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Editorial

Spies in the House of Literary Criticism

Margery Fee

Lately, I've learned a lot from working with two Canadianist colleagues, Kathryn Grafton and Katja Thieme, whose research and teaching also includes writing in the disciplines. Those of us who teach literature know how to write in our discipline, but it likely hasn't occurred to us to think about the typical moves a successful critical article actually makes. We certainly know them when we see them as we go about reading and evaluating undergraduate and graduate essays and articles and books written by our peers. I also read and edit articles submitted to this journal and have the pleasure of reading the reports of the expert readers we conscript to evaluate them. Many of these reports are amazingly helpful, not just in pointing out gaps in knowledge or writing problems, but also in suggesting how the article might be reconceptualized or reframed overall. Far too often, the readers point out that the argument is stated too late, vaguely, or not at all. Further, they note, theoretical approaches are either buried or too schematically applied, connections to the wider disciplinary conversation are few and far between, and the article's own contribution underplayed.

My writing colleagues, however, have shed some light on why even expert literary critics might still be missing some of the obvious marks in producing their articles. We rarely, if ever, think about method. Methodology is a word I never encountered in graduate school and recently, when I have been asked to explain my methodology, I am now ashamed to report that I often replied, flippantly, "reading, writing, and thinking." A while ago, I was ranting about the requirement to fill in a section on methodology on grant applications. The form, I felt, was clearly designed by evil social scientists. My discipline

just didn't have a methodology and should not be expected to, any more than we should have lab results or data collections. My patiently listening colleague said kindly, well, it is a good idea to explain what texts you will be reading, why you selected them, how you will be reading them, and what your reading might add to what we already know about them. Oops. We actually do have methods, but we just don't talk about them much. We see ourselves as studying literature, not literary criticism. Our analytic gaze is focused on the texts we read, not on how we do the reading.

Because we tend to work in disciplinary silos, different disciplines have different "epistemological styles" (Lamont 54); since most of us do not engage in interdisciplinary work, we tend to see those in different disciplines as "the Other" and hold stereotypical ideas about their disciplinary practices. As my rant makes clear, even those of us who have wandered across or been forced over disciplinary boundaries may still lapse. I wrote a literary history for my doctorate, completed an undergraduate applied linguistics diploma, and took on a research project for my first tenure-stream position that was based on millions of words of real-language data. I have taught Women's Studies, Indigenous Studies, and Science Studies, and team-taught a first-year course with historians and philosophers (UBC's Arts One). I consider myself lucky to have had these highly educational interdisciplinary experiences, despite the vertiginous sensations of imposter syndrome that still wash over me as I think about them. In fact, these sensations are deserved, since I remain a literature scholar: I lack a great deal of knowledge about the foundational assumptions of these other disciplines. Witness my problems with methodology. Worse, as my writing studies colleagues point out, I don't really understand the foundational assumptions of my own discipline. I still just perform them and hope for the best.

Writing specialists put it this way. We have lots of what they call tacit knowledge about critical writing in our field, but we don't make it explicit. We learned by immersion and imitation. We usually teach our students to write literary criticism by demonstrating how it's done in lectures, by guiding them in discussion, by encouraging them when they get it right and by getting them to read the occasional critical and theoretical article. We know good criticism when we hear it or see it. However, students are unable to articulate the moves that we perform for them—not surprising, since we often can't do this either. Often they disappoint us by imitating us too closely, when we really want them to do something original—to surprise us. Or they disappoint us by ignoring our moves altogether and lapsing into plot

summary interspersed with uncritical quotation from a random assortment of sources. Writing specialists think we should help students by explaining our moves rather than simply performing them.

We could also expand our horizons and that of our students by taking on board the findings of other disciplines (like writing studies) that relate to literature and literary criticism. However, we don't read articles that analyze literary critical articles—why would we read social science? We don't read about how scholars in psychology, cognitive science, rhetoric, linguistics, philosophy, history, education, and sociology analyze literature, although these disciplines and others are, like us, busily studying texts, narrative, and discourse. Yet more and more, our grant and scholarship proposals are assessed by those in other disciplines: we need to be able to mount an argument for our projects that they will engage with. Michèle Lamont's study of academic assessment committees points out that my hostility to social science is grounded in a fundamentally different attitude to truth: "Humanists often define interpretive skills as quintessential for the production of high-quality scholarship. Social scientists, especially those who champion empiricism, more often deride interpretation as a corrupting force in the production of truth" (61). Of course, social science fields also vary in their beliefs and methods. My feeling is that we shouldn't get our experience of other disciplines indirectly, by having our grant applications rejected or by finding ourselves at a loss on a grants panel where we suddenly realize we are presenting as dangerous loonies. As Sherry Lee Linkon points out, "intuition and serendipity . . . are essential elements of our critical methodology" (22): an economist may be aware that these forces play a role in her discipline, but it's quite likely she won't proclaim this idea to a room full of scholars from other disciplines. We need to know at least enough about other disciplinary perspectives to make persuasive arguments about our own projects to those who don't share our assumptions.

Our failure to see our discipline as an object of study as well as a practice puts us and our students at a disadvantage. Although English literary studies began to replace the Classics in schools and universities only in the mid-1850s, English rapidly gained prestige. Matthew Arnold situated it as a substitute for religion in a secularizing Britain. Canonical works were touted as a model of civilized expression for the colonies. Settler colonies like Canada and the United States became fixated on developing great national literatures. Members of the educated upper class were expected to have read widely and to show their cultivation by alluding to their literary knowledge.

The justifications for studying literature became so obvious as to be hardly worth stating. Now that those props have been kicked out from under us by a neoliberal ideology that focuses on monetary profit, by a rise in narrow positivism in some disciplines, and by an attitude to education that focuses on jobs, we are left sputtering. Like aristocrats faced with a crudely practical rising middle class, we find it demeaning to justify what we do. In fact, we can't, at least not in terms that make sense to those outside our discipline.

But it is even more troubling that we don't explain our primary critical strategies to our students. In *Literary Learning: Teaching the English Major*, Linkon argues that we are good at demonstrating our ability to work through interpretations in lectures and to guide class discussions about texts. Where we fall down, in her view, is explaining to students as we go through this process just how we arrived at our interpretation, which is usually presented to them as a finished, polished performance. This typical pedagogy fails to convey our method, what she calls strategic knowledge and what Laura Wilder calls "rhetorical process knowledge" (4), vital information if students are going to be able to succeed at tackling the interpretation of unfamiliar texts by themselves.

For Linkon, the solution lies in changing the way we lecture to include a sort of cooking-show running commentary. We might note what aroused our interest in a particular word in a poem and how we tracked its use in the OED. We might explain how biographical information can be parlayed into an illuminating context. It also means more class time spent on group work where students use the strategic knowledge we have offered them to work out interpretations for themselves. Finally, it affects writing assignments. The most typical assignment in English courses is the research paper, usually due at the end of the term. However, the students don't get the benefit of our feedback at this point: it's done. No wonder some students don't bother to pick up their final papers, despite our careful comments.

Linkon and other writing scholars argue for what they call "scaffolded writing." The scaffold is a series of classes and assignments that lead toward the final paper, making the class more like a writing and research workshop than a lecture/discussion class. Students choose their research topic early, producing a series of short writing assignments related to it throughout the term: e.g., short paper proposal, annotated bibliography, draft, response to peers' essays, and finally the finished essay. During the process, they will have received instruction in research and in several common disciplinary genres. We will have time to intervene at several stages in the process.

Students are given more low-stakes assignments that turn the typical summative evaluation of the final paper into a process aimed at developing their skills. Students may read less, but they arguably learn interpretive skills that are transferable to other literature courses and, it is hoped, to the jobs they take after graduation.

One typical research method for a writing studies scholar is to select a sample of published critical articles and to analyze them for recurrent features. Laura Wilder promotes the explicit highlighting of what she calls "special topoi of literary analysis," topoi she has identified by reading contemporary literary critical articles. These topoi are "agreements that are shared by members of a particular discipline" (Wilder 18). She argues that students should be taught these topoi so that they are aware that as they move from one discipline to another that they are moving from one set of writing expectations to another. Majors thus become apprentices to a scholarly discipline, trained how to move from novice to expert rather than merely forming an audience for our performances, which range from the bravura to (in many more cases) the mundane.

Rather than further describing these and other works of writing scholars focused on writing in the discipline of English, I urge you to read them for yourselves. My interest in them comes from our plan to use these and other studies to underpin a guide to academic research and writing in *Canadian Literature*'s online teaching and learning resource, CanLit Guides. For courses that focus on making disciplinary writing practices explicit, the design of writing assignments is a crucial component. We hope to help Canadian literature instructors to think about their own assignments by providing samples for them to model in their own classrooms. We hope to "create a digital resource that helps students learn to read scholarly articles and produce their own instances of scholarly genres about the literatures of Canada" (Fee, Grafton, and Thieme 1). Although we are still thinking about what this resource will look like, we hope to test it at a CanLit Guides workshop we plan to hold in spring 2016. Tentatively, we propose that this writing guide will contain (with the author's and readers' permission) examples of a few articles published in *Canadian Literature*, along with the first submission, the two readers' reports, the revised submission, and the second set of readers' reports. Students—and those planning to submit to the journal—will be able to see the stages of a process that now largely remains invisible except to editors and authors. Along with this, we hope to include a set of student writing samples, showing the steps that students go through

as they work through a scaffolded set of writing assignments to a completed research paper. Laying out the process that a published scholarly article and a final student research paper goes through in development, research, drafting, evaluation, and revision will make a process that is largely hidden more visible. However, we realize that simply throwing these texts up on the web will likely not engage readers: we need to consider how to present this resource effectively and how to add our commentary to situate these writing samples in the process that writing scholars like Linkon and Wilder use to articulate how we write in our discipline.

Although the discipline of writing studies has been developing since the 1990s, the complexity of literary critical writing has meant that works like those I examine here have emerged only recently. Along with writing textbooks that use their theoretical findings, these works should move into our own collections, not to mention the reading lists for teaching assistants in our discipline.

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Natasha Gold

This is a Mining Town

Prevailing winds mounting,
the uproar of quartz and feldspar shifting underfoot
the indignities of a stripped mountain, flesh cut back
to reveal its inner being
the rooted canals, water long dried to minerals
the gaping mouths of seas rubbed raw
shocks of basalt ballooning and freezing
shelf-life decay
impossible to meet with the eye.

