses semi-embarrassment at “Drinking wine and researching ex-boyfriends online / while listening to the kind of music sold at Starbucks,” and “Places to Meet the Love of Your Life” mentions a “wedding to which you’re not sure why you were even invited”; the creative-class positioning and the assurance that the speaker is on the invite list give the impression that nobody’s really losing face here. This cautiousness matches the surface-level interiority of the romantic comedy, but, given that the story of the authors’ collaboration is built into the final product, it leaves something to be desired nonetheless.

*Rom Com* also works in text from Wikipedia and approximations of Twitter-style word games, as in the “Vagina Edition” of “Porn Parodies”:

There’s Something about Vaginas
Notting Vagina
Groundhog Vagina
Silver Linings Vagina

But while post-Flarf humour may be the collection’s centrepiece, the series “Sonnets for Supporting Roles” is at times far more visceral than the jokier sections’ moments of weakness. “Muriel, It Could Happen to You” pulls this off with a sympathetic reading of its supporting character:

another working-class woman can swoop in
take your husband who was always
more infatuated with your womb
than with your fire.

Ultimately, though, this difference is one of quality, not kind. These poems too build themselves out of rote rom-com fodder; that they’re at home with the collection’s more blatant borrowings suggests that such intuitive variants of conceptualism are far from radical or parochial. But, as Del Bucchia and Zomparelli imply, perhaps there’s little to be gained from assuming the mainstream can’t be appealing.

### Unsettling “Belonging”

**Stan Dragland**

*Strangers and Others: Newfoundland Essays.*

Pedlar $23.00

**Kathleen Winter**

*Boundless: Tracing Land and Dream in a New Northwest Passage.*

Anansi $29.95

Reviewed by Jeff Fedoruk

Upon receiving an invitation to be an onboard writer on a Russian icebreaking vessel travelling through the Northwest
experiences gestures towards land-based epistemologies. After various historical, geological, and cultural tours, and while on the deck of the vessel, Winter begins to feel that “[t]he land is a body, and . . . it has something like speech,” acknowledging the “elemental force” that “had begun to exert an influence.” That Winter’s narrative ends with a trip to Ottawa to support Chief Theresa Spence’s 2012 hunger strike in protest of Northern Indigenous living conditions is certainly a testament to the influence of Indigenous Knowledge. But while she concludes that “[a]ll land is sacred,” she still cannot shake the colonial impulse with which she began her voyage. For all the decolonization she undergoes, she remains fixated on retracing the story-lines of John Franklin’s failed Northwest Passage expedition, and is positively bubbly when she learns that his logbook was being kept in one of the settlements that she passes through, Gjoa Haven. Her uncritical stance on the “national and international headlines” that follow the logbook’s reveal is at odds with her prior realization that “[n]o matter how well-meaning the passengers, could we claim to stand apart from questions of invasion, privilege, and trespass?” Winter’s narrative retains its pedagogical potential if such ambivalence is read critically. Otherwise, Boundless comes across simply as an addendum to the colonial exploits that Winter initially cites, or as a memoir featuring the land as an agent of self-discovery.

And while the journey she subsequently takes unsettles this to an extent—through the teachings of Inuk guide Bernadette Dean and Greenlandic-Canadian guide Aaju Peter, as well as from the land itself—Winter ultimately struggles to shake the colonial roots from which she was raised. Boundless is nevertheless a rewarding rumination on the challenges that settler-Canadian writers and readers face in the current cultural moment of decolonization in Canada.

Decolonization is not so much a theme as an undercurrent in Winter’s writing. She maintains a narrative open-mindedness throughout her travels, allowing the voices of the various guides and experts to speak for the places and people that she is encountering. From Aaju Peter, she learns the Indigenous names of animals, plants, and rock formations, along with the pedagogical desire for resurgent Indigenous Knowledge in Nunavut. From Bernadette Dean, she learns of Inuit cultural traditions and of colonial appropriations of these cultures that manifest in museums across North America. The most enduring lessons, however, seem to come from the land itself—the synthesis of Winter’s various experiences gestures towards land-based epistemologies. After various historical, geological, and cultural tours, and while on the deck of the vessel, Winter begins to feel that “[t]he land is a body, and . . . it has something like speech,” acknowledging the “elemental force” that “had begun to exert an influence.” That Winter’s narrative ends with a trip to Ottawa to support Chief Theresa Spence’s 2012 hunger strike in protest of Northern Indigenous living conditions is certainly a testament to the influence of Indigenous Knowledge. But while she concludes that “[a]ll land is sacred,” she still cannot shake the colonial impulse with which she began her voyage. For all the decolonization she undergoes, she remains fixated on retracing the story-lines of John Franklin’s failed Northwest Passage expedition, and is positively bubbly when she learns that his logbook was being kept in one of the settlements that she passes through, Gjoa Haven. Her uncritical stance on the “national and international headlines” that follow the logbook’s reveal is at odds with her prior realization that “[n]o matter how well-meaning the passengers, could we claim to stand apart from questions of invasion, privilege, and trespass?” Winter’s narrative retains its pedagogical potential if such ambivalence is read critically. Otherwise, Boundless comes across simply as an addendum to the colonial exploits that Winter initially cites, or as a memoir featuring the land as an agent of self-discovery.

Whereas Boundless often reflects back on Winter’s British childhood and Newfoundland youth, Stan Dragland’s volume of essays in Strangers and Others continues to dwell in the colonial and literary present of Newfoundland, within a familiar Canadian literary context. Here, Dragland provides detailed readings of standout works in contemporary Newfoundland literature that speak to what he considers to be a lack of national
attention towards these texts. This volume features a broad literature review in its first chapter, followed by closer readings of Paul Bowdring’s novel The Night Season, poet Agnes Walsh’s In the Country of My Heart, Wayne Johnston’s historical novel The Colony of Unrequited Dreams, visual artist Vicki Tansey’s St. John’s installation House of Clouds and Other Ephemerals, and Lisa Moore’s February. The content of these works differs greatly, but as Dragland asserts in his introduction, all concern an “insider/outsider tension that is not felt only by the resident stranger”—indeed, part of the inspiration for Dragland to write these essays in the first place is to build on the literary impulse he felt when moving from Southern Ontario to Newfoundland. In studying local literatures as an “outsider,” he has found a locus of cultural expression unique from the rest of the country.

Most compellingly, Strangers and Others offers a formulation of Canadian literary identity that is not quite local, nor post-national, nor regional. As the last “province” to join Confederation, Newfoundland has developed its literary tradition somewhat independently from the canonical thrust of the nation’s more central forces. Dragland is the first to admit that he comes from the school of literary studies in Canada that strove to formulate a definitive Canadian cultural identity in the 1970s, and in relocating to Newfoundland, he feels “an impetus for asking the old questions with a new enthusiasm.” Even in this “new unsettled context,” however, his perspective remains primarily white and primarily settled. In his reading of Johnston’s novel, for example, Dragland draws attention to the term colony as it appears in the novel’s title, but the idea of “colony” throughout Strangers and Others appears solely with regard to Newfoundland as a colony of Canada. This is problematic because Canada is itself a colony; such colonial trappings overwrite the cultural production of the Mi’kmaq and other peoples who are indigenous to the territory now known as Newfoundland (Dragland’s references to Rudy Wiebe’s The Temptations of Big Bear fall outside of this collection’s primary focus). It is therefore a risk for settler writers to take up the question of belonging in Canada today without fully acknowledging Indigenous and diasporic relationships to the land—especially when national and international movements such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, Idle No More, and Black Lives Matter are reframing Indigenous-settler and diasporic relations on multiple scales simultaneously.

**Fictions of Resistance**

OmiSoore H. Dryden and Suzanne Lenon, eds.
Disrupting Queer Inclusion: Canadian Homonationalisms and the Politics of Belonging.
U of British Columbia P $29.95

Michael L. Ross
Designing Fictions: Literature Confronts Advertising. McGill–Queen’s UP $24.95

Reviewed by Julian Gunn

At the end of the 2003 HBO production of Tony Kushner’s Angels in America, Prior Walter—the white, patrician, gay man living with AIDS—proclaims the advent of gay citizenship in the United States: “The world only spins forward. We will be citizens. The time has come.” It’s a potent declaration. It is also intelligible as an advertisement for a social justice narrative in which state citizenship is the ultimate goal of queer struggle. In the years since the broadcast of Angels, much critical work has been undertaken to highlight the ways in which assimilation is neither a universal queer good nor, indeed, a universal queer possibility.

What opportunities, then, arise within cultural and political work—writing plays and novels, creating TV series, assembling critical anthologies, enacting protest—for
creating effective resistance to the narratives of power? Two recent books of criticism explore the challenge of creating resistant discourses. Michael L. Ross’ *Designing Fictions* surveys anti-advertising novels and TV. *Disrupting Queer Inclusion: Canadian Homonationalisms and the Politics of Belonging*, edited by OmiSoore H. Dryden and Suzanne Lenon, interrogates the legal and social boundaries of queer Canadian belonging.

*Designing Fictions* proposes that, over the past century, anti-advertising art has been compromised both by the novel’s commodity status—the widget of mass publishing—and by the appeal to authors themselves of lucrative advertising jobs. Ross, Professor Emeritus of English and Cultural Studies at McMaster University, has earned a reputation for meticulous scholarship: *Designing Fictions* comprises attentive literary studies of paired texts, primarily novels, from the last hundred years. Ross uses the vexed friendship of Henry James and H. G. Wells to frame an origin story for two strains of anti-advertising thought, noting that “James’s objections to advertising were aesthetic, while Wells’s were social and economic.” Scholars of Canadian literature will enjoy Ross’ analysis of Margaret Atwood’s advertising satire in *The Edible Woman*, which—like the TV series *Mad Men*—occupies its own chapter.