They want concrete, not abstract
every rock an animal, every mountain a waste pile

Drink the iron crunch the anthracites smash your teeth
against the coal make it black make it uneasy make it

a river of expectations toppling like lava
erasure light and airy as tephra settling until hardened
cemented civilizations; this rivulet of fact
Pennsylvania harboured like a stillborn, Appalachians taking
every man in the state underground
blackening them and finally, closing all the lights
the last pull of oxygen from the lungs

When it feels good, suffocate —
suffocate ceaselessly and repeat. Collapse is inevitable,
lung or otherwise. This is a mining town.

Ranbir K. Banwait

Legislating Race, Grammars of Patriarchy

Citizenship, Statelessness, and Velma Demerson's *Incorrigible*

Velma Demerson's *Incorrigible* (2004) offers a point of reflection for thinking about the racialized history of citizenship in Canada. Indeed, The Strengthening Canadian Citizenship Act (Bill C-24), which received Royal Assent on June 19, 2014, calls on us to historicize the language, conceptual limits, and losses of citizenship. Widely criticized for its redefinition of citizenship as a privilege rather than a right and its construction of a second-class category of citizens, Bill C-24 returns us to the historical production of Canadian citizenship and its legacies of disenfranchisement and loss. Demerson's autobiographical narrative, about a young white woman who is incarcerated and experimented on because she has a Chinese fiancé, illuminates the paradoxes of this history. In 1939, Demerson is charged for being "incorrigible" under the Female Refuges Act[1] and eventually incarcerated at the Andrew Mercer Reformatory for Women in Ontario.[2] When she later marries her fiancé, Demerson loses her Canadian citizenship; twelve years later, struggling with poverty and unemployment, Demerson and her husband lose custody of their son, Harry. The autobiography ultimately reveals Demerson's loss of both her husband and her son, the latter dying at the age of twenty-six. Indeed, Demerson's life is variably bound to and torn from these two family members, as she experiences devastating losses of legal and social identity. The year 2014 also brings Demerson's story full circle: Bill C-24 implemented changes to existing citizenship law in order to grant citizenship to those who lost their citizenship as a result of the 1946 Citizenship Act, which produced the category of Lost Canadians[3] that Demerson, too, was a part of until 2004.

And yet, the act also gives new life to categories of exclusion[4] bearing an eerie resemblance to Demerson's and Harry's peculiar narratives of citizenship. By examining how the frames of citizenship and biopolitics come together in mediating Demerson's relationship with her son Harry, I suggest that these frames ultimately produce conflicting and unanticipated narratives about political subjectivity, racial identity, social death,[5] and citizenship. Offering insight into the socio-political, medical, and legal regulation of women's bodies in the first half of the twentieth century, *Incorrigible* calls attention to the ways that citizenship and statelessness are racially legislated through the grammar of patriarchy.[6]

Experimental Bodies and Social Conditioning

The conundrum of the medical treatments and experiments conducted on Demerson must be considered precisely in the context of the racialized nature of her pregnancy. In what follows, I thus examine how these practices of medicalization estrange Demerson from her own body, complicating her relationship to her pregnancy and her son. Since Harry is racialized even before birth, the unborn child's ontological status (as half-Asian) calls into question Demerson's access to social legitimacy. And after his birth, Harry becomes a prime target of state regulation and biopolitical control. This status becomes quite clear through the ways in which Demerson and Harry are caught in the matrix of shifting definitions of citizenship at the time. Demerson applies for a passport in 1949 only to discover that she lost her citizenship upon her marriage to a foreigner. Harry, however, retains his citizenship status, and this, paradoxically, enables him to move both within as well as outside of the nation-state.

In the autobiography, Demerson catalogues the different treatments she undergoes during her eleven-month stay at the Mercer. As she explains, "The type of medical procedure we undergo is degrading and none of us knows what the other endures. Only the older women are unafraid to use medical words with their ominous meanings" (105). Later she notes, "Dr. Guest would have had to examine over three hundred Mercer women the year the Belmont girls arrived. It's likely she spent more time on Helga and me than on the others. I underwent weekly treatments for over two months in surgery, injections, and chemical applications" (163). According to the records she later acquires from the Ontario archives, Demerson not only endures a series of painful treatments for gonorrhoea, but after Harry's birth, she is also asked to take pills whose effects were unknown to her, but

which she believes led to Harry's severe eczema (Demerson 91; Backhouse 121). As historian Constance Backhouse explains, Dr. Guest "was committed to studying the Mercer inmates as research subjects for the advancement of medical knowledge" (109). Demerson also notes that when Guest "first became a physician at the Mercer, gonorrhoea statistics for the women there rose to 47 percent from 26 percent in the previous year" (161). This rise in statistics is consistent with the fact that "the treatment and medicalization of women's criminality blossomed as never before" at the Mercer[7] in the mid-twentieth century (Ruemper 369).[8]

Historicizing her experiences through Dr. Guest's career, Demerson provides invaluable insight into the everyday medical administration of social hygiene. In their account of colonial science, Jordan Goodman, Anthony McElligott, and Lara Marks observe that as the "boundary between science and the state was becoming progressively blurred" in the beginning of the twentieth century, so, too, did "medical science [become] a constitutive force in the creation of a 'knowledge society' built around the functionality of the body" (5). Elaborating further, they explain that the discourse of racial hygiene was not only "invented by medical science," but that modern science's exploration of the human body mimicked the imperial narrative of expansion and "exploration" (5, 2). Demerson's autobiography reveals a similar link between the expansion of colonial science into the lives of young women and the expression of racial hygiene in the workings of colonial science.

Interracial crossing and questions about the viability of the foetus all converge rather startlingly in the fraught sites and moments of experimentation, as well as in their aftermath. In an interview with Backhouse, Demerson speculates that Dr. Guest selects her for the medical treatments because she is pregnant with a mixed-race child: "I'm positive she was conducting experiments. She [may have felt] justified in her experiment because [she thought my] baby was going to be feeble-minded anyway, defective. Was her main objective to kill the baby all along?" (*Carnal* 120-21). Guest's disregard for Demerson's pregnancy, perhaps, explains why she administered sulphanilamide to Demerson, in spite of controversy at the time regarding the drug's harmful effects (355). When Demerson reflects on her 1939 pregnancy, she recalls,

> My environment has taken over my entire being. . . . My heaving body has separated me from others. I feel like an animal that needs reprieve from suffering. No one ever told me that I'm carrying a human being inside me and I don't acknowledge its existence. There's a silent conspiracy to undermine that reality since I have antagonized the state by my monstrous behaviour. (17)

In this scenario, Demerson reads her pregnancy as a measure of the state's intrusion into her life, referencing a shifting index of meaning with respect to the pregnant body as a social entity. In these lines, the narrator conveys a number of striking shifts in her sense of bodily habitus, the entire grammar of cognitive and affective dispositions that encompasses her subjection. She tells us that her spatial and social isolation from others denies her access to the longings and loyalties that bound her to her fiancé and that could have, in turn, bound her to her unborn child. Indeed, her "loyalties have dissolved in a sea of turmoil," subsumed by her vulnerability and "lack of access to [her] physical needs" (17). The condition of captivity reconfigures Demerson's relation to her own body as well as her intimate social relations. She maintains that she "was not born in captivity" (17), but the experience of confinement reduces her to her body's physicality, and rewrites her corporeal and affective disposition toward others.

The register of estrangement that the above passage tracks is thus significant because it occurs at the level of the *pregnant* body and shows the extent to which pregnancy is a social process. In another insightful moment, Demerson asserts that the lack of social recognition of her pregnancy facilitates an inability on her part to also acknowledge the impending birth of her child. Indeed, her own mother fails to mention the baby upon her visit to the Mercer: "[My mother] must be aware I'll be going into hospital soon to give birth but this isn't discussed. The word *baby* is never mentioned. I don't think about it either. I don't anticipate the future. I exist only for myself in the present. I have no feelings but fear" (75-76). Demerson attempts to inform her mother of the excruciating pain she experiences during the medical procedures, but her plea for help falls on deaf ears, a sign of her family's complicity in her incarceration: "I'm accustomed to [my mother's] digressions—she acts as though she doesn't hear me. My suffering probably adds to her expectation that I'll have a miscarriage or the baby won't be born alive" (71). Significantly, Demerson connects her mother's deliberate silences on the topic of the unborn child to the hope that the baby will not survive. In this respect, *Incorrigible* is instructive because it reveals how the racialized half-Asian foetus is socially cast as a nonentity, its life and liveability preordained by norms of recognition that place Demerson's pregnant body outside of the dominant social and political order.

In moving metaphorically between the animal, the human, and the monster, Demerson questions how the pregnant body becomes the site where shifting ideas about humanness and the nonhuman come together. It is telling that

Demerson foregrounds the feeling of *feeling like an animal* because, as Lynda Birke indicates, "women have long been denigrated by animal epithets . . . mostly loaded with loathing" (430). The association of women's bodies with animality is an old one, recycled and repackaged time and again. Unsurprisingly, the animal, also understood as a biological entity, relocates women as biological subjects in patriarchal discourse. In a parallel vein, Margrit Shildrick also observes that monstrosity came to connote morphological difference for both women and racial others (2-6, 12). Demerson, however, introduces an important distinction between animality and monstrosity: she associates her body (a biological entity) with animality, and her actions ("immoral" conduct) with monstrosity. The suggestion in *Incorrigible* is that monstrosity is rooted in conduct, and pregnancy is the sign, the symbolic effect, as it were, of the narrator's behaviour. Thus, by characterizing her body in animalistic terms and her behaviour as monstrous, the narrator also marks her double displacement from the human.

The racialized relation of Demerson to her child is significant because it also hails Harry into the world, conditioning the formative scenes of his entry into subjecthood. The spectre of disease and physical injury haunts Harry from the very beginning, and the circumstances of his botched circumcision and the severe eczema he develops as an infant can both be traced back to Dr. Guest and the various medical treatments and experiments Demerson undergoes. The language of eugenics recasts his ability to survive and indeed, to live. One doctor asserts that Harry "should never have been born" (135). As a kind of phantom figure in the narrative, whose birth, life, and even death remain shrouded in mystery, Harry thus comes to the fore from within the text most remarkably as the figure without language, the child who is shuttled between parents and institutions and whose narrative emerges from the interstices of the text. He spends his adolescent years in the foster care system and drowns at the age of twenty-six. In the text, this death represents a relation that cannot be recovered and an account that cannot be given: he haunts the pages of the book as an irrecoverable subjectivity.