*Designing Fictions*’ introduction is subtitled “Baudrillard’s Dream,” and there are some astringent references to the Frankfurt School, but the critical compass of *Designing Fictions* is Stuart Ewen’s *Captains of Consciousness: Advertising and the Social Roots of the Consumer Culture*. Ross cannily identifies the way that commodity culture might corrupt a novel’s critical strategies. A further layer of response criticism exploring the way these books were promoted, reviewed, and read would complement the literary analysis; where Ross includes such information, it is illuminating. For example, revealing Christopher Morley’s gift for self-promotion connects Morley’s depiction of détente between art and commerce in *The Haunted Bookshop* with his reliance on advertising to publicize that novel.

If these literary and cultural works attempt to resist advertising culture, what kind of resistance do they propose? They tend to suggest alternative discourses as more truthful or authentic. Wells uses science; Morley and Orwell high literature; and Atwood ludic non-sense. Across eras, Ross finds that success is elusive: advertising’s corrosive discourse tends to win out. What, then, might successful resistance look like? Would we know it when we saw it? How can resistance be generated and maintained in the face of the amorphous and amoral practices of advertising—or of a nationalism that employs the strategies of commercial promotion to position national identity?

*Disrupting Queer Inclusion: Canadian Homonationalisms and the Politics of Belonging* is part of UBC Press’ Sexuality Studies Series, which “focuses on original, provocative, scholarly research examining . . . the complexity of human sexual practice, identity, community, and desire.” The essays in *Disrupting Queer Inclusion* probe queer belonging and citizenship in Canada. Dryden and Lenon have curated a group of searching takes on Jasbir K. Puar’s conceptual frame of homonationalism, which names the invention of a “good queer (Canadian) citizen” whose acceptance, even celebration, is used to support the claim that Canada is a queer-positive nation. This collection explores the dangerous deployments of such a claim: to obscure the tolerant country’s foundation in colonial violence; to impart the symbolic entitlement to interfere politically or militarily with states deemed less enlightened; and to justify internal policies of exclusion based on less valorized categories like religion and ethnicity.

*Disrupting Queer Inclusion* explores this
analytic model through a variety of national constructions, including citizenship, privacy, visibility, individualism, and economic theory. Sonny Dhoot’s “Pink Games on Stolen Land” considers the 2010 Vancouver Olympics’ creation of Pride House in the context of colonial occupation, comparing the gesture to “pinkwashing” in Israel. In “A Queer Too Far,” Dennis Lee’s “Pink Games on Stolen Land” considers the 2010 Vancouver Olympics’ creation of Pride House in the context of colonial occupation, comparing the gesture to “pinkwashing” in Israel. In “A Queer Too Far,” editor Dryden conducts an elegant close reading of the Canadian Blood Services donor questionnaire, which constructs—through negation—a “too queer” subject, inadmissible for blood donation not only through same-sex contact, but also via contact with an abstracted “Africa” constructed as a threat to national purity.

Such critique of the mainstream politics of acceptance calls out for alternate models of struggle that recognize all “queered” configurations of bodies and desires. In this vein, Naomi de Szegheo-Lang’s “Disruptive Desires” sketches an alternative praxis of fluidity and contingency, and Marty Fink’s “Don’t Be a Stranger Now” offers a study of queer prison-based cultural production, in the form of newsletters, zines, and blogs sites like Tumblr. Like Ross, the creators of these “disruptions” find the possibilities for resistance vexed; for example, Amar Wahab observes how predominantly white fetish communities, once cast as sexual outlaws, may contribute ideologically to the exclusion of queerly raced bodies. Ultimately, both Designing Fictions and Disrupting Queer Inclusion may remind readers that no one strategy, vocabulary, or stance is sufficient; resistance must be as protean as power itself.

Contemporary Classics

Marilyn Dumont
Brick $20.00

Dennis Lee
Riffs: Brick Books Classics 3. Brick $20.00

Reviewed by Neil Querengesser

Brick Books has since its inception published more than its share of excellent and enduring Canadian poetry. Its recently inaugurated Classics series features new editions of the best of its best. Designed by Robert Bringhurst, all books in this series are beautifully printed on high-quality paper, each with its unique typeface and, appropriately, each with its unique cover picture of a brick “made from Vancouver Island clay and aged in the coastal rainforest.” In their careful physical construction, these books are a fittingly respectful tribute to the quality of the poetry contained within them, especially the two volumes reviewed here.

I am reading A Really Good Brown Girl about a year after the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada released its report, and very soon after the establishment of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. I am also writing after the recent tragic murders of two teenagers from Whitefish Lake First Nation in Alberta, allegedly killed by a friend jealous of their promising future. While many positive changes in Canada’s Indigenous communities have occurred over the last several years, many systemic injustices still exist; the sobering themes that underlie much of Dumont’s book resonate as strongly today as they did twenty years ago at the time of its initial publication in 1996. As Lee Maracle puts it in her introduction to this edition of A Really Good Brown Girl, a book that has already been reprinted thirteen times and whose poems have been
abundantly anthologized, “No other book so exonerates us, elevates us and at the same time indicts Canada in language so eloquent it almost hurts to hear it.” The book indeed struck a deep chord of recognition in Indigenous readers across the country; Dumont comments in her afterword that while writing the poems was cathartic for her, it was apparently also so “for many others who, after readings, approached me with pages of the collection dog-eared.” It may also strike a deep chord of recognition in those non-Indigenous readers who are willing to be seen and spoken of from a perspective not their own.

The poems range widely over many overt and subtle aspects of the speaker’s experience—including expressions of love, hate, fear, and other emotions common to everyone—but they are also completely rooted in her experience as a Métis woman in twentieth-century Canada. At times one can almost see the page wrinkle wryly, as in these words from “Circle the Wagons”:

There are times when I feel that if I don’t have a circle or the number four or legend in my poetry, I am lost, just a fading urban Indian caught in all the trappings of Doc Martens, cappuccinos and foreign films . . . .

The closing lines of “Leather and Naughahyde [sic],” where the speaker is tacitly but unmistakably dismissed by the “treaty guy” upon his surmising her “diluted blood,” slap stingingly at her Métis—and female—identity. Her heart-rending ode to Helen Betty Osborne, the story of whose horrific murder should never be forgotten, stuns with the power of outrage woven into its carefully measured lines and phrases. The satirical clout of often-anthologized poems like “Letter to Sir John A. Macdonald” and “The Devil’s Language” continues to resonate powerfully today. But Dumont’s poetic brilliance also extends to tenderly empathetic explorations of the nuances of relationships among family and friends in such poems as “Fireflies” “The Sky Is Promising,” and “My Mother’s Arms,” the tender lullaby lines of which “bathe [her] in love.” A Really Good Brown Girl tells the truth—unerringly, sometimes painfully, sometimes beautifully—but always with consummate integrity.

Riffs is the third incarnation of one of Dennis Lee’s most influential works. First published as a series of sixty-seven sections in Descant 39 (1982), it appeared as an eighty-eight-section volume by Brick Books in 1993. The present edition is based on a reprinted and somewhat revised sequence included in Lee’s retrospective Nightwatch (1996). In his introduction, Paul Vermeersch locates Riffs at the centre of Lee’s career both chronologically and stylistically, calling it “the book that unites his various voices and lyrical personae” and that provides “the key to understanding the evolution of one of the most extraordinary bodies of work in contemporary English poetry.” Riffs grew out of Lee’s middle-aged love affair and its aftermath, the individual lines later supplanting, through the prolific spontaneity of their nocturnal composition, the affair’s erotically addictive qualities. Lee remarks in the book’s afterword, based on a 1993 interview with Donna Bennett and Russell Brown, that the original Descant publication—with which he was not entirely satisfied—had to gestate over a decade until he discovered that the key to balancing its lyric spontaneity and narrative linearity lay in the device of turning the real love affair into a fictitious, adulterous one by recasting his partner as a married woman, and by interposing deliberately constructed connecting poems between the spontaneous riff lyrics. The resultant sequence, with its inventive and compelling jazz cadences, is poetically compelling and convincing, keeping the reader amidst the affair’s sensations but also achieving periodically the necessary distance to carry it to its inevitable, but ultimately graceful, conclusion. The hunger he suffers for his partner is apparent in such vivid lines as these:
occurs between people, machines, things, cultures, and languages.

The title of Hajnoczky’s second book, *Magyarázni*, is a Hungarian term that translates as “Make it Hungarian.” Certainly, throughout *Magyarázni*, Hajnoczky makes the English language Hungarian, attempting to make connections between the two languages as one does when one grows up with two languages—with slippages of meaning (“blurred / and bubbling”), similarities between sounds and spelling (“All to tell, not too dull” and “Altatódal”), and the confusion when learning both (“no letters, but caught / in your throat, you can / read your heart so well”). The poems are organized alphabetically, each poem beginning with a letter from the Hungarian and/or English language and accompanied by beautiful Hungarian-inspired drawings that are visual poems of each letter. This organization further elicits resonances between the two languages—in orality/aurality, visuality, and the meaning of words. But Hajnoczky is also interested in the silences, the “rift, this fault line along the / continents.” When the poems reach W, Y, and Z, there is no corresponding title in Hungarian because they are not “true Hungarian letter[s].” And the first poem, “Pronunciation Guide,” contains many parenthetical remarks—“Not used in English.” By opening and ending the book with these rifts and silences, Hajnoczky draws attention to the work and navigation that goes into mediating between two languages—carrying over a non-English cultural heritage into the English language—and the tensions that this work and navigation produce; it is a process, like *Magyarázni* itself, that requires you to “[w]ait for your / letters to bloom.” The “you” in *Magyarázni* does not, as Oana Avasilichioaei claims, make the reader Hungarian, but it does cause readers to consider their positionality and the cultural backgrounds that have influenced their English, as well as to acknowledge
Hajnoczky’s excellent work of making the English language Hungarian.

Fernandes’ Transmitter and Receiver takes a broader approach to language—it is more concerned with communication. But what makes his book a compelling debut is its nuanced attention to communication—verbal and non-verbal—and to the fact that all living and non-living things in the world are both transmitters and receivers. This notion may be obvious, but I will admit that I sometimes think of “transmitter” and “receiver” as separate (and I blame a century of broadcasting for this). But whether or not you find the notion obvious, Fernandes approaches the subject in ways that surprise and delight; each poem considers aspects of quotidian communication in the world that are often overlooked. The opening poem does not begin with words, but rather place and image:

You have this thing you can only explain by driving me out to the port at night to watch the towering cranes moving containers from ship to train.

Further in the book, there are poems about traces of communication in books (“the oil of our hands, the oil and sweat / of our shaking, paper-cut hands”), the struggles of writing poetry and communicating an experience or object poetically, the thoughts of an ATM as it communicates with people withdrawing money, and the communication that occurs with film, nature, objects, and life events. Despite its broad subject, Transmitter and Receiver is cohesive in the intimacy carefully created by Fernandes and in its attention to the relationality of communication. Transmitter and Receiver is more than an endearing and beautiful account of human communication—it is an intimate collection about an interconnected and communicating world.

Each of these texts provides a study of the relationality of communication—in Magyarászni, the relationality between English and Hungarian, and in Transmitter and Receiver, the relationality of communication between humans, animals, and things in the quotidian world. Each book reminds us that language is a funny thing.

Creative/Collective Resistance

Jon Gordon
Unsustainable Oil: Facts, Counterfacts and Fictions. U of Alberta P $45.00

Liza Piper and Lisa Szabo-Jones, eds.
Sustaining the West: Cultural Responses to Canadian Environments.
Wilfrid Laurier UP $42.99

Reviewed by Lucia Lorenzi

To whom do we turn to understand our relationship to petroculture and its non-negotiable impact on our environment? To whom do we look to imagine long-term solutions to our dependence on bitumen? If not politicians, policy makers, and those directly involved in the oil industry, then who? Jon Gordon, in Unsustainable Oil: Facts, Counterfacts and Fictions, as well as the numerous contributors to Liza Piper and Lisa Szabo-Jones’ edited collection Sustaining the West: Cultural Responses to Canadian Environments, argue that we ought to turn to the humanities as one of the richest sources of critique and of creative resistance to dominant discourses about petroculture.

Jon Gordon’s work is a necessary addition to the rich body of scholarly works on petroculture. Building on the work of Rob Nixon and Stephanie LeMenager, Unsustainable Oil not only positions literature about bitumen as a counter-discourse to corporate efforts to defend the idea of “sustainable development” of bitumen in Canada, but does so precisely by putting these works into conversation with governmental and corporate narratives about
the possibilities for the future. At the heart of Gordon’s analysis is the argument that literature performs a “downward counterfactual function”—that is to say, it exposes the grim realities of bitumen extraction—but that in doing so, it also reaffirms the possibilities for other types of futures. Gordon begins his text with a narrative of his experiences flying to Orlando for a family vacation. In doing so, he not only questions the carbon footprint of such a trip—a thought that many of us might have also had in the course of our own travels, however fleetingly—but also the forms of violence involved in extracting the bitumen that powers these forms of mobility. Gordon queries: “How can the suffering be avoided? . . . What do we do with the guilt this creates? How can we forgive each other? Ourselves?”

While Gordon does not claim to have all the answers, he proposes that we turn to works of literature (plays, poetry, short stories) as a means of re-imagining the narratives that we tell ourselves about our embeddedness in petroculture. More specifically, Gordon works to trouble the term “sustainable development,” asking readers to consider the realities of a resource that is both limited in quantity and heavily implicated in environmental damage, and to dwell in the “impossibility” of our current bitumen-dependent existence. Gordon’s analyses of texts, ranging from Warren Cariou’s “An Athabasca Story” to the collective The Enpipe Line project, demonstrate that literature performs not only a necessary diagnostic function (namely, to articulate the environmental and social costs of our dependence on bitumen), but also a vital prognostic function, through which we can begin to restore our understanding of the intimate relations between humans and their environment, and our hope for a post-bitumen future.

Liza Piper and Lisa Szabo-Jones’ collection Sustaining the West takes a similar approach as Gordon’s work does, insofar as it positions the work of the humanities as integral to conversations about scientific research and environmental policies. The collection, which has its roots in a three-day workshop organized by Piper and Szabo-Jones in Edmonton in 2011, not only offers a diverse and wide-ranging set of artistic and theoretical perspectives on Western Canada, but also does so in a fashion that speaks to the necessity of truly interdisciplinary and collective action. As Piper notes in her introduction, the various pieces in the collection were commented on and responded to by individuals working in “a different discipline or creative practice from those who were presenting.” This commitment to interdisciplinarity offers a vital countermeasure to the ways in which different disciplines often find themselves siloed in their individual approaches to the environment, and, as such, Sustaining the West speaks to the power of collective resistance.

The focus of the collection is, as per its title, the West. However, this category is broadly conceived not as “a particular place” but as a “range of different environments.” Central to the collection’s success in addressing Western environmental concerns is the ways in which it explores how ideas of the West are bound up in notions of progress, ones which are often girded by colonial and capitalist ideologies. As indicated by the organizational headings of the volume, this range of “environments” at stake in ecocriticism and ecoactivism are not only material ones (as expressed in Part 3: Material Expressions), but also intellectual ones (Part 2: Constructing Knowledge) and relational ones (Part 1: Acting on Behalf Of). A cogent example of this approach to the idea of the West is Warren Cariou’s essay “Wastewest: A State of Mind,” in which he positions Western waste not only as an environmental toxin, but also as an ideological framework that exists in staunch
opposition to Indigenous ways of knowing. What would it mean for us, as Cariou posits, to “regain a sense of proximity to our waste, and thus a responsibility for it?” Other essays in the collection similarly explore the layered multiplicities of environmental concerns, and do so by presenting a vast range of poetic and scholarly voices.

Environmental work is difficult work. It is difficult because of the ways it often conflicts with and runs up against corporate and/or academic interests, and difficult because it must engage with a crisis whose effects are both currently unfolding and as of yet unforetold. Both Unsustainable Oil: Facts, Counterfacts and Fictions and Sustaining the West: Cultural Responses to Canadian Environments take on this challenging work, and in doing so, demonstrate that a rich critical and creative network of humanities-based artists and critics is integral to both ecocritical conversation and ecological action.

Quand le destin dépasse la vie

Daniel Grenier
L’année la plus longue. Le Quatranier 27.95 $
Reviewed by Daniel Laforest

On n’écrit plus guère de romans qui visent à embrasser des destins en entier. À qui croirait que c’est là un manque d’ambition de la part des écrivains, il nous faut répondre que non. Les écrivains ont tous l’ambition à revendre. Mais ils sont rares, très rares, à posséder le talent requis pour dépeindre non simplement l’idée d’un destin, mais avant tout le sentiment qui l’accompagne et qui est celui d’une vie vécue d’un bout à l’autre d’un monde lui-même emporté dans sa course. Daniel Grenier a ce talent. Il le possède avec une évidence éclatante, et même déconcertante. Déconcertante car L’année la plus longue est un roman qui procure ce qu’il y a de plus précieux au lecteur. Et ça n’arrive pas tous les jours. Je parle de l’étonnement devant une forme de récit neuve et de la stupéfaction conséquente dans la rencontre d’une intelligence si clairement littéraire — c’est-à-dire si consciente de l’art qu’elle accomplit dans la langue et dans l’imagination — sans pour autant que n’emanne d’elle autre chose qu’une grande générosité. Avec L’année la plus longue le critique n’a plus trop envie de jouer le jeu des amarres culturelles. Littérature québécoise? Bien sûr. Canadienne? Mais oui. Et l’américanité, la francophonie? Oui, tout ça aussi. L’art est maîtrisé à son comble. Daniel Grenier est un écrivain crucial. Et L’année la plus longue est son premier roman. Ne l’ont précédé qu’un recueil de nouvelles (remarqué il faut le dire) et un court récit, publiés également au Quatranier. Alors de quoi s’agit-il? Grenier a imaginé un dispositif qui relève quelque peu du surnaturel mais qui malgré cela n’affecte en rien le réalisme de son histoire: il a transformé la nature du personnage romanesque. En faisant naître deux des siens, Aimé et Thomas, un 29 février, il a quadruplé leur durée de vie, pour peu qu’on accepte que le scandale de la mort et des générations puisse devenir aussi arbitraire que la convention des calendriers bissextilles. Qui plus est le premier personnage est l’ancêtre de second, ce qui donne un tour génétique à l’affaire dont l’issue du récit fera un usage qui rappelle Les particules élémentaires de Michel Houellebecq. Le personnage d’Aimé naît dans des conditions misérables à Québec au lendemain de la Conquête anglaise. Sa survie est moins un miracle que l’image d’une résilience que les années innombrables de sa vie viendront concrétiser. Il se retrouve plus tard aux États-Unis, devient témoin de la Guerre civile et de ses massacres, accompagne pour un temps l’exil vers l’Ouest des nations autochtones évacuées par le colonialisme sauvage. Il change plusieurs fois de noms et donc — Amérique oblige — d’origine.