The Paradoxes of Racially Bound Citizenship

The violent legacies of modern citizenship continue to resurface in debates today about the values of birthright citizenship, belonging, and statelessness. The Canadian conception of citizenship emerged through the colonization and displacement of Indigenous peoples and through the historic exclusion

of racialized minority groups. And yet, this history is not history per se, for the exclusions of citizenship continue to be relegislated today, and debates over the tightening of citizenship law continue to resurface. Bill C-24, introduced in the House of Commons by the government in February 2014, is the most recent incarnation of such debates, and now as a law, it drastically limits individuals' access to citizenship. Its many stipulations include a citizenship revocation clause and stricter language and knowledge tests; these resonate with earlier forms of nationality and citizenship law in Canada, which also legislated citizenship through a similar language of dispossession. Critics contend that Bill C-24 transforms citizenship into a privilege rather than a right, making it harder to get, and easier to lose (Macklin 23). As Audrey Macklin points out, the revocation clause in Bill C-24 is nothing new: "revocation power was used to target foreign-born labour activists for expulsion during the anti-communist crackdown in the early 1930s. Near the end of World War Two, the Liberal government enacted a scheme to 'repatriate' (deport) to Japan thousands of Canadian citizens and non-citizens of Japanese descent. . . . This entailed, among other things, denationalizing citizens by birth and naturalization" (21). Situated in this history, Bill C-24 mobilizes anti-terror rhetoric for the purposes of criminalizing residents through citizenship. A repetition with a difference, the 2014 law is illuminated by a turn to the first decades of the twentieth century and Demerson's narrative about citizenship, dispossession, and loss.

In *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Giorgio Agamben interrogates the biopolitical processes through which some bodies cease to be politically relevant (139), questioning, "What is the status of the living body that seems no longer to belong to the world of the living?" (97). A limit on who gets to belong, Agamben argues, is the founding principle of modern societies (100). According to Agamben's formulation, nation-states employ the principle of exception to simultaneously ingest and regurgitate those who become its threshold subjects. This regulatory principle brings two categories into being: one designating natural rights, the rights that pertain, properly speaking, to all human beings, and consistent with the simple fact that humans are born and exist; and the second conferring the rights and privileges of belonging to a given place.

And yet, *Incorrigible* revises Agamben's query, posing the following question instead: what is the status of the living body that *returns* to the world of the living—the status of the subject who politically contests and reclaims the rights of citizenship? What does this return illuminate about

the threshold between the politically alive and the politically dead? The trajectory of Demerson's narrative reflects how Agamben's principle of exception is not outside of time or space, but continually adopts new criteria for inclusion and exclusion. In particular, *Incorrigible* allows us to explore the excesses of biopolitics. These excesses are generated when the lines of race intersect with those of gender, producing conflicting narratives about legal and political identity, citizenship, loss, and disenfranchisement. The autobiography's publication, for instance, follows Demerson's legal and political battle for apology, redress, and compensation in a two-year process of negotiation with the Ontario government.[9] Demerson's story of political agency asks us to look more closely at the racialized logic of citizenship discourse at the time and its production of unlikely and capricious forms of social and political life and death.

Agamben's argument brings to mind the history of Canadian immigration and the state's regulation of its borders through its use of Chinese labour. While feeding its economic need for railway workers, for instance, the Canadian nation-state delimited the Chinese Canadian claim to belonging through a set of legal exclusions. One such measure—the Chinese head tax—adopted under the Chinese Immigration Act in 1885, functioned through the principles of exception described by Agamben. Legislation on Chinese immigration shifted between the years 1885 and 1924, but while the head tax was a pretext for allowing the influx of Chinese labourers it sought to disallow, the 1924 legislation almost completely prohibited Chinese immigration, even as it presumably allowed the entry of "desirable" immigrants. Explaining how the policy shifted over time, Lily Cho notes that the head tax was paid in advance by labour brokers and ship captains. In this system of indenture, labourers were not required to pay the full amount at their initial arrival in Canada; that they were required to repay their labour brokers and ship captains only later meant that, although politicians introduced the head tax as a system that would prevent Chinese immigration, the legislation's outcome was the opposite of its stated intention (72-73): it "facilitate[d] the entry of more Chinese immigrants" (72). In fact, even as the House of Commons increased the head tax first in 1900 and then in 1903, Chinese immigration was on the rise during these years; this statistic is accounted for by a system of indenture that accommodated the need for Chinese labour (73). Interestingly enough, the 1885 legislation contrasts with the 1924 Chinese Immigration Act, which put a stop to virtually all Chinese immigration, but was framed in very different terms: that of permitting

only "desirable Chinese, merchants and students" into the country (73). Supposedly restricting the immigration of only Chinese *labourers*, the 1924 legislation effectively curtailed all Chinese immigration for the next twenty-five years (75): the "head tax functioned as a policy of inclusion under the rhetoric of exclusion, and [eventually] exclusion in 1924 came into legislation under Mackenzie King's rhetoric of liberal inclusion" ("Rereading Chinese" 76). Changes to Chinese immigration legislation consequently reveal how policies of inclusion and exclusion fold into each other, one becoming the modus operandi for the other.

Such acts of legal racialization produced their own states of exception, but what is striking is that a definition of Canadian citizenship first emerged from immigration policy, rather than directly from Canadian citizenship law. Under the Revised Statutes of the 1910 Immigration Act, the term "Canadian citizen" referred to "a person born in Canada who has not become an alien" or "a British subject who has Canadian domicile" (2065); an alien was anyone who was not a British subject (2065). As Sarah Buhler observes, "'citizenship' terminology" was used in the 1910 Act to construct the notion of "alien" (95). Along with providing this definition of "citizen," this statute also outlined the infamous Continuous Journey clause. The passage that follows restricts the landing of immigrants considered "unsuitable" for Canada's political, socio-cultural, and climatic environment:

> The Governor in Council may . . . prohibit or limit . . . the landing in Canada . . . of immigrants belonging to any nationality or race or of immigrants of any specified class or occupation . . . or because such immigrants are deemed unsuitable having regard to the climatic, industrial, social, educational . . . or other requirements of Canada or because such immigrants are deemed undesirable owing to their peculiar customs, habits, modes of life and methods of holding property, and because of their probable inability to become readily assimilated or to assume the duties and responsibilities of Canadian citizenship. (2083)

The above passage racializes the notion of Canadian citizenship, using the thinly veiled language of "unsuitability" to consolidate the country's dominant racial identity around whiteness. That citizenship is defined in legislation about *immigration* illustrates the extent to which Canadian citizenship has been based on racialization from its early inception, defined and policed through immigration law.

Prior to 1947, the legal status of Canadian citizenship was based on British citizenship law. It was only when the Citizenship Act of 1946 came into force in 1947 that the nation-state properly conferred citizenship status on Canadian subjects. However, Demerson's loss of citizenship status highlights

how the 1947 Act put various race- and gender-based exclusions into place. As I have already discussed, Demerson and her unborn child share a connection that vicariously racializes each in relation to the other, a relation from which each is hailed by the medical and legal establishments of the day. This relation is once again reconfigured, however, upon the child's birth and Demerson's subsequent marriage to Harry's father. Legally speaking, the formal union results in the loss of Demerson's citizenship status, adding another layer to her narrative of loss and dispossession. And yet, this family's citizenship status is far more complex than even this articulation of loss might suggest. The 1940s were rife with meaning in this regard. Demerson's case illustrates how these years were a time of incredible flux with respect to who was excluded from citizenship. When Demerson learns of her loss of citizenship a mere two years after the act came into effect, we also discover that she became a stateless person because she married a Chinese man in 1940; she remained stateless until 2004.

The 1947 Citizenship Act belongs to the same pool of legislation that policed racial relations through the grammar of patriarchy. Sandra Chu points out that, "While the *Exclusion Act* was repealed in 1947, racist restrictions on the immigration of Chinese persons continued until the early 1960s. This legislative activity reflected a wider pattern of anti-Asian public policy in Canada" (404). As Chu avers, the intent of these laws was to prevent the reproduction of the Chinese Canadian community. Thus, despite the notable absence of anti-miscegenation laws in Canada, "an informal and extra-legal regime ensured that the social taboo of racial intermixing was [also] kept to a minimum" (Thompson 354). In addition to forms of social policing, interracial relations were regulated indirectly through a whole host of other legislative acts, such as the Female Refuges Act mentioned earlier, and the nationality and citizenship laws that both Demerson and Harry are subjected to.

Demerson's story reflects on the losses that accompany the loss of a legal identity, and the restrictions such a loss imposed on her mobility and her ability to lay claim to her own life. But even more importantly, *Incorrigible* also demonstrates how such losses define and delimit the *multiple* status of family members, and their displacement and disenfranchisement in relation to one another. As Lois Harder and Lyubov Zhyznomirska explain, "[k]inship rules of national membership keep us in our place, they let us know what our place is, and they underscore what it means to be 'out of place'" (313). What is unique to Demerson's story of citizenship is that a set of competing laws comes into play in legislating both Demerson and her

son's citizenship statuses. Harry is born in October 1939 (Demerson 163). Demerson's marriage takes place months later in 1940 (115). The hiatus between Harry's birth and Demerson's marriage generates a set of conflicting meanings about who belongs and when, and according to which law.

Demerson only learns of her loss of citizenship from an RCMP official years later in 1949 when she attempts to procure a Canadian passport. For the purposes of exploring the particulars of nationality law during this time, I thereby focus primarily on the decade beginning with Harry Junior's birth and ending with Demerson's application for a passport in 1949: "because my husband is a Chinese National [I am told] I am a citizen of China by marriage. He writes down 'Chinese citizen.' Then . . . [he] takes my hand and presses my little finger on a pad and moves it to another for imprinting, which he also does with every finger" (139). The officer takes an impression of each of Demerson's fingers, marking the narrator's bodily trace into the identifying papers. In this moment, the officer retrospectively authorizes the 1914 Act respecting British Nationality, Naturalization and Aliens, which classified a woman's citizenship under that of her husband. The wording of the Naturalization Act is as follows: "The expression 'disability' means the status of being a married woman, or a minor, lunatic or idiot" (298). Placing married women under the category of "disability," the statute further defines the national status of a married woman in the following way: "The wife of a British subject shall be deemed to be a British subject, and the wife of an alien shall be deemed to be an alien" (292). The officer's claim is based on the fact that Demerson lost her British nationality upon her marriage to a Chinese national, as stipulated by the 1914 Act. Thirty-three years later, this loss of nationality would have been re-codified in law as a *loss of citizenship* by the Citizenship Act. The 1946 bill also stipulated that a person would be taken to be a "natural-born Canadian citizen" if "he" was born in Canada or on a Canadian ship and *has not become an alien at the commencement of this Act* (68). As its language reveals, the Citizenship Act upholds and in fact, re-enacts the precedent established by the earlier statute, re-entrenching the patriarchal logic of the earlier legislation.