In the introduction to her instructional guide, *How to Read (and Write about) Poetry*, Susan Holbrook draws two conclusions about the ethics of reading poetry. She posits:

*If language contours the way we think, then, all the language coming at you every day . . . is shaping who you are and how you see the world. If poetry can ignite awareness of letters and words in you, . . . then perhaps you can be more conscious of that shaping, become a more critical thinker about your world as you participate in it as a citizen.*

Not surprisingly, Astrid Lohöfer’s argument about the ethics of lyric poetry rests on a similar supposition about the demands and effects of poetry’s formal qualities—qualities that by virtue of engendering ambiguity and complexity equip poetry with the “ability . . . to unmask and challenge existing values and beliefs” and, through the process of attending to those qualities, “to effect changes in [the] moral and political mindset” of readers. In other words, for both Holbrook and Lohöfer, an effective poetry (hopefully) results in an affective ethics.

While these beliefs about the ethics of poetry might represent the only point of convergence between Holbrook’s instructional guide and Lohöfer’s academic study, these beliefs raise the ultimate question about how form constitutes meaning in poetry. Holbrook does state and demonstrate how formal aspects must substantiate claims about meaning, but I think she does not
emphasize it enough. On the one hand, I applaud her intention to demystify poetry, where poetry’s constitutive features do not hide meaning, but make meaning, and where part of poetry’s longevity, charm, and reward arise out of poetry’s resistance to acquiescing. On the other hand, I criticize her missing the opportunity to explore and demonstrate how poetry does not preclude any ways of approaching, and how interpretation can be both logical and experimental, but ultimately as satisfying as solving a mathematical equation. The challenge in writing a book about how to read, and eventually write about, poetry arises from attempting to describe a matter-of-fact engagement with something that defies such an engagement, and from remembering to assume the mentality of a non-literature person reading something foreign.

How to Read (and Write) about Poetry offers a loose “how to”—more summary than instructional guide—at the beginning, followed by an introduction, a series of ten chapters on different formal or thematic concerns, a brief guide about meter, and a section about writing, with a sample essay. Overall, Holbrook’s formal and thematic selections—which range from canonical to experimental, and include a balance of gender, time frame, and race—represent a fairly concise and thorough picture of poetry. While I appreciate her discussions of exemplary poems and the “Research Tips” she offers to enhance reading, the probing questions she offers to initiate conversation about further examples often seem like missed opportunities to practically apply “new skills.” Her chapter on sonnets, by example, ends by asking students to “[c]onsider the ways the following poems engage with the traditional form.” Why not ask students to apply certain concepts—quatrain vs. octet, rhyme scheme, romantic conceit—to the variations so as to help reassure students that they understand how they make meaning?

With Ethics and Lyric Poetry, Astrid Lohöfer makes a valuable contribution to sluggish conversation about the ethics of poetic form. As expected from a published dissertation, her thorough review of discussions about ethics and aesthetics, the ethics of reading, and the ethics of lyric poetry in particular, offers a valuable resource. In those discussions, she identifies the downfalls of both what she refers to as the “neo-Aristotelian” and the “postmodern” approaches to an ethics of literature and reading. The former envisions literature as any other discourse, hindered by the inevitably ambiguous, unreliable, and ideologically determined nature of all language, and considers the reading of literature illustrative in representing that fact, and thereby consciousness-raising about being suspicious of any normalizing discourse. Few proponents of either approach have done justice to accounting for the ethics of lyric poetry, specifically how formal devices like lineation, rhyme, irony, and metaphor augment how lyrics can function ethically. In what amounts to a third and synthetic approach, Lohöfer turns to Martin Heidegger and Paul Ricoeur to argue how the particularities of lyric poetry, primarily metaphor, enable poetry “to provide alternative views of reality that move beyond established ways of thinking and understanding.” Lohöfer uses this approach in the second half of her book to offer nuanced readings of Baudelaire and Rimbaud, on the one hand, and F. R. Scott and Dorothy Livesay, on the other—readings that demonstrate lyrical language problematizing and broadening how the world might be seen.

Like much of the criticism that engages a history of poetry and ethics, Lohöfer’s discussion provides a cursory account of how that relationship changes over time. She
leaps, for example, from the Greeks to Kant, and then to Nietzsche. Understandably, that lineage shows the gradual division between ethics and aesthetics in philosophy—a division that accounts for readings of Symbolism and Modernism that her readings hope to correct—but I would have liked a more thorough history outlining the changing definition of both poetry and ethics. And while her Continental bias, and the demands of a dissertation committee, force her reliance on Heidegger and Ricoeur, why does she not even mention P. B. Shelley? In his Defence, he characterizes the language of poets as “vitality metaphoric; that is, it marks the before unapprehended relations of things.” Is this not essentially her definition of both ethics and lyric poetry—the difference between which Lohöfer often muddies? In fact, she does not explicitly define ethics except as a function or result of a metaphorical heuristic, i.e., an expanded vision of the world via lyrical language. She works so diligently to apply Heidegger and Ricoeur without, it would seem, recognizing or exploring how she amalgamates the ethical approaches she criticizes.

**Literature as Politics**

Michael Keren  
*Politics and Literature at the Turn of the Millennium.* U of Calgary P $34.95

Gillian Whitlock  
*Postcolonial Life Narratives: Testimonial Transactions.* Oxford UP $31.95

Reviewed by Asma Sayed

Both Michael Keren’s and Gillian Whitlock’s scholarly works, although dealing with different genres—fiction and nonfiction, respectively—offer us interesting and engaging perspectives on the study of humanitarian crises—genocide, poverty, violence, terrorism—and argue that literature can be an important medium for social activism and political engagement and awareness.

Whitlock’s *Postcolonial Life Narratives: Testimonial Transactions* brings together the fields of postcolonialism and life narrative. It is a study of slave narratives, letters, memoirs, journals, biographies, and testimonial narratives from Africa, Canada, Australia, the Caribbean, and India. Drawing inspiration from postcolonial scholars such as Frantz Fanon, Robert J. C. Young, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Edward Said, and Achille Mbembe, and from others in the field of life writing, such as Sidonie Smith, Julia Watson, Kay Schaffer, and Bart Moore-Gilbert, Whitlock moves “beyond nation and narration to track transnational and transcultural passages of life narrative, its volatile currency and value, and its changing technologies of the self.” Whitlock draws various narratives together through contiguity, co-location, chronology, appropriation, and remediation to pursue an active engagement with textual transactions and social activism: the politics of abolitionism, anti-apartheid, indigeneity, feminism, environmentalism, refugee rights, for example.

Whitlock contends that life narratives are critical to understanding human rights and to expanding cultures of care and sympathy. As she rightly asserts, subaltern voices usually struggle to be heard. As such, she includes voices from varied cultures, including slave narratives associated with abolition and emancipation campaigns, South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission testimony and memoir, testimonies of Dalit activism, and Indigenous testimony about the Stolen Generations and residential schools in Australia and Canada. Moving beyond the Enlightenment archetype of selfhood which represented a Western, white man, and in an attempt to decolonize the subject, the book focuses on many marginalized pieces of writing. For instance, she compares *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*
and Captain Watkin Tench’s *A Narrative of the Expedition to Botany Bay*, and argues that while the two narratives draw from different experiences, they both call on readers to bear witness to developments in the “New World.” Many other case studies—such as biographies of Saartjie Baartman, Woollarawarre Bennelong’s letter, and testimonies of rape survivors, among others—are analyzed in a postcolonial context. Whitlock’s research makes an important contribution to the study of literature as a site of social change and activism. The groundbreaking scholarship offers readers a new perspective from which to study life narratives.

In *Politics and Literature at the Turn of the Millennium*, Keren discusses fictional writing in a socio-political context. He brings together the seemingly disparate fields of politics and literature and suggests that fiction can help with understanding political issues and may be a good pedagogical tool to use in social sciences classrooms. Keren focuses on novels by some of the top-notch novelists of our times: José Saramago, Cormac McCarthy, Gil Courtemanche, Anosh Irani, Haruki Murakami, Günter Grass, André Brink, John le Carré, Sayed Kashua, David Grossman, Margaret Atwood, and Yann Martel. In his introduction, Keren elaborates on theoretical frameworks within which he situates his study: John Kenneth Galbraith’s concept of the “technosstructure,” Amitai Etzioni’s model of the “active society,” and Karl Deutsch’s ideas about the “learning capacity” of political organizations. Keren claims that these three scholars “pointed the way and set the conditions for social progress based on human knowledge and creativity.” He suggests that political scientists can use literary texts to teach political theory in more accessible and interesting ways. He gives some examples: Franz Kafka’s works can be used to teach Max Weber’s ideas about bureaucratic structures; George Orwell’s portrayal of totalitarianism may aid understanding of Carl Friedrich’s political theories; Milan Kundera’s novels could help with the explanation of the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe. Keren offers many more examples, and reasons that while novels present imaginary worlds and do not have the same kind of content as scholarly essays, they help “provide insights into the existing order and a standard for [political order’s] evaluation.” Keren is very clear in his approach; he is in no way suggesting that political theories are not valuable on their own. Rather, he argues, imaginary works may afford alternative representations, and “the aesthetic qualities of literature may be used to enrich political inquiry.” The novels that Keren discusses all have political relevance. For example, in his discussion of *The Cripple and His Talismans*, he looks at how Irani, a South Asian Canadian novelist, uses magical realism to highlight the world of Bombay’s poverty-stricken slums. Keren suggests that Irani’s work allows for an alternative understanding of the politics of the slum, as opposed to what readers may get through United Nations reports, urban studies, and documentary films.

While each book takes a different theoretical approach, they both provide useful pedagogical tools for introducing literary works in interdisciplinary courses. For example, both testimonial literature and novels can be used in political science or gender studies courses. Keren’s and Whitlock’s books will be of interest to scholars working in the areas of postcolonial literature, humanitarian literature, ethics of care, and the social sciences in general.
Three Very Different Kinds of Laughter

Bryden MacDonald
*Odd Ducks.* Talonbooks $17.95

Morris Panych
*The Shoplifters.* Talonbooks $17.95

Marcus Youssef and James Long
*Winners and Losers.* Talonbooks $16.95

Reviewed by Shelley Scott

For those familiar with Bryden MacDonald’s intense and unconventional earlier plays, such as *Whale Riding Weather* (nominated for the Governor General’s Award in 1994), his newest work, *Odd Ducks,* will come as a surprise. Commissioned and premiered in 2012 by the Chester Playhouse Summer Theatre Festival in Nova Scotia, and dedicated to the playwright’s mother (“She loves a good laugh”), *Odd Ducks* is described on the cover as “a romp.” That’s as good a description as any for this breezy, light-as-air comedy about four forty-something patrons of the Odd Duck Pub in the east coast village of Tartan Cross. The east coast setting and the familiar, humorous bickering bring to mind Daniel MacIvor’s *Marion Bridge,* while the emphasis on easily accessible entertainment evokes the popular comedies of Norm Foster or any number of television sitcoms. Much of the play’s enjoyment would come alive in production—in, for example, the use of frequent “snippets of jukebox pop songs”—and would rely on skilful comic actors to make the four characters likeable as they move seamlessly from enacting various moments in their history together to addressing the audience directly. We are told repeatedly that Ambrose is both charming and irritating, an unemployed “roguish man-child” who dresses and behaves like a rock star, but it would be up to the actor to demonstrate that level of charisma. Ambrose’s foil and drinking buddy is solid, unexciting Freddy, who can’t seem to get a break at work or with women. Freddy lends Ambrose money and listens to his self-absorbed monologues with increasing exasperation. The two “boys” are paralleled by the “gals,” Mandy and Estelle. Ambrose carries on an affair with Mandy, trophy wife of a rich invalid named Walter, whom we hear offstage but never see (he has some of the play’s funniest lines) and who dies early on. Ambrose then breaks up with Mandy at Walter’s funeral, precipitating the play’s big “incident”: Mandy gets drunk and shoots Ambrose at the Odd Duck—although, this being the kind of comedy it is, she in fact only grazes him with a BB gun. There to comfort Mandy is her maid, Estelle, a lesbian with a mysterious past in the big city. Estelle’s sexuality, and some hints in the script, lead to the over-the-top finish: Freddy rejects Ambrose’s sexual advances and the two “boys roll around beating the snot out of each other: clothes get ripped,” while “the girls make out passionately: clothes begin to fall away.” One could argue that MacDonald employs a useful strategy by winning over a summer theatre audience with the antics of conventional, recognizable characters and then inserting potentially risqué queer content, but any mildly subversive agenda is secondary to having “a good laugh.”

Morris Panych’s latest comedy, *The Shoplifters,* features a similar cast—two men, two women—but aims more explicitly for a social message along with the laughs. Premiered in 2014 at the Arena Stage in Washington, DC, *The Shoplifters* was a New Play Award winner from the Los Angeles-based Edgerton Foundation, which allows extended rehearsal time for American productions. The play had its Canadian debut in Calgary the next year. Panych’s play takes place in one location in real time and, unlike the other two plays under consideration here that engage with the audience, it adheres to strict realism and a conventional structure of scenes divided by blackouts within two acts. Veteran security guard
Otto and overzealous new guard Dom have apprehended veteran shoplifter Alma and her extremely nervous accomplice Phyllis, and the play unfolds in a series of interrogations and conversations between various combinations of the four. Dom—who is certainly comic but also a bit scary and out of control—tries to convert Phyllis to Christianity, while Alma tries to convert her to a greater sense of social activism and personal daring. Phyllis, however, is content with her modest life circumstances and leaves the scene at the end of the play no different than when she entered; similarly, Dom is content to continue in his simplistic understanding of right and wrong, albeit as a parking lot security guard. Otto and Alma reveal their long-standing cat-and-mouse game as guard and criminal has been, at least in part, played for the benefit of each other. They become a romantic couple in the course of the play; he has protected her throughout her career of theft and in turn, she makes sure he gets to keep the job he was about to lose for his liberal attitude towards thieves. Alma has been stealing in order to provide affordable sandwiches in her low-income neighbourhood, and both Alma and Otto have come to see that have-nots taking from a wealthy corporation may have justification. Perhaps the political message and economic argument could be made more pointed in performance, but social critique remains muted by the fast-paced banter and low-stakes character arcs.

Winners and Losers by Marcus Youssef and James Long is a much different kind of comedy than the first two plays, one in which uncomfortable laughter at witty banter devolves into shock at the personal attacks we witness between the two performers. The impact on the spectator comes from what Jenn Stephenson, in her introduction, calls “authenticity effects.” Youssef and Long play themselves—Marcus and Jamie—and the play’s performance is a re-creation of a transcribed dialogue they improvised, with some parts of the show still open to improvisation. Premiered in Richmond, British Columbia, in 2012, the play has since been performed many times internationally, co-produced by the two artists’ own companies, Newworld and Theatre Replacement. We as readers or viewers are initially amused by their offhand and arbitrary pronouncements on a range of random topics; we are participating in a kind of game or event. Stephenson places the play in the contemporary practice of Theatre of the Real: the two actors do real things, like play Ping-Pong and drink beer, so that when they eventually turn to a critique of each other as a winner or a loser, it feels personally real and truly dangerous. In its indictment of male competitiveness, the play recalls Daniel MacIvor’s Never Swim Alone, and the structure is reminiscent of The Noam Chomsky Lectures by Daniel Brooks and Guillermo Verdecchia. While race and class issues are central throughout, one could argue that the final, most damaging accusations are about personal relationships between parents and children, so that, ultimately, one wonders what overarching point has been made for the audience to take away. The play feels thrilling and new in a way the other two plays under consideration do not, but in each there is an attempt to overthrow the expected: Estelle and Mandy and Alma and Otto overcome class differences to find love. Perhaps in Winners and Losers, too, we see the friendship between the real-life Marcus and Jamie as a testament to the ability to collaborate and create, even across acknowledged (real-life) differences.
Stó:lō-Métis orator, author, and unabashed feminist Lee Maracle announces in the subtitle of Memory Serves: Oratories its difference from previous volumes in NeWest’s Writer as Critic series. Of course, the book’s materiality means it cannot literally be what its subtitle professes, thus provoking from the outset questions about the nature of the genre. Maracle’s Preface explains her multi-stage process for producing the speeches “turned-essay[s],” though the “new kind of prose” she claims to be writing may not be altogether novel, considering the history of print textualizing of orature from all contexts, and Indigenous people’s writing down of Indigenous “storying up” globally. However, in foregrounding the oral as Maracle does, she points to her thinking’s foundations and Stó:lō-derived method of working, enriching our sense of oral-written hybridity beyond style and content to process. Moreover, when editor Smaro Kamboureli explains that their editing process included the pair reading texts aloud to each other, she reveals another loop in the dance between oral and written that produced Memory Serves.

The book is more meta-oratory—a coming to theory, to use Maracle’s own formulation in her best-known essay “Oratory” (included here)—than it is literary criticism or theory. But then Maracle’s Stó:lō-based senses of how stories and songs/poems are created and of what the works do differ from Western understandings of the author and creative process, and from any takes on literary function and value, centred aesthetically or didactically.

Stó:lō, Maracle tells readers, produce works communally from an oral base and with frequent feedback loops, but with the primary teller’s or singer’s/poet’s individual stamp. Stó:lō oratories provide ample opportunity for listeners or readers to co-create, arise from an ethics of non-intervention and caretaking of all sentient beings and their environments, and are more concerned with transformation than conflict and resolution. These creations are meant to prompt reflection on whether the direction of an individual and her people accords with who the individual and people understand themselves to be, and what they formulate as “the good life.” The ramifications for Maracle’s view of what constitutes an appropriate response to Indigenous literature are that such a response depends on critics having a firm grounding in the oratory of the authors’ cultures, including its genres, and requires consideration of the literature’s efficacy in stimulating thought about how individuals and societies govern themselves to support wellbeing for all.

While Maracle does valuably address her own and other Indigenous writers’ work, repeatedly lauding that of other women, her most detailed and enlightening critical comments are ironically focused on male creations. Observing that Tomson Highway’s The Rez Sisters “makes us want something more from our lives . . . not just [to] resist the oppression, but also the . . . being stuck,” she praises Highway’s “revolution[ary]” re-making of the Trickster of oral tradition into a “transformer” who “inspires a different less cataclysmic, social relationship between Canada and Indigenous women.” The sole oratory she dedicates to a single work centres on The Journals of Knud Rasmussen, by male filmmakers at Inuit production company Isuma, which she values for being directed to Inuit but collaterally serving all Indigenous people. It does so by “mapping the death of cultural belief and community” that occurs when the shaman Aua complies with the Danish anthropologist’s request to “download” stories, thus changing the way Aua’s
family relates to the very stories that sustained them. In both cases, Maracle focuses on Indigenous oratory in new media serving communities through the transmission and transformation of Indigenous knowledge in contemporary contexts.

While Maracle privileges Indigenous-to-Indigenous communication, she writes that Memory Serves is a book “my community . . . [and] Canadians” need. Her volume serves our mutual needs in identifying a path to peace and reconciliation through shared cultivation of the non-interventionist caretaking ethic, though Maracle is clear the settler state must make reparations for appropriation of Indigenous resources and other damages. It serves by writing down Indigenous “storying up” of events, and by providing Indigenous peoples with arguments for “rematriation” and Canadians with considerable insight into another way of being and creating. The book also richly serves scholars interested in memory; ecological thought; colonization and decolonization; resilience and reconciliation; the interface between orature and writing; and Stó:lō philosophy and culture, especially the verbal arts. We can be grateful, then, to Kamboureli for prompting Maracle to gather and re-work the book’s seventeen “oratories.” Readers would have been even better served, however, by more careful copy-editing—or more robust responses to it—and by a chronological arrangement and/or complete dating of the oratories to enhance understanding of the development of Maracle’s thought.