To return to *Incorrigible*, the RCMP officer also reinforces the Naturalization Act by closing another legal loophole for Demerson. The official asks Demerson to sign a Declaration of Intention which, she believes, is an application for citizenship (139). This declaration, however, when read alongside the language of both the Naturalization Act and the Citizenship Act, is likely a Declaration for the *renunciation* of Canadian citizenship (293, 73).

The wording of the Citizenship Act suggests that natural-born Canadian citizens may also renounce their citizenship if they become citizens of another country through the laws of that nation:

> 17. (1) Where a natural-born Canadian citizen, at his birth or during his minority, or any Canadian citizen on marriage, became or becomes under the law of any other country a national or citizen of that country, if, after attaining the full age of twenty-one years, or after the marriage, he makes, while not under disability, and still such a national or citizen, a declaration renouncing his Canadian citizenship, he shall thereupon cease to be a Canadian citizen. (73)

The above clause stipulates that an individual who becomes a national of another country through marriage may renounce "his" Canadian citizenship. Following up on the officer's statement that she is now a Chinese national, Demerson subsequently heads to the Chinese embassy to apply for a Chinese passport. But her request is ignored by an official there as well, who is mainly puzzled by the young woman's application (139). The embassy's noncommittal response to the request not only counters the Canadian official's claim that Demerson became a Chinese national through marriage, but also reflects the production of an entire category of stateless people through the Canadian Citizenship Act. Unable to acquire a passport from either country, the narrator travels to Vancouver to reapply for a Canadian passport under her maiden name (139). In this instance, Demerson's acts of citizenship indicate a set of practices and counter-practices with respect to the narrator's personal history of citizenship and disenfranchisement, one that also highlights her resourcefulness in negotiating both the claims of citizenship and the address of the law.[10]

Since citizenship is crucially about the sorts of claims and rights we may have as citizens, it also raises questions about how we come to belong (or not belong) as individuals to a designated state. In reading this as a narrative about the paradoxes of racially bound citizenship, I take my cue here from Judith Butler's discussion of the contingencies of dispossession and her suggestion that "we are not only constituted by our relations but also dispossessed by them" (*Precarious* 24). For Butler, this means that we are compelled to assert our autonomy in the political sphere, but that the assertion of this autonomy is nevertheless always-already insufficient: "when we hear about 'rights,' we understand them as pertaining to individuals. . . . And in that language and in that context, we have to present ourselves as bounded beings—distinct, recognizable, delineated, subjects before the law. . . . But perhaps we make a mistake if we take the definitions of who

we are, legally, to be adequate descriptions of what we are about" (24-25).

The experience of estrangement and defamiliarization, of loss and injury in *Incorrigible* makes this all the more clear. As the text suggests, Demerson becomes mired very quickly in the messiness of the law when she comes under its purview. The important point here is not just that Demerson inherits an affectively charged sense of dispossession, but also that she inherits a rights-based discourse of disenfranchisement that she hadn't been subject to before. This dispossession thus necessitates for Demerson a set of negotiations that would not have been possible, let alone imaginable, prior to her marriage.

By contrast, her son's example offers an even more ambiguous case study. In accordance with the Naturalization Act, he would have been a natural-born Canadian citizen, born on Canadian soil to a Canadian mother. But although Harry is born on Canadian soil, his legal status as a Canadian citizen would have come under contestation from the moment his parents married. According to the Naturalization Act,

> Where a person being a British subject ceases to be a British subject, whether by declaration of alienage or otherwise, every child of that person, being a minor, shall thereupon cease to be a British subject, unless such child, on that person ceasing to be a British subject, does not become by the law of any other country naturalized in that country. (292-93)

The above clause stipulates that a child would lose his status as a British subject should his responsible parent also lose her status as a British national. Since Harry was born out of wedlock, his responsible parent was Demerson, and upon her marriage to a foreign national, Harry, too, would have become a Chinese national. This clause is reinforced by the 1946 Act:

> 18. (1) Where the responsible parent of a minor child ceases to be a Canadian citizen under section sixteen or section seventeen of this Act, the child shall thereupon cease to be a Canadian citizen if he is or thereupon becomes, under the law of any other country, a national or citizen of that country. (73)

Mandating against dual citizenship, the clause dispossesses those who were born in Canada, but who might be considered citizens of another country. Although Chinese citizenship during the first half of the twentieth century was also indefinite, the principle of blood lineage (*jus sanguinis*) was used by the Qing dynasty to determine Chinese nationality in 1909 (Dan 12). Shao Dan observes how the "blood line principle, which transcend[ed] both temporal and spatial boundaries" caused nationality conflicts for Chinese people in the diaspora (21). Although both the Canadian and the Chinese legal definitions of citizenship are consistent when we examine Harry's case,

Incorrigible offers another take on what could otherwise have been a strict application of citizenship law; Demerson explicitly identifies Harry as a Canadian citizen in the autobiography.

To consider this further, it is necessary to examine how Demerson's familial narrative unfolds in the autobiography. In 1942, a series of events initiate Demerson's separation from her husband and son, triggering a pattern of displacement and precarity that unravels her family unit: Finding herself pregnant again, and unable to cope with memories of her previous pregnancy, Demerson turns to her father to pay for an abortion; he asks her to return home in exchange for the money (127). Agreeing to this demand, Demerson moves to New Brunswick to work for her father; informing her husband that she will return, she leaves Harry in an Infants' Home in Toronto (127-128). In the years that follow, Harry is shuttled between Demerson, her husband, and the foster care system. In 1949, we find Demerson living on Church Street in a Chinese laundry in Toronto (135). Lew Yuen, the laundry's owner, offers Demerson and Harry rent-free shelter. Facing acute social alienation and the difficulties of handling Harry's extreme asthma and eczema, Demerson sends Harry to Hong Kong to live with Lew Yuen's sister, believing that this arrangement would both benefit Harry's health and help him learn the Chinese language; Harry's father also signs documents in agreement with Demerson's decision to move Harry (he travels to Hong Kong one month before his tenth birthday) (136-137).

There is public outcry, however, when both Chinese and Canadian reporters learn that Harry had not been received by anyone at the Hong Kong airport (136-37). One newspaper reminds its readers that Harry "is a Canadian despite his mixed-up parentage" (137). Eventually, Harry is united with his caretaker in Hong Kong, and Demerson follows Harry to Hong Kong months later on a Canadian passport in her maiden name. Upon reaching Hong Kong, Demerson proves that she is Harry's mother at the Canadian consulate, another indication that Harry's citizenship status is first defined through Canadian law (144). Harry's example thus suggests how in practice, citizenship was authorized for subjects through conflicting and ad hoc legal interpretations. Such practices can be related to two defining principles of citizenship, *jus soli* (Latin for right of soil, or birthplace) and *jus sanguinis* (Latin for right of blood, or rights granted through parental citizenship).

The 1946 Citizenship Act created a series of elisions that call into question the very principles of citizenship and in particular, highlight the contradictory role that the legal concepts of *jus soli* and *jus sanguinis*

played in shaping these prohibitions. As in many other countries, Canadian citizenship law is based on these twin principles.[11] Taken together, these concepts signify how the metaphor of birthright forms an origins-based narrative about civic life. Remnants of ancient notions of citizenship, they continue to play a formative role in contemporary forms of biopower. The two principles frame the concept of birthright, rooting citizenship in a lineage that gets passed on either through "land" or "blood" or both. In this respect, birthright also functions as a structuring myth that reifies citizenship as a dual practice of property rights and patriarchal lineage. In *Cradle of Liberty*, Caroline Levander writes that the child represents a racial narrative that is central to myths about national citizenship and "functions as the point of origin for the human" (6, 3). Like others, Levander stresses that modern citizenship is inaugurated through the birth of the child (7). Demerson and Harry's respective citizenship statuses highlight the uncanny ways in which this myth of citizenship takes shape and showcase the contradictions of modern citizenship.

Ultimately, *Incorrigible* demonstrates how the principles of *jus soli* and *jus sanguinis* can be applied in racializing ways. Historian Christopher Lee explains that these legal principles "have acquired a central role in understandings of modern citizenship, and they continue to inform criteria for citizenship status in a number of countries" ("Jus Soli and Jus Sanguinis" 507). What especially distinguishes Demerson's case, however, is that although she is stripped of her citizenship rights, the civic principle of *jus soli* adjudicates her son Harry's right to citizenship: he becomes a Canadian citizen at birth since he is born on Canadian soil. In Canada, the birth of the child in the form of the citizen is a legal legacy that highlights the ironies of a racialized citizenship, which attempts to mandate against interracial marriages, but is legislated through the grammar of patriarchy. Specifically, this grammar is applied to Demerson, for whom this takes place through a legal regime that either appends women to their husband's legal identity or else conflates them with his property. Certainly, Harry's example is perhaps the more intriguing of the two because he retains his citizenship although his mother loses hers: together their examples show how a race-based concept of citizenship ends up sometimes permitting what it seeks to disallow, giving way to the losses and complexities of social, political, and legal identity. What's more, narratives such as Demerson's lead us to consider deeply the long-lasting implications of citizenship policy today—and the experiences of loss and dispossession, that the category of citizenship continues to give rise to.

NOTES

1 A provision under the Ontario Female Refuges Act, the charge of incorrigibility (1919-1958) was used to label and punish the behaviour of young women who strayed across colour lines. See historian Joan Sangster's "Incarcerating 'Bad Girls'" for more detail (240, 275).

2 While at the Mercer, Demerson gives birth to Harry, a sickly child whose weakened condition was later acknowledged by the Ontario government to be the result of these experiments. As acknowledged in the apology she received from the Government of Ontario in 2001: "the government wishes to apologize for the adverse effects your incarceration undoubtedly had on your son, who was born to you while you were in custody" (*Incorrigible* 165).

3 The Lost Canadians were those who either lost or else were denied their citizenship as a result of discriminatory racist and patriarchal state policies. See, for example, Lois Harder's article "'In Canada of all places': National Belonging and the Lost Canadians." The case of the Lost Canadians came to public attention in 2007 when the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI) required that Canadians and Americans carry passports when crossing the Canadian-American border (203); this initiative has been a part of the tightening of borders and security in the "war on terror" (204). Harder argues that the Lost Canadians garnered public sympathy because the rules of kinship belonging determine an individual's claim to Canadian citizenship. As Harder outlines, the case of the Lost Canadians not only established a strong connection to White European ancestry, "invok[ing] an organic connection to the nation—a blood tie," but it also set up an implied contrast with racialized non-white residents and citizens and their claims of belonging (204). As he writes, "articulations of national identities work through gendered and racialized dynamics of power to foreground particular identities and struggles and to obscure others" (206).