This non-Indigenous reviewer approached two works—Mareike Neuhaus’ The Decolonizing Poetics of Indigenous Literatures and a collection of essays edited by Neal McLeod, Indigenous Poetics in Canada—cognizant of the fact that the meaning and purpose of Indigenous poetics are creative acts that, regardless of how earnest and engaged the reviewer, are centrally concerned with issues and concepts that can never be fully appreciated or understood by non-Indigenous readers. But this does not mean that these books should only find Indigenous audiences, or that their work on Indigenous poetics is intended only for a specific group. Instead, both works demonstrate that “engagement” with Indigenous poetics is fraught with difficulties and challenges (especially for non-Indigenous readers) and demands more than a cursory understanding of what Indigenous poetics means. It is in this spirit that I hope to converse with these works.

Both books have great relevance for Indigenous peoples in Canada who continue to live in an existential and practical colonial project. Both raise several important questions that, when taken individually, address the meaning and purpose of Indigenous poetics; but when taken in their totality, these questions point to a central concern. Namely, how do Indigenous poetics confront and challenge the colonial project, and lead not only to a spiritual (artistic) emancipation, but to real political and individual agency? For at its heart,
Indigenous poetics is not simply aesthetic expression, but like all good art, it has a political imperative. McLeod confirms this: “Indigenous poetics is inherently political because it is the attempt to hold on to an alternative centre of consciousness, holding its own position, despite the crushing weight of English and French.” This is relevant for Indigenous peoples, especially considering that the attempted colonial destruction of their cultures was facilitated by the wilful nullification of Indigenous languages. The first step toward “decolonization,” then, necessitates the re-acquisition/re-affirmation of Indigenous languages. Neuhaus’ contribution is most welcome here.

Neuhaus raises important questions: what is Indigenous poetics without Indigenous languages? How can Indigenous stories and poetry fully articulate an Indigenous experience using the colonizer’s language? The short answer is they cannot. Neuhaus thus seeks a corrective to this problem by offering the following definition of Indigenous poetics: “I think of Indigenous poetics primarily as a way of making sense of Indigenous expressions, as a set of tools that readers may use when they read Indigenous texts—as a map, if you will, that can help guide their readings.” This map or method for reading Indigenous texts focuses on “holophrastic reading,” showing that although there are many different types of Indigenous literatures and expressions, they all generally share one dominant feature: holophrasis. Holophrases are, according to Neuhaus, “grammatically complete sentences or clauses because they include an expression of both the verb and the subject, and if applicable, its object(s).” The first part of the book presents a primer on finding “holophrastic traces” and “relational word bundles”—important features of Indigenous languages. Her central aim is to show how to “think outside the English language while simultaneously using that language.”

Neuhaus’ book is challenging and daunting, as it should be. As a manual or method, it requires more than a single reading. It is incumbent upon the non-Indigenous reader to struggle with these difficulties, and not to assume Indigenous narratives can be adequately conveyed in English. Neuhaus’ method is best used as a constant reference and reminder of how to “read” Indigenous literatures written in English: “The presence of holophrastic traces in Indigenous writing in English is based on negation: holophrastic traces evoke (the use of) a language structure that does not exist in English grammar. And yet, holophrastic traces remain significant elements of discourse.” Most importantly, holophrastic reading has particular “discourse consequences” that speak directly to important characteristics of Indigenous languages. First, the holophrastic “nature” of Indigenous languages demonstrates the importance of “evidentiality,” or “the process of identifying or qualifying one’s (source of) knowledge.” Second, Indigenous literatures employ figurative uses of language. And third, holophrases allow for a “minimalism of text” to tell a story.

All these elements combine and allow the reader (the follower of the map) to engage with Indigenous literatures and see the influence of ancestral languages, to see how Indigenous narrative structures differ from their Western counterparts, to accept the “sovereignty” of Indigenous literatures, and to understand how these literatures contribute to healing the historical trauma that continues to affect Indigenous peoples. These elements are given life as Neuhaus moves beyond a “method” of reading toward a substantive consideration of the works of Richard Wagamese, Leslie Marmon Silko, and Louise Bernice Halfe, amongst others, to illustrate how holophrastic reading can contribute to a fuller engagement with Indigenous literatures written in English.

Neuhaus’ work is thus a useful complement to McLeod’s collection of essays, which defines Indigenous poetics as
“a theoretical activity grounded in narrative and language.” The essays in this volume challenge how we understand and articulate poetry from an “Anglo-môniyâw interpretative matrix.” The book is divided into the poetics of memory, place, performance, and medicine. These divisions do not signify different categories of analysis or meaning, but show how Indigenous poetics are artistic, cultural forms of expression that speak to rich histories and traditions and are also “political” acts of personal and communal “decolonization.”

The French historian Ernest Renan famously argued that, “[f]orgetfulness, and I would even say historical error, are essential in the creation of a nation.” The creative acts of Indigenous poets help confront the colonial “forgetting” necessary for Canada’s creation and perpetuation. The poetic endeavour from an Indigenous perspective addresses what Warren Cariou refers to in his essay as “wilful forgetting, a choice to not look at something that might destabilize Canada’s wholesome idea of itself.” Cariou’s essay, “Edgework: Indigenous Poetics as Re-Placement,” examines the work of Marvin Francis to show how Francis’ poetry breaks down boundaries that “enabl[e] the relatively wealthy and privileged to enjoy their place in the nation without being bothered by the horrific inequities that typify colonial reality on this continent.” The poet as “edge walker” is able to challenge and complicate these divisions, thereby confronting the very nature and meaning of Canada.

But this remembering cannot be done without understanding the central role that the storyteller plays in Indigenous cultures. Essays by Duncan Mercredi, Janet Rogers, and Lindsay “Eekwol” Knight all speak to what Mercredi terms the “keeper of the fire,” the storyteller and his/her role in both narrating and cataloguing the lived experiences of Indigenous nations, but also in pushing back against the “forgetfulness” foisted upon Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. The “stories” of residential schools are most powerfully understood (heard) through an appreciation of the oral traditions of Indigenous peoples. Mercredi writes:

Their stories were told in a manner consistent with the way stories were related when I was a child. These were emotional, gut-wrenching stories, told from memories and hearts of the storytellers so that they would have the most impact but, more importantly, they were told in such a way that they would remain embedded in the memories of those hearing them for the first time. They were poetic, with a rhythm that would rise and fall, depending on the emotion in which the story was told.

This circles back to the characteristics of Indigenous literatures identified by Neuhaus—figurative use of language, minimalism of text, and the qualification of knowledge—that shape how the storyteller recounts the narrative and allow for “silences” to bring the listener into the story. The memories of residential schools thus become at once historical and contemporaneous, creating the consciousness necessary for the decolonization that Indigenous poetics affirm.

Essays by Waaseyaa’sin Christine Sy and Alyce Johnson demonstrate how a unique connection to the land contributes to decolonization. Sy’s spoken word poem about the sugar bush opens up a “personal decolonization” through a revised understanding of the “erotic.” Sy also addresses the question posed at the beginning of this review. She writes: “The point is to inscribe contemporary Indigenous poetics with the work of decolonization so that we may reduce cultural voyeurism or tokenism and even prompt critical praxis in a non-Indigenous audience; prevent the recreation of a new kind of romantic Indian, the romantic Indigenous person . . . ; and nurture the personal in decolonizing practice.” I take
this to mean an engagement—the type offered by Neuhaus’ work—that appreciates and seeks to understand both the limits and possibilities that Indigenous poetics offers, without degenerating into the type of crude cultural co-optation that has characterized the “Canadian” relationship to Indigenous cultures.

Both Neuhaus’ and McLeod’s books show that Indigenous poetics offer a powerful cultural, aesthetic struggle against colonialism while creating discourses that non-Indigenous people must rightfully struggle with to appreciate and understand Indigenous narratives in Canada.

Out of the Silence

Edmund Metatawabin and Alexandra Shimo
Up Ghost River: A Chief’s Journey Through the Turbulent Waters of Native History. Knopf $32.00

Rick Monture
We Share Our Matters: Two Centuries of Writing and Resistance at Six Nations of the Grand River. U of Manitoba P $27.95

Reviewed by Suzanne James

Revisiting, re-envisioning, and revising the histories of First Nations peoples in Canada is both a personal and a politically-charged act for Edmund Metatawabin, Cree writer and former Chief of the Fort Albany First Nation, and Mohawk academic Rick Monture.

Co-written with journalist Alexandra Shimo, Edmund Metatawabin’s memoir, Up Ghost River: A Chief’s Journey Through the Turbulent Waters of Native History, effectively conveys the alienation and intimidation of a childhood lost to a notoriously harsh residential school in the 1950s and early 1960s, followed by more than a decade of alcohol abuse. The outrage in Metatawabin’s account is poignant, yet tempered, as he recounts horrific experiences that—even after the revelations of Canada’s 2010-2015 Truth and Reconciliation Commission—both surprise and disturb. His “silence began in 1955” and became (as it did for so many of his people) “an ever-present companion.” Breaking this silence and recovering his lost voice as he relates his private—and now published/public—memories proves both advantageous and therapeutic for Metatawabin, his family, and his community.

Nevertheless, the story of Metatawabin’s decline is sadly familiar as “[w]ith an addict’s rage,” he starts to “destroy all that . . . [he] had built: home, family and career.” His recovery is attributed to traditional Indigenous teachings and practices that enable him to recover his Cree identity, though interestingly—especially from a Western perspective—this identity is presented as a collective: in Metatawabin’s words, “My identity is other people.” He initially struggles with a rehabilitation program that insists he come to terms with his identity in isolation, yet finds support in a Cree healer who contextualizes the alcoholism of disenfranchised First Nations men and women such as himself.

For Metatawabin, the Idle No More movement embodies a (perhaps) idealized collectivity and affirmation of Indigenous identity, and he closes this memoir by challenging readers with a series of concrete suggestions for change: abolish the Indian Act, support Native sovereignty, advocate for political change, help youth in education, target youth suicide, and support Indigenous artists.

In contrast to Metatawabin’s very personal narrative, Rick Monture’s academic text, We Share Our Matters: Two Centuries of Writing and Resistance at Six Nations of the Grand River, explores First Nations perspectives and issues of identity through a revisionist historical account of the Haudenosaunee, commonly referred to as the Iroquois or Six Nations. As Monture notes, the Haudenosaunee have been extensively
studied in Western anthropological, historical, political, environmental, and linguistic accounts, yet—until very recently—never critically analyzed from anything other than an outsider perspective. Focusing on letters, speeches, poems, and songs produced by members of the Six Nations, as well as select accounts by colonial writers purporting to convey Haudenosaunee perspectives, this work explores the complex ways in which prominent members of the community negotiated with European culture and the colonial government, represented traditional beliefs and Indigenous philosophy, and attempted to assert the sovereignty of their community. The latter is particularly interesting as colonial discourse so often negates any form of First Nations nationalism or sovereignty, or subsumes it within the framework of Canadian nation building, as Emily Pauline Johnson (one of the focal points of Monture’s study) does here in “Brant: A Memorial Ode”:

To-day
The Six Red Nations have their Canada,
And rest we here, no cause for us to rise
To seek protection under other skies

Monture explores the tension in works such as this memorial poem, interrogating the often-contested loyalties expressed by the Haudenosaunee writers he discusses, all of whom were the products of a formal Western education.

Monture opens his text with an overview of Haudenosaunee history and a discussion of their traditional worldview. This is followed by an analysis of the speeches, letters, and biographical accounts of the nineteenth-century Mohawk chief Joseph Brant (Thayendanegea), and a discussion of the often-contentious poetry of Emily Pauline Johnson (as exemplified in the previous paragraph). Monture then shifts outside of the community, providing a critique of Duncan Campbell Scott’s highly influential accounts of Haudenosaunee issues at the turn of the twentieth century.

A discussion of the speeches, essays, and poems of Dawendine/Bernice Loft (1902-1997) takes the reader into more unfamiliar territory, as does the music of Jaime Robbie Robertson, who wrote for, and performed with, Bob Dylan and The Band in the 1960s. This is followed by a series of engaging accounts of Haudenosaunee writers leading up to the films and works of multimedia artist Shelley Niro.

Monture closes by reminding us that “[t]his is a book that will always be ‘in progress’” as, for the Haudenosaunee, “the world is continually unfolding, changing, and developing.” As well as providing a fascinating account of a people’s philosophy, culture, and history so often misrepresented or unrepresented, We Share Our Matters exemplifies the ways in which the field of First Nations studies has the potential to challenge and enrich traditional Western academic culture. The many voices in this text now speak out of what has too often been a place of silence, resonating as does the voice of Edwin Metatawabin in Up Ghost River.

A Pixelated Paradigm
Anna Poletti and Julie Rak, eds.
Identity Technologies: Constructing the Self Online. U of Wisconsin P $24.95
Patrik Svensson and David Theo Goldberg, eds.
Between Humanities and the Digital. MIT $45.00
Reviewed by Justin Shaw

Identity Technologies: Constructing the Self Online and Between Humanities and the Digital discuss a central issue in defining the “digital humanities”: to what extent are traditional humanistic concerns—pain, suffering, freedom, pleasure, happiness—taken into consideration in our increasingly abstract engagement with digital technologies? For some, this is a serious ethical issue
that will always require the insights of the traditional humanities, while for others the “digital” needs to break free from antiquity. Along these lines, these texts diverge in tone and content: *Identity Technologies* leaves an impression of reluctant yet cautious optimism, while *Between Humanities and the Digital* is anchored in the “digital” world, focusing on digital success stories and calling for investment in digital infrastructure.

*Identity Technologies* interrogates wide-eyed optimism for the “revolutionary” and “democratizing” potential of digital technologies, emphasizing that critical theory needs to situate such technologies within the histories of their production. This takes into consideration neoliberal discriminations based on gender, race, ethnicity, and class, which often impede the “democratic” participation of certain global citizens. Section 1, “Foundations,” begins with Helen Kennedy’s critique of this rhetoric of “democratization,” arguing that online discriminations are often transposed to online contexts. Lisa Nakamura extends this critique to the neoliberal commodification of cyberrace in “identity tourism.” Similarly, Rob Cover challenges the “authenticity” of social network subjectivity, with Facebook allowing users to define themselves according to delimiting schemata of neoliberal intelligibility. Finally, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson ask whether digital extensions of human subjectivity will lead to posthuman liberation or neoliberal appropriation.

In Section 2, “Identity Affordances,” Aïmée Morrison argues that Facebook co-authors subjectivity through its preconstituted affordances, which delimit users’ authorial expression. Courtney Rivard also questions digital authorship, suggesting that the success and relative failure of the 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina digital archives reveal that archival production is always influenced by power relations. Laurie McNeill examines the affordances of creative self-expression and community building on *Smith*, a website dedicated to writing microfiction, arguing that its “democratic” image is undercut by its commodification of participants’ stories into books, bypassing author royalties.

In Section 3, “Mediated Communities,” Mary L. Gray explores how “coming out” as LGBTQ has been facilitated by online communities, especially for rural youth who face conservative social values and who lack visible community. Olivia Banner examines how “lifelogging,” promoted by PatientsLikeMe.com, creates biosocial communities of patients who track and share their symptoms, which problematically reduces embodied/experiential understanding to abstract data sets that are sold to medical corporations. In contrast, Alessandra Micalizzi, by examining an online perinatal death support group, shows how the Internet can serve as an identity technology in which communities can share personal narratives and gain recognition online that is otherwise denied in the offline world. The penultimate essay by Philippe Lejeune laments the devaluation of the expansive sense of time afforded by traditional forms of autobiography, suggesting that the nature of online communication—including its immediacy, revisionism, and brevity—“attacks” the ability to construct coherent life narratives.

*Between Humanities and the Digital* is a more expansive and in-depth volume that highlights the contemporary transition of humanities to the digital realm. In the first section, “The Field of Digital Humanities,” Alan Liu and William G. Thomas outline how cost-cutting in neoliberalized universities encourages online courses, which traditional humanities departments have critiqued as dehumanizing. Along these lines, Todd Presner reasserts the fundamental importance of critical theory in the humanities, arguing that without it, the “digital humanities will largely ape
and extend the technological imaginary as defined by corporate needs and the bottom line.” As critical theorists, Henry Jenkins suggests, humanities scholars should become better public intellectuals by getting involved in technology and adopting a more “citizenly discourse.” Jenkins interviews Sherry Turkle, who sees public engagement as an antidote to current anxieties concerning technology, suggesting that people are “not happy and are genuinely searching for new ways of living with new technology.” In contrast, Ian Bogost’s polemic on the redundancy of the traditional humanities dismisses critical theory and thinking as “fashionable censure.” However, David Theo Goldberg recasts the debate by simply asking, “what kind of humanists [should] we choose to be in and for our times?”

In a technologically advanced culture, the answer is inevitably “digital.” From that affirmation, the second section, “Insecting Fields and Disciplines,” moves into specific case studies of how the digital humanities are influencing contemporary fields. The breadth of application is wide: from digital interactive installations that revitalize medieval art forms, to “digital remixes” of media products as creative mashups, to critiques of gendered autocomplete results generated by Google’s search algorithms, to immersive and interactive multimedia platforms that transport users to the “Global Middle Ages,” to “cyber archaeology” that facilitates research in three-dimensional computer-generated environments, and to fMRI analyses of the brain while reading to better understand the processes of literary experience. All of the chapters on the practical applications of digital humanities are positive and gesture towards future research.

The third section, “Knowledge Production, Learning, and Infrastructure,” defines the unique infrastructural needs of the digital humanities. Amy E. Earheart argues that digital humanities labs need to be both “real and virtual” and be “multipurpose, with activities ranging from research to pedagogy.” Zephyr Frank examines a virtual laboratory project: an online recreation of Richard Pryor’s hometown of Peoria, Illinois. The website was designed as an “alternative media” form that was “filled with links to primary documents and short filmed sequences designed to provide a visually rich narrative pathway into the material for novice users.” Elizabeth Losh proposes that such “novice users” (i.e., students) should learn by actually creating “the bulk of course content” in a lab setting, a “utopian” pedagogical approach that “highlight[s] how new ideas around ‘critical making’ change the fundamentals of the production and consumption of knowledge.”

Closing the text, N. Katherine Hayles laments the “conservative” tenor of many commentators on the digital humanities, calling for a revolutionary embracing of the “nonconscious cognition” at the core of human reasoning that is replicated in current digital technologies.