4 As Audrey Macklin points out, the citizenship revocation clause of Bill C-24 must be situated in the context of related practices, "including deprivation of citizenship rights, deportation of non-citizens, historical practices of banishment and exile, and the death penalty" ("Citizenship Revocation, the Privilege to Have Rights" 3). Macklin situates Bill C-24 in the larger context of anti-terror rhetoric, and the impetus to criminalize immigration. Historicizing citizenship revocation as an archaic procedure, she notes that it is analogous to political and civic death, whereby a subject "is no longer recognized as an autonomous legal subject" (8).

5 In her important study of cross-racial relations in British Columbia, Renisa Mawani observes that Chinese migration "renewed constitutions of race and racisms" while "physical and discursive proximities, contacts, and encounters produced additional regimes of racial truths and added modes of legal and nonlegal governance" (7, 6). Mawani claims that these geographies of surveillance and violence produced regimes of racial death that were as political as they were cultural. Demerson's *Incorrigible* reveals these regimes to be shifting ones, racializing subjects through capricious forms of social existence and social death.

6 To look at racial governance in the first half of the twentieth century, it is necessary to examine how racial relations were legislated through a patriarchal grammar. Indeed, to think about legislation and grammar together is to be attentive to what the term "grammar" signifies. As Christine Kim and Sophie McCall assert, attention to grammar illuminates the unwritten forms of power that code the everyday structures of our lives:

"[c]ultural imperatives in language evidence assumptions about difference and identity, of self and other, and inevitably produce unstated hierarchies" (9).

7 In her history of the Mercer Reformatory, Carolyn Strange points out that it was founded on two ideological principles: "The first was the idea that reformation rather than punishment was the best antidote for crime. The second was the belief that men's and women's natures—their sensibilities, their minds, their souls, and hence their 'proper' spheres—were distinct" ("Criminal and Fallen" 81). Despite the emphasis on the Mercer as a reform institution and a site for maternal control, Strange points out that it ultimately failed in its mandate, combining the disciplinary and coercive elements of a prison: "The central problem . . . lay in the impossibility of maintaining a prison as an 'ordinary, well conducted household.' No matter how motherly the superintendant, she could never transform cells, workrooms, and dungeons into a home. Every inmate who walked through Mercer's archway knew she had been sentenced to prison, even though the words above her spelled 'Reformatory'" ("Criminal and Fallen" 92).

8 For more information on the history of the Mercer Reformatory, see Strange's "The Velvet Glove." See also Hannah-Moffat, Strange's *Toronto's Girl Problem,* and Ruemper. As Joan Sangster points out, "there had been a number of riots at the Mercer [since 1948], often over issues such as food and bad treatment; one involved 100 women and 50 Toronto police, while another was quelled with tear gas" (247). A 1964 Grand Jury report by the Elizabeth Fry institute also condemned the Mercer for its harsh and inhuman treatment of inmates. The report outlined a lack of educational programs and inadequate medical care. The use of solitary confinement cells also revealed the extent to which the Mercer veered away from its "rehabilitation" program (Sangster, "Reforming Women's Reformatories" 241).

9 The text's afterword includes the written apology that Demerson receives from Attorney General David Young on behalf of the Province of Ontario, in December of 2002: "I am writing to you on behalf of the Government to apologize to you for your incarceration under the Female Refuges Act in the 1930s. This Act had unfortunate and unjustified consequences for you and other women who were unjustifiably incarcerated under its provisions. In addition, the government wishes to apologize for the adverse effects your incarceration undoubtedly had on your son, who was born to you while you were in custody, and to his father, Harry Yip" (165).

10 As David Chariandy reminds us, it is important to be mindful of how minority subjects serve as active scripters and narrators of citizenship: "we often run the risk of narrating citizenship, in Canada and elsewhere, in ways that automatically figure blacks (and non-whites in general) as either passive or else outright worrisome inheritors of citizenship, and not active and, at times, crucial definers of it" (328).

11 Despite the emphasis on *jus soli* as birthright citizenship, First Nations peoples did not receive citizenship based on right of soil. Legally characterized as wards of the state, Indigenous peoples only received the right to vote in August of 1960 (Robertson 234).

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Lisa Arsenault

Sunrise of Extinct Birds

Red-winged blackbird sings sweet auspicious song, alive in Music Garden,
not like the reunion night heron,
extinct in the 17th century,

or the canarian oystercatcher extinct since the 1990s,
not like the sulu bleeding heart bird flew over Tawi Tawi Islands,
its bleeding heart gushed, rushed, unable to fly in this world,

not like the mysterious starling flew over Cook Islands.
See the Sulu Sea, longer skies longer, like the black and
white sacred ibis in Tanzania still flies.

We wait at Pearson's Red Rocket in Terminal 1,
drinks, September Vogue, all flights oversold,
our future unknown like a cockatrice.

Would New York memories be worth it
or better we never made it?
The New Zealand laughing owl hoots its death-howl at us now.

Woo Hoo. Hoo Hoo. Ha Ha.

Paul Huebener

Subjective Time and the Challenge of Social Synchronization

Gabrielle Roy's *The Road Past Altamont* and Catherine Bush's *Minus Time*

In his inquiry into different conceptualizations of time, Christopher Dewdney raises a question about how we, as individuals, might hope to reconcile the fact that "our collective sense of the present, the one we all agree upon, is not the same as our private sense of 'now'" (10). Our experiences of time are deeply personal even while they are tied to social life. The tensions that can arise between these different layers of temporality lead to what Daniel Coleman describes as a sometimes fraught negotiation of our conceptual images of time, or chronotopes: "We construct chronotopes in an ongoing dialogue between individual and collective experience, and much of our personal sense of belonging has to do with the fit between our individual time-space maps and those of the communities in which we live" (231). This matter of "fit," as well as the articulation of different temporal structures themselves, is intimately connected with our everyday use of narrative. In his seminal study *Time and Narrative*, Paul Ricoeur asserts that "time becomes human time to the extent that it is organized after the manner of a narrative" (1: 3), and that narrative itself is the only thing which allows us to take "the subject of an action, so designated by his, her, or its proper name, as the same throughout a life that stretches from birth to death" (3: 246). The perception of any constant identity or relationship is possible only through the perception of continuity, the perception that past events are related to present and future events, and that one moment in time can be understood in terms of another. The upshot is that our distinctive experiences of time, which are shaped largely through social relations and tensions, equate very closely to our distinctive identities. Thinking through the complexities of

subjective time—a task to which thoughtful literary narratives are especially well suited—allows us to understand how subjective time is shaped by, and lies in tension with, broader forms of social and temporal relations.

In this article I offer two case studies on the above concerns by reading the tensions between subjective time and sociality in Gabrielle Roy's short story cycle *The Road Past Altamont* (*La route d'Altamont*, 1966) and Catherine Bush's novel *Minus Time* (1993). While the two books examine strikingly different temporal circumstances—francophone settler culture in early twentieth-century Manitoba and the implications of orbital space travel for a Torontonian family near the end of the twentieth century—both works clarify the ways in which broad social temporalities must be understood through individual temporal experiences, as well as the ways in which subjective time, and thus the very notion of identity, must be understood through the context of social factors which include not only cultural chronotopes, but other forms of social circumstance such as the need for intimacy with others, the flux of familial relations, and the ambiguous effects of new technologies. I suggest in particular that the desire for various levels of social synchronization is key to reading subjective experiences of time, that certain forms of social tension on the level of the family, the society, and even the ecosphere, can best be understood as forms of desynchronization, and that fleeting moments of partial synchronization are deeply necessary for fostering intimacy and connection between individuals, even while total synchronization remains not only elusive, but in fact by definition impossible.

Why examine these two particular texts? Following A. A. Mendilow's distinction between "tales of time" and "tales about time," Paul Ricoeur argues that "[a]ll fictional narratives are 'tales of time' inasmuch as the structural transformations that affect the situations and characters take time. However only a few are 'tales about time' inasmuch as in them it is the very experience of time that is at stake in these structural transformations" (2: 101). Mark Currie, however, points out that the above distinction requires the critic to make a risky judgment about which concern is primarily at stake in a narrative; he suggests that instead of asking whether a particular narrative is "about time," critics can more productively ask what a given narrative *knows* about time (111). While *The Road Past Altamont* and *Minus Time* could largely be understood as narratives "about time," there is no question that each book knows something significant about time, and about the difficult relationship between subjective time and social synchronization

in particular. The sustained focus on this problem within the two texts deserves illumination, and becomes especially revealing when the books are read alongside one another. Even while the works share a similar conceptual problem, they respond to very different cultural moments: the boundary between modernism and postmodernism for Roy, and the late stages of the postmodern era for Bush. While both works speak to the particular social concerns of their respective eras, they also allow for strikingly compatible conclusions about the paradoxical human need for forms of social synchronization that can never be maintained, suggesting that the troubled desire for synchronization remains a vital concern in the investigation of identity and subjective time despite the radical cultural changes visible across the span of the twentieth century.[1]

Like Gabrielle Roy herself, the protagonist Christine in *The Road Past Altamont* is born in Manitoba early in the twentieth century to francophone parents who had immigrated to the prairies from Quebec. While some critics refer to the book as a novel, it is usually seen as a short story cycle, in that the four sections, which examine four different periods of time in Christine's youth and young adulthood, are comprehensible on their own but are best understood as building on one another to establish a fuller perspective on Christine's growth into adulthood and her decision to become a writer. (As such, the book is a *Künstlerroman*, if we allow that a work which leans more towards the short story cycle form can still usefully be described as an "artist's novel.") Critical commentary has often focused on Roy's representation of the prairie landscape, but the subjective experience of time in informing both personal identity and intimate social relations is also a central theme. As Christine gradually comes of age, she learns through interactions with those close to her that the temporal bonds which tie family members and friends together simultaneously preclude the possibility of complete temporal coexistence. While individuals are connected to one another by virtue of the fact that everyone ages, by partially overlapping lifespans, by the inevitability of death, and by social customs that create a sense of community in a particular time and place, each of these commonalities also ruptures interpersonal relations: no two people are exactly the same age, no one's lifespan overlaps completely with anyone else's, the timing of death is unique to everyone, and, especially in modernity, the social customs to which one is accustomed shift over time, separating oneself not only from those who are younger or older, but also from one's own past way of life.[2] This knowledge of temporal connections and ruptures in turn

becomes a form of self-knowledge, informing the discoveries that Christine makes about her own identity as a young but developing person navigating complex relationships with the people around her.

David Williams sees *The Road Past Altamont* as an "imagist novel" (178) that transforms problems of time into spatial figures such as the tapestry—which symbolizes the way that Christine's mother, or "Maman," narrates the family history—and the womb, which symbolizes Maman's realization that the aging individual metaphorically gives birth to her ancestors and her children through hard-won comprehension of the needs and anxieties of people of different ages. For Williams, the "linked story form" allows the novel to create "its series of lyric instants" (178). Seeing the book specifically as a short story cycle, though, can further draw out the temporal aspects of the form. Gerald Lynch argues that the form of the short story cycle itself is "a distinctly Canadian genre" which "allows for a new kind of unity in disunity, reflecting a fragmented temporal sense" (18). He points out that the popularity of the form

> coincides with the arrival of the modern world, when the revolutionary impact of Darwin, Marx, Freud, and Einstein was being cumulatively felt and all traditional systems were coming under a destabilizing scrutiny . . . including the tradition of the realistic-naturalistic novel. Viewed in this context, the short story cycle can indeed be considered as a kind of anti-novel, fragmenting the continuous narrative's treatment of place, time, character, and plot, and often offering simultaneous multiple perspectives in a manner paralleling that of cubist painting. (23-24)

J. N. Nodelman briefly mentions that Lynch's argument could be applied directly to *The Road Past Altamont*, but does not comment further on the implications of this fragmented temporal sense, deciding instead to focus on the various modes of spatial transport in the book—including stilts, horse-drawn carts, trains, and cars—which cause people to conceptualize and interact with the landscape in particular ways. Lynch's generalization on the short story cycle does accurately reflect the fragmented temporalities created by the way in which each of the four stories that constitute *The Road Past Altamont* covers an isolated period of time, even while the stories taken together develop a more unified sense of Christine's growing comprehension, a formal trait that is entirely appropriate to the representation of temporal bonds that connect people even while they divide individual experiences. The form of the book mirrors its thematic preoccupation with subjective temporalities that are both fragmented and coeval. Still, this does not make it an anti-novel as such. Modern and postmodern novels, after all, had carried

out similar rejections of continuous linear narrative by the 1960s. Rather, the form of *The Road Past Altamont* disrupts the conventions of continuity that were tied more specifically to nineteenth-century novels invested in what Lynch calls "the realistic-naturalistic" tradition, and in this way the form also mirrors the experiences of the characters who find themselves living in a world where the social conventions of the previous century have given way to shifting and complex new realities. Monsieur Saint-Hilaire complains that his grandchildren "weren't unkind or heartless but suffered from the malady of the times: a fondness for speed and cars and motorcycles and also for spending money as quickly as they could . . . and that he felt too old now to be able to adapt himself to the frenzy of the day" (71). His comment is appropriate not only thematically, but also formally insofar as it appears within a short story cycle that eschews a regular narrative progression in favour of the modernist "frenzy" of a more rapid pace of change.[3]

While the spatial metaphors that Williams sees as the key to the book's commentary on time are indeed important, the very notion of identifying what he calls "the ultimate spatial form for time" (187) risks moving the conversation away from properly temporal concerns and toward debates over the significance of different spatial images.[4] Hence, Williams' argument that the image of the womb makes Roy's modernist vision of time quintessentially feminine. Hence, too, the long-standing critical debate over whether time in the book is best understood as cyclical or linear. Nodelman points out that, for M. G. Hesse, "time is conceived as a cycle, so that the future contains the past while the past anticipates the future," while for Paula Gilbert Lewis the characters' desires for cyclicality "imply a lack of any forward movement" along the linear path of time (qtd. in Nodelman 219). Nodelman refers to "Christine's deepening sense that life is a great circle," but suggests that the debate remains open, that the central question in the second story of the book, for instance, is "whether our passages across the landscape are cyclical (in the sense that we can experience several different times of our own lives, and those of others, at once) or linear (meaning that the past is forever lost, and the generations cannot truly connect)" (219). Williams correctly sees this choice as a false one, arguing that "time is neither cyclical nor lineal but both: the round womb of time gives birth again to linear development" (187), a comment which reflects the widely understood conclusion in the critical study of time that, in Barbara Adam's words, "all social processes display aspects of both linearity and cyclicity, and that we recognize a cyclical structure when we focus on events that repeat themselves and unidirectional

linearity when our attention is on the process of the repeating action" (519). Roy draws our attention to both of these aspects in turn.

In some ways, then, the more interesting approach does not have to do with identifying the type of spatial image that best represents the book's concern with time, but rather examines the properly temporal concerns of troubled simultaneity and synchronization. Amidst the fractured and divided temporalities that Christine encounters in her relationships with her mother, her grandmother, and her elderly neighbour Monsieur Saint-Hilaire, she develops a deep desire for her own life to be *synchronized* with the people she loves, a contradictory desire that is associated with sorrow and solitude as much as it is with intimacy and connection. The temporal gap between individuals takes its clearest form as a gap between generations, and becomes the concluding thought to the first story in the collection, "My Almighty Grandmother." In this story the six-year-old Christine stays for part of the summer with her grandmother, who has become elderly and forgetful. When her grandmother uses spare household materials to make an elaborate doll for her, Christine is delighted at the act of pure creation, and begins to wonder about the relationship between the youthful, active grandmother of the past, and the increasingly frail and incapacitated grandmother of the present. Looking through an old album, Christine finds a photograph of her grandmother as a young mother: "This old photograph fascinated me so much that I forgot everything else. Through it, at last, I think I began to understand vaguely a little about life and all the successive beings it makes of us as we increase in age" (29-30). Christine's realization that the experience of temporality makes "successive beings" of individuals is, paradoxically, also the realization that the *same* person undergoes remarkable changes over the course of a lifetime. When Christine takes the album to her grandmother's bedside, "to show my grandmother the portrait she no longer resembled," Maman appears at the doorway wearing "a sad and very tender little smile." The story ends with Christine (the adult narrator) thinking back and wondering: "But why did she look so pleased with me? I was only playing, as she herself had taught me to do, as Mémère also had played with me one day . . . as we all play perhaps, throughout our lives, at trying to catch up with one another" (30).

This final line of the story presents the irresistible but impossible desire to "catch up with one another," to achieve interpersonal synchronization, as an expression of the tension that arises through the human coexistence of temporal intimacy with temporal solitude. In her study of time and feminist theory, Rita Felski suggests that the term "synchronous nonsynchronicity"—a phrase

that she borrows from Ernst Bloch—may offer "the most promising way of approaching the cultural politics of time. Quite simply, it acknowledges that we inhabit both the same time and different times: individuals coexist at the same historical moment, yet often make sense of this moment in strikingly disparate ways" (3). A key point here is that temporal identities, like other forms of identity, are always partial. As Christine realizes, though, it is not just that people make sense of their historical moment in different ways, but that individuals actually experience different times within the "same" absolute moment by virtue of their own temporal situatedness. The state of synchronous nonsynchronicity, while paradoxical, accurately reflects the internally conflicted sense of subjective time in a social world. Indeed, after the first story ends with Christine's supposition that people endlessly try "to catch up with one another," the remaining stories in the cycle confirm that the attempt to synchronize amidst inevitable nonsynchronicity is a project that does in fact continue "throughout our lives."

If the first story identifies the need for temporal alignment in the fostering of human intimacy, the second story, "The Old Man and the Child," confirms the impossibility of synchronization. Christine, now eight years old, becomes friends with the elderly Monsieur Saint-Hilaire, though to Christine he is simply "the old man." When he invites her on a day trip by train to Lake Winnipeg, which Christine has never seen, she is exhilarated. Upon arriving at the beach, the old man explains that the lake "was older than the soil of Manitoba and that it would still be there when millions of years had passed. For the eternity of time, he told me" (61). To sit in front of the lake, then, is to encounter eternity, yet even in the face of the ultimate human commonality—the knowledge that one will die while the world carries on—Christine is struck by the gulf of time separating her from her companion. After writing a figure eight, her own age, into the sand, she experiences a sensation of distress: "I suppose I could not bear the joy of being at the beginning while he was at the end" (77). The old man then whispers his own age to the girl, which she writes alongside her own "as a sum in arithmetic." The temporal gap between eight and eighty-four is then displayed for her, in the most transient form of writing, in the sand before the eternal lake:

> I was stricken by what remained to me and seemed to separate us from each other by a stretch of time even more mysterious than the extent of water and earth. . . . I was rather disheartened, I think, by a sense of the inequality and injustice of life. Why, I wondered, did we not all reach the same age at the same time.
>
> "It would be dull," he pointed out, "all the old folks together—or only the young." (77-78)

While the desire for temporal alignment is an ache that never goes away, the old man's comments begin to reflect the fact that absolute synchronization, completely shared experiences of time, would also mean completely shared narratives, and therefore shared identities. The unbridgeable temporal gulf between Christine and the old man is part of what it means for each of them to have their own identities, and the ache for synchronization is thus the confirmation of subjectivity. Our experiences of time are our stories, and even while we all share the experience of temporality itself, the infinite variations in personal temporalities establish our identities as individuals.[5]

Importantly, though, this story does offer several forms of synchronization to Christine and the old man, even if these remain partial and temporary. First is the obvious but important sense in which the two companions are able to spend time together, conversing, interacting, and experiencing the world simultaneously. Second, as Williams points out, by telling Christine stories about his travels in Europe, the old man "offers her another way of 'catching up with one another' through time. For his stories of the many countries to which he has travelled inspire in her a desire for imitation" (182). Many years later Christine will be in a position to replicate some of these travels, just as Maman relives her own mother's experiences of old age as she begins to become elderly herself. While this eventual reliving is among the most nonsynchronous forms of synchronization, it speaks to the exemplary power of temporal alignment through storytelling. Narratives, or personal articulations of time, not only shape phenomenological experiences into coherence, but also transmit subjective temporalities into the consciousness of those around us, allowing for intimate sharing of personal temporal experiences, even if the sharing may occur across a wide gulf of absolute time. The final form of synchronization in "The Old Man and the Child" occurs as Christine and the old man share their final moments together before the lake. Throughout the earlier parts of the story the two of them had become drowsy at different times—Christine nearly falls asleep on the beach only to have the old man wake her to walk into town, then the old man falls asleep at a restaurant while Christine watches nervously from across the table—but as the story draws to a close, the two achieve a momentary alignment when, "[a]lone now on this long beach before immensity, we slept shoulder to shoulder" (83). In the face of eternity, and through a basic human act of replenishment, the two become synchronized, even if this moment of alignment is a small part of their extended temporal experiences.

By the eponymous final story of the collection, "The Road Past Altamont," Christine is entering adulthood herself and is driving her mother along the unmarked prairie roads that seem to intersect at random across the landscape, until the pair stumble upon a series of hills surrounding the tiny village of Altamont. When Maman reminisces about the hills in the region of Quebec where she had grown up, Christine is dismayed that her mother is so deeply attached to a period of her life to which Christine has no access: "I was astonished to see Maman pass over her adult existence in Manitoba to go to the most remote part of her life in search of those images, unknown to me yesterday and now seemingly more pleasing to her than any others. I was perhaps even somewhat vexed" (112). The concern wears at Christine throughout the story: "come to think of it, it was only since the reappearance of hills in our life that I had noticed that attention to voices from the past that I found so bewildering and that took her to some extent away from me" (125-26). Maman's reminiscing about times that occurred prior to Christine's existence separates the two of them, even while they sit together travelling in the same car.

Once again, though, the story juxtaposes these unsettling forms of temporal disconnection with opportunities for temporal alignment. One such opportunity, a massively social one which is tied to the passage of the seasons, occurs when a large group assembles at Uncle Cléophas' house for harvesting: "These people . . . came from every corner of Canada, I should perhaps say of the world, for that was the most astonishing thing of all, that men of such diverse nationalities and characters were gathered together in our remote farms to harvest the wheat" (122). And once again storytelling emerges as a binding force, as the men "were never so tired that they did not attempt, when night came and the whining of the machines was silenced for a few hours, to share something unique to each of them that might draw them for a moment closer to each other" (122). While the old man's story at the beach had itself fostered a form of temporal alignment, the harvest gathering shows how an instance of temporal alignment—in this case one tied to seasonality and communal food production—can foster other forms of social connection. The ache for synchronization sees one of the fruits of its fulfillment here, as the participants are drawn closer to one another through actual shared temporal experience as well as the more abstract shared temporalities of storytelling. Christine reflects that "[i]t is from those evenings, unfolding like competitions of songs and stories, that my desire, which has never since left me, to learn to tell a story well undoubtedly dates,

so much was I impressed at that time by the poignant and miraculous power of this gift" (122). The adult Christine, we learn, has become a writer, and the narrative reflections that constitute *The Road Past Altamont* represent her articulations, in form and content, of the gradual temporal shaping of her own subjectivity as well as the larger family history through which her temporal existence takes shape.

The intergenerational experiences of Christine and her mother, alongside the memory of Christine's grandmother, open up the remaining opportunities for nonsynchronous synchronization. Maman recalls that, as she grew older, she began to resemble her own mother both in appearance and in personality. "Only with middle age did I catch up with her, or she caught up with me—how can you explain this strange encounter outside time? . . . Besides, I'm no longer angry about it, since, having become her, I understand her" (130). Here the old man's hint to Christine that temporal difference constitutes identity reaches its logical conclusion, that "catching up" with another person means that one *becomes* that person. The transformation is not literal, of course, but confirms that to the extent that sharing the temporality of another person is possible, such an experience forms a connection as intimate as the sharing of an identity. Even while Christine and her mother drift apart towards the end of the story when Christine travels to Europe "to learn to know myself and to write" (145), Maman leaves her with a final insight on temporal identity and intimacy. The period of adulthood, Maman explains, in which "parents truly live over again in their children" even while they also relive "the lives of [their] own parents" is "perhaps the most illuminated part of one's life" (135). Through carefully constructed narrative, the artist illuminates the ways in which subjective experiences of time effectively constitute identity, always partially overlap the temporalities of others, and draw us inevitably toward one another even while they hold us at a distance. Just as the implications of the modernist frenzy of changing social temporalities become most clearly meaningful to the extent that they are actually embodied through individual experiences, so too can subjective experiences of time be understood only through an examination of the broader social circumstances within which they take shape.

Catherine Bush's novel *Minus Time* also offers a nuanced investigation of the interactions between several of the issues important to the discussion of time, subjectivity, sociality, and narrative: the ways in which personal identity is shaped by past events; the fragmentation and internal conflict to which an individual's sense of time is often susceptible; the problematic negotiation

between personal and collective chronotopes and the impossibility of separating one from the other; the difficult but important feat of aligning one's temporal maps with those of one's family and peer groups; and the consequences of conflicting visions of temporality for people and the rest of the biosphere.

The novel tells the story of Helen Urie, a young adult in Toronto whose mother Barbara is famous not only for being a Canadian astronaut, but for attempting to set a new record for the amount of time spent living in space. The title *Minus Time* refers to the anxious duration of the countdown before the space shuttle launch (as in the phrase "T minus three minutes") but also takes on a figurative association with the intense temporal anxiety and sense of loss surrounding Helen's realization that her mother "had left the planet and they had no idea when she was coming back again. . . . The time and space that lay between was not traversable. She was speeding into the future" (6). Looking up at the overwhelming Florida sky into which the spacecraft has disappeared, Helen experiences a mixture of elation and panic: "She had concentrated so hard on the launch and now she'd surged beyond it. In that instant, everything had changed. Her life, too, split into before the launch and after. She wanted to reach for the sky and howl out loud like a wolf—*what now?*" (6). The liftoff itself becomes a watershed moment of the kind articulated in many works of literature, figuratively launching the emotional arc of the story. For critic John E. MacKinnon, the novel's title refers to "an interval in Helen's life" that holds "her future in abeyance, as if suspending her in time" (107).

This sense of trauma causes Helen to look for meaning in the events leading up to and following the launch, and to single out those whom she sees as complicit in forming the temporal chasm. She comes to identify as antagonists everyone and everything she deems responsible, from her mother, whose life ambition to become an astronaut has interfered with her ability to spend time with her children; to her father, who copes with family stresses by spending years in distant countries helping the victims of natural disasters; to the alienating socio-technological infrastructure that carries her mother indefinitely into space even while gradually poisoning her home through chemical spills, species loss, and interpersonal fragmentation. "You've got these video screens all around you," Helen's brother Paul explains about watching the shuttle launch, "and the launchpad almost looks like it's balanced right on top of the digital clock on the ground in front of you, the clock that shows the countdown. It *is* scary, in a way" (41). As a metaphor for pervasive technoscience, the countdown clock forms the unstable ground

upon which the key moments of the family's lives precariously sit. The clock's starts, stops, pace, and authority are outside the family's control, yet they govern the creation of personal temporal chasms and lead seemingly towards widespread ecological apocalypse. Helen decides to collaborate with Elena, an animal rights activist who wants to construct a "huge clock or some kind of timer that would count out each time another species disappeared" (214), a project that emblematizes the fraught relationship between technoscientific tools and the actual people whose use of such tools both causes and condemns ecological destruction.[6]

While the consequences of technologically mediated temporality may affect everyone, they do not do so even-handedly, and contested temporalities within familial groups are susceptible to similar imbalances. Despite being subjected to the same brief media spotlight as the rest of her family, Helen's feeling of alienation from her parents continues to grow: "Time itself seemed suddenly compressed and uncontrollable. Faster, faster. Didn't everyone feel it? Was I the only one whose stomach was being turned inside out?" (137). She accuses her mother of having "hurled us with you into the dangerous future" (178), while Paul describes their relationship with their perpetually absent father as an asymptotic line graph: "It's like these waves on a graph and they keep getting closer and closer as they run toward infinity but they never touch. That's what it feels like" (231). The space agency, meanwhile, warns Helen that because astronauts and their families inevitably change over the duration of their separation, she should expect a traumatic experience when her mother eventually returns to earth: "Only it wasn't exactly a return: The woman who left did not come back. Those she'd left behind were not the people who came to greet her" (322).

The tension culminates in Helen's angry confrontation with her mother—a conversation which is both intensely personal and mediated by the technology of the space station videophone hookup. When Barbara insists that it will remain "possible to be close to you, even from here," Helen replies, "What if I don't see the future the way you do? . . . I *do* have some sense of the future—but what if I see it being here, right here? . . . We have to change things here, the whole way we think about things here. I don't think it's good to act as if everything might get better by being someplace else" (276). Growing desperate, Barbara says "I would give you a whole new world if I could," but Helen shouts back, "I don't want a whole new world. . . . Don't you see? I want this one. I want a future here" (277). For Helen, the anxieties of increasing technological alienation, looming ecological collapse, skewed

social chronotopes that treat individual people as momentary objects of interest, and discordant familial visions of temporality have culminated in a personal temporal crisis. Attempting later on to catch a glimpse of the space station as its orbit passes above her, Helen walks "through a wilderness of satellite beams and radio waves, somewhere beyond Sudbury, through a world that seemed to her like a map of voices in the darkness, lost voices. . . . Time itself seemed vaporous, lapping in small waves around her" (326).

Despite this sense of conflict and fragmentation, the concluding scenes of the novel emphasize the potential for stability, reconciliation, and solidarity. This shift occurs partially on a personal level, as Helen finds within the resiliency of narrative identity an ability to locate a stable sense of self emerging from her own past, a past that trails behind her "like comet trails, vaporous and filled with detritus. In the present, receding into the future, she still multiplied and divided, seeing through several eyes, longing for too many things at once, but in the past she was singular; her past made her singular, it was hers and no one else's, and whatever else happened, she still carried it with her, like a portable home" (308). But the most meaningful shifts towards solace occur on a social level within Helen's immediate family, and, like Gabrielle Roy, Bush accomplishes this transition through images of synchronization. Growing accustomed to her father's presence after his unexpected return, Helen feels that "already something like habit was binding itself between them, dissolving the time that separated them into almost nothing" (282). Sharing an intimate moment with her lover, Foster, Helen's "skin grew as springy as moss, as if touch itself could redefine the two of them, hurl them into the present, clear some space and time for them" (313). Barbara makes the metaphor explicit when she asks Helen to look up towards the night sky that evening and locate the space station, promising to return the gesture: "Whatever happens, I'll look down tonight. Your night. We'll synchronize our watches" (334). The intentional unification of the watches marks a deep alignment in temporality and purpose, even while the phrase "Your night" acknowledges that the two people inevitably remain partially absorbed in asynchronous registers of time. The fact that they can experience precisely the same minute even while occupying different portions of the day-night cycle—a cycle so disrupted by space travel that Barbara experiences sixteen sunrises each day (55)—indicates that temporalities, like other aspects of identity, are always partial, and that meaningful alignments can occur even while some aspects of temporal identity remain divergent. Just as the concept of synchronous

nonsynchronicity is key to *The Road Past Altamont*, where subjective temporalities remain separated even while the ache for alignment is soothed momentarily through shared times and shared stories, so too is it central to understanding Helen's experience and her musing that "[i]t was as if they were all still walking through their own version of minus time, toward the moment of cumulative choice" (334).[7]

The final scene of *Minus Time* depicts Helen arriving at the lake that has been selected as the family meeting point, while Barbara floats overhead: "The dark lake and dark sky shone before her like a doorway, shimmering in time. . . . *A small step into tomorrow*" (338). Paul and David arrive to join her, and the novel ends: "She held out her hands to them, and stepped through the doorway" (338). The triumph suggested in the story's conclusion is a result of all four family members finally inhabiting the same subjective moment, sharing a sense of companionship, purpose, and movement into the future. While temporal alignment on the broader social and ecological scales remains worryingly elusive, synchronization is achieved, even if only momentarily, within the familial circle. While *Minus Time* contends with temporal relativity in ways that were unforeseen in past eras, the novel supports Ricoeur's view that "the major contribution of fiction to philosophy does not lie in the range of solutions it proposes for the discordance between the time of the world and lived time but in the exploration of the nonlinear features of phenomenological time that historical time conceals" (3: 132). More than this, the novel articulates how phenomenological time and historical time are themselves internally contested and unstable, bearing witness to the difficulty and the importance of enacting fleeting moments of synchronization.

In trying to understand how individuals experience time we are led inevitably back to considerations of social relations, ranging from the intimate workings of families and peer groups whose temporal experiences fluctuate within synchronous nonsynchronicity, to the accelerative impulses of modernity and the ingrained configurations of social power that operate on systemic and cultural levels. While John Urry, a theorist of networked "instantaneous time," speaks of "the simultaneous character of social and technical relationships, which replaces the linear logic of clock time" (189), inquiries into the experiences of subjective time and social synchronization reveal not only that linear time continues to exist in negotiation with other experienced and technologically mediated forms of time, but also that simultaneity in social relations is fragmented, and never absolute. Gabrielle Roy's and Catherine Bush's texts respond to very different social and cultural

circumstances, meaning that these two books "know" different things about the particular configurations of temporal experience that arise, respectively, at the transition from modernism to postmodernism and in the late stages of the postmodern era. Significantly, despite these different vantage points, both books support the notion that the impulse to "catch up with one another"—to "synchronize our watches"—is ultimately unfulfillable as it is tied irrevocably to the tensions and fractures of social existence, and to the inevitable separateness of human subjective experiences. But at the same time, these stories tell us that the desire to synchronize remains a key expression of human intimacy, and makes available many of the fruits of sociality. Even if social synchronization is always partial and ephemeral, it fosters vital moments of shared purpose.

NOTES

1 While the broader field of critical time studies must account for many different aspects of temporality, such as the ways in which time functions culturally as a form of power, or the ways in which categories of identity such as gender and race are tied to experiences of time, this article offers a model for one way that the critical study of time can respond to the particular concerns of subjective time and social synchronization within texts that emphasize these concerns. My forthcoming book *Timing Canada: The Shifting Politics of Time in Canadian Literary Culture* illuminates the wider range of possibilities afforded by critical time studies.

2 In his impressively systematic study, Hartmut Rosa argues not only that social acceleration is quantifiably real, but that it constitutes the primary mode of experience in contemporary society—that "the experience of modernization is an experience of acceleration" (21).

3 Franco Moretti argues that the *Bildungsroman*, as a story of youth, became the "symbolic form" of modernity in the nineteenth century largely because modernity "perceives the experience piled up in tradition as a useless dead-weight, and therefore can no longer feel represented by maturity, and still less by old age" (6). He traces the disappearance of the *Bildungsroman* form primarily to the onset of the First World War, whose social trauma presented an "insoluble problem" to the *Bildungsroman*: "The trauma introduced discontinuity within novelistic temporality, generating centrifugal tendencies toward the short story and the lyric" (244). In this sense, the use of a short story cycle to articulate new socio-temporal realities in the twentieth century is entirely appropriate. And yet, Moretti's insight that the *Bildungsroman* structure itself is "intrinsically contradictory" because it is based on "dynamism and limits, restlessness and the 'sense of an ending'" (6) suggests that the transition from the *Bildungsroman* toward forms that more strongly emphasize discontinuity was more of an evolution rather than a complete break. The focus on youth in a *Künstlerroman* such as *The Road Past Altamont* also mirrors the focus on youth in the classic *Bildungsroman*, suggesting that in the transition from modern to modernism, and perhaps to postmodernism, youth remains among the most appropriate figures for examining rapidly changing social circumstances.

4 To an extent, my comment here echoes Henri Bergson's assertion that the conventional view of time as a linear sequence results from our problematic tendency to conceive of time in terms that apply properly to space (232). While Bergson's solution is to emphasize the subjective experience of duration, his approach risks assuming "that time is only an effect of consciousness" (Easthope 184). By focusing on the temporal quality of synchronization rather than spatial images of time, while still accounting for factors beyond individual consciousness, I aim to draw from the most useful aspects of inquiries into subjective as well as social temporalities.

5 Commentary on this scene has usually focused on Christine's question of whether they are looking at the end of the lake or the beginning, and the old man's response: "The end or the beginning? Such questions you ask! The end or the beginning. And if they are fundamentally the same. . . . Perhaps everything finally forms a great circle, the end and the beginning coming together" (68). As I have suggested, while cyclical aspects of generational time are deeply important in the book, the temptation to point to quotations such as this one as identifying a strictly cyclical (or otherwise spatial) mode of time is of limited use.

6 Elena's project anticipates online "clocks" that display live counters of species extinctions, remaining global fossil fuel supplies, increasing global average temperature, and so on. Other conceptual clocks that seek to recalibrate our sense of ecological or deep time include Michelle Bastian's proposal that we might look to leatherback turtles as a kind of living clock, since their existence through both deep time and contemporary rapid change involves complex interrelated time scales that are "more accurate for the times we live in" (41); and the Long Now Foundation's 10,000 Year Clock, currently under construction inside a mountain in Texas, which is intended "to creatively foster long-term thinking" (Kelly n. pag.).

7 Commenting on the iconic sound of Big Ben in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, Ricoeur asks whether we can say of the characters, at the moment the clock strikes, "that the hour is the same for all? Yes, from outside; no, from inside. Only fiction, precisely, can explore and bring to language this divorce between worldviews and their irreconcilable perspectives on time, a divorce that undermines public time" (2: 107). As Bush's novel shows, though, the proliferation of global travel and digital communication makes apparent the fact that people inhabit different hours even from the "outside." The divorce between personal temporalities is compounded by the relativity of time itself, and while the visible impact of such relativity on human affairs is a fairly recent development, fiction's toolbox appears up to the task of articulating these complications.

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Michael Nardone

PORTRAIT OF THE POET AS FINANCE CAPITAL

Various among airport halls, they stroll without
Particular destination. Duty Free? They enter,
Relieved to find fellow Americans. "Hors?" "Taxes?"
"What kind of country is this?" Their dissonance
Anticipates our meltdown. They flaunt this inability
To choose. Yet exchange rates remain always
In their favour. In Basra, for instance, they afford grain
Silos, astrolabes, dine on apricots and dream
Of Hammurabi; at Bala Hissar, they sleep with ease,
Vacationers to the vacated. Should we be surprised
To find them, disguised in local robe, anonymously
Grinning amid our customs with nothing to declare?

Lisa Marchi

From the Dark Territories of Pain and Exclusion to Bright Futures?

Rawi Hage's *Cockroach*

Introduction

Intrigued by Heather Love's call for a reconsideration of negative affects and backward trajectories as a basis for a radical politics, I turn to *Cockroach* (2008) by Arab-Québécois writer Rawi Hage, a novel that focuses on a difficult past and mobilizes negative affects, such as unhappiness, resentment, anger, and pain, to fuel social and political change. I consider this novel exemplary of recent Arab diasporic literature[1] that counters the negative image of the melancholic migrant, as a subject fatally trapped within a deeply hurting past and paralyzed by nostalgic grief, as well as the all-too transparent and shiny representation of the successful immigrant who finds comfort and fulfillment in his/her new homeland. Rather, the novel's orientation toward the past, I argue, gives rise to a powerful and politically innovative representation of the migrant, and of the racial/ethnic Other in general, as a subject who neither mythicizes the place of origin nor glorifies the place of arrival. Instead, the protagonist in *Cockroach* poignantly insists on the persistence of racism and violence in both places and refuses to concur with the majority that multiculturalism is inherently good and cheerful.

Particularly after 9/11, with the rise of Islamophobia and the implementation of a series of racist policies following the attacks on the Twin Towers in New York City and the Pentagon in Virginia, Arab writers in North America have used literature to expose, criticize, and oppose the negative construction of Arabs (especially Muslims) as potential terrorists, dangerous outlaws, and undesirable intruders threatening through their very presence the nation as a whole.[2] Far from limiting themselves to the exposure of this

negative construction, Arab-Canadian writers have developed distinctive ways to destabilize and dismantle this stereotypical representation. They have shifted the focus to the quotidian, thus drawing readers close to the (often dim) reality of migration, making them touch with hand the concrete material, psychic, and emotional costs of everyday racism and xenophobia.[3] Hage provides an exemplary case, which is particularly significant since he is a key figure in the literary panorama of Quebec, one of the privileged destinations of the century-long Arab migration to North America.[4] Far from reproducing the classical linear trajectory from Old to New World and the image of the good and happy-go-lucky immigrant that has widely characterized early autobiographical immigrant writing, Hage openly deviates from his predecessors to outline instead a complex character who does not necessarily thrive, inspire sympathy, nor conduct an exemplary life.[5] On the contrary, *Cockroach*'s anonymous protagonist fully displays his own contradictions and ambiguities, must learn to live with his weaknesses and failures, and feels no obligation to perform the "happiness duty" (Ahmed, *Promise* 158) that the new homeland has imposed on him.

In her provocative essay "Happy Objects," Sara Ahmed criticizes and dismantles the construction of the multicultural nation as a "happy object" and re-examines the representation of the migrant as the source of unhappiness, a melancholic being turned both inwards and backwards, who acts as "an obstacle to his or her own happiness, but also to the happiness of the generation to come, and to national happiness" (48). Writing back to a whole tradition that has blamed