The first text in this review, Identity Technologies, ends with a decidedly loose and philosophical interview with Lauren Berlant who envisions blogging as a productive crossover between the traditional humanities and the digital. In contrast, Between Humanities and the Digital makes a hard exit by focusing on digital humanities infrastructure. Svensson and Goldberg’s decision to conclude on future hardware and productive spaces treats the question of the digital as if it’s a foregone conclusion, and in many ways it is. While the inherent skepticism and ethical foundations of the traditional humanities will always remain vital to keeping “revolutionary” and “utopian” impulses in check, the digital world has been moving inexorably forward and the traditional humanities have to catch up to contemporary “human” concerns, which are increasingly linked to digital ways of being.
The desperation of the Dirty Thirties. Almost all the poems in this book are narrative in style, focusing on the underlying story behind the outlaws and those around them. The most lyric of the poems appear when exploring a specific moment in time, such as barrel fires during a break from the spree, or the clothes worn when they were finally captured, as witnessed in “the clothes Blanche ran with”:

Golden yellow spring outfit with white detail in, white gloves and pumps to match (ruined by grease that time I drove the car). . . . Tight yellow jodhpurs made me look so nice and trim and went real well with riding boots (what I wore when we were caught).

It is in these small vignettes that Smart’s brilliance comes through; we are perfectly transported to a dusty road in the 1930s, pulled into the mythic lives of Bonnie and Clyde.

Rachel Rose, Vancouver’s current Poet Laureate, explores the complexities of the domestic in her newest collection, Marry & Burn. Poems in the book consider love and sexuality, commitment and betrayal, addiction, and parenthood, filtered through the compassionate lens of the author. Rose experiments with forms and structures, pushing individual poems into new variations of themselves; prose poems, sonnet corona, list poems, and series of vignettes all appear within the new collection. She creates startling images, using language to pivot meaning and subtext, and this is where her work shines. In “Cleave,” Rose juxtaposes the simple act of cutting onions with the end of a marriage:

August swelled with heat, loops of onion fell from my knife. The children knew nothing of such sorrow. My face streaked with sudden rain, I served them lies

Rose has explored the domestic in earlier collections, but even when tackling familiar
Robert Bringhurst is often described as a modern-day renaissance man. Few writers could navigate fields as diverse as poetry, translation, typography, cultural history, and philosophy as interwoven vocations. Through an adherence to polyphony as a mode of deep ecological thinking, Bringhurst works to make accessible the wisdom of poets and thinkers past, from Sophocles to Haida mythtellers Ghandl and Skaay.

As Bringhurst puts it, “when two voices intertwine, the space they occupy gets larger, and the mind gets larger with it”; no wonder poet Dennis Lee calls him “a man of massive simple-mindedness.” Bringhurst has a way of chiselling complex thinking down to that part of being that ineluctably binds all living matter together. Bringhurst’s ontological approach is more aligned with ancient Greece than the modern academy, which is why editors Brent Wood and Mark Dickinson make clear that he doesn’t neatly fit within the “twenty-first century university’s rubric of knowledge production and transmission.” As such, Bringhurst is most comfortable in the role of an independent public thinker, bound by neither institution nor strict cultural protocol, which has irked some of his critics.

Working to right the perceived blight of Robert Bringhurst from academic conversations, including his exclusion from CanLit anthologies, Brent Wood and Mark Dickinson have put together an excellent collection (the first of its kind) on Bringhurst’s far-reaching oeuvre. Listening for the Heartbeat of Being: The Arts of Robert Bringhurst includes fifteen essays from a range of literary scholars, publishers, poets, and journalists, and, like Bringhurst’s own work, concerns what we might refer to as an ecology of being. The essays include a detailed biography of Bringhurst by Mark Dickinson, first-hand accounts from publishers about his typographic achievements, analysis of his polyphonic poems for performance, and much-needed reconsiderations of his Classical Haida Mythtellers translation trilogy. Aside from experienced scholars and publishers speaking about Bringhurst’s work, we also get strong endorsements for his singular genius and pioneering approach to translation, language, and poetics from well-known CanLit icons Margaret Atwood and Dennis Lee.

Bringhurst’s active listening and translation of the great minds of many cultures is rooted in a polyphonic concern for ecological well-being. As he puts it in his essay “Singing with Frogs: The Theory and Practice of Literary Polyphony”: “What city
dwellers frequently call ‘silence’ is the ebb and flow of birdsong and the calls of hawks and ravens, marmots, pikas, deer, mice, singing voles, the drone of gnats and bees and bee flies, and the sounds of wind and rain and running water. The world is a polyphonic place.” “Ecology becomes,” as Kevin McNeilly puts it in his essay on Brighurst’s Antigone, “a question of response and responsibility, of careful exchange: human beings cannot keep taking, without giving back.” For Brighurst this act of giving back relates to translation and revision as a “gesture of respect.” To truly listen and understand, we need to immerse ourselves in the sounding world from which literature is born.

Hence, Brighurst’s definition of polyphony goes beyond the literary or the musical, as he claims it “isn’t a literary or musical technique,” but a “property of reality which any work of art can emphasize or minimize, emulate or answer, acknowledge or ignore.” Of course, the central conceit borrows from the language of literature and music, and in many ways, as Katherine McLeod elucidates, Brighurst models his own thinking and poetic structures on musicians whose practices are engaged with multiple speaking voices: “Glenn Gould, jazz pianists Bill Evans and John Lewis, and a range of composers from his contemporary Steve Reich all the way to J. S. Bach, and reading scores from ‘early Hayden to Shostakovich.’” The comparison of Brighurst to reclusive Canadian Glenn Gould is apt, as Wood and Dickinson suggest Gould’s “little known polyphonic radio documentaries inspired Brighurst’s own multi-voiced performance poems.” From jazz (I enjoyed reading of a young Brighurst learning jazz drums) to European chamber music, Brighurst utilizes the techniques of “echo, paraphrase, overlap, repeat,” and other forms of musical response to find ways to show how literature is of the world and mind, shaped within and across cultures.

Brighurst’s approach to Haida oral literature takes an unexpected direction, albeit in line with his other work. His mentor and friend, the late Haida carver and storyteller Bill Reid, suggested that he could get inside the stories through European classical music, playing Bach’s Unaccompanied Cello Suites for him, saying: “Those solo cello pieces are like those myths you were talking about. It’s hard to follow the pattern, but they make a kind of sense.” Part of the controversy around Brighurst’s retranslations of Haida oral literature surrounds him not asking the Council of the Haida Nation for permission and his ethnopoetic approach, preferring to use poetic line breaks to mimic an oral voice rather than prose as in prior translations.

Much of the initial ire directed at Brighurst has dissolved. Atwood claims these early responses were misplaced and goes on to praise Brighurst’s Haida translations—particularly A Story as Sharp as a Knife—as an American Iliad. The collection does a good job summarizing the numerous debates and revelations of Brighurst’s Masterworks of the Classical Haida Mythtellers, with an essay about the book design of this work from Scott McIntyre; a public defense of the work by Atwood for the Times; a comprehensive breakdown of the trilogy by Nicholas Bradley; a piece by Vancouver-based broadcaster of Haida and Cherokee decent, Káawan Sangáa, that looks at the critiques of the text at the time of publication; and an essay by Ishmael Hope, an Alaskan storyteller of Iñupiaq and Tlingit heritage, who acknowledges the importance of these stories and mythworlds of Skaay and Ghandl for his own family.

The essays are decidedly supportive of Brighurst’s endeavours, which, as McIntyre offers, seek to reveal “historical truths of the Haida voice.”

While more could be said in the collection about how Brighurst’s universalism is at times fraught or essentialist, Brighurst’s
the members of the Cuban family, who are represented as random customers and mere strangers; as a result of the fraud, the lawyers have their permits suspended for the rest of their lives.

The story takes place partly in Toronto and partly in Havana. The team of delegates includes an ambitious lawyer named Octavian Castro; an astute lawyer named Ferdinand Magellan, usually referred to as Mags; and the protagonist, an untalented lawyer named Walter Roger. The loophole, originally discovered by Mags, concerned the eligibility of “anyone born on a Canadian military ship for Canadian citizenship.” Castro, Roger, and Magellan travel to Havana in order to finalize their plans to circumvent the Canadian legal system. They plan for Stella, a Cuban citizen, to give birth to her child on a ship, which would be considered Canadian as long as Magellan, who had served in the Canadian Naval Army, was on it. The plan’s progress becomes hampered by the embassy, and so Magellan and Castro devise a new plan where Stella will temporarily divorce her husband Ramon so that the Cubans can temporarily marry the lawyers. Stella and her child (falsely presented as Castro’s) ease their way to Toronto, and Ramon’s fake same-sex marriage to Roger paves his way to Canadian citizenship—the reader is forced to wonder how the embassy overlooks evidence that would contest the truth of such claims. After a year, Ramon and Stella divorce their partners and reunite. The end result is that the Cuban family gains Canadian citizenship, while the lawyers are suspended from practicing law in Canada indefinitely.

Loopholes evokes the struggle of a family attempting to escape the communist economic system of Cuba and fighting to live in a capitalist society such as Canada. Although the novel makes no overt claims in support of capitalism, its focus on the harsh living conditions and
limited stipends of families in Cuba does so implicitly. Yet, *Loopholes* also raises numerous questions about capitalist Canada as a country wherein immigrants hope to belong. For example, Ramon, who is an engineer, finds work at the Bank of Montreal as a security guard in order to make ends meet, leaving readers to question whether or not he finds the opportunities he deserves after immigration. Moreover, Ramon is also subject to homophobia within the Cuban community in Toronto, who make him a “laughing stock” based on their perception of his sexuality resulting from the sham marriage to Walter that enabled his Canadian citizenship. Such difficulties faced by immigrants are highlighted throughout the novel and cast a shadow over the utopian dream of Canada. Despite the lawyers’ success in navigating legal loopholes, the difficulties of Ramon’s life ultimately raise the question of whether or not coming to Canada and becoming a Canadian citizen have been worth the trials of immigration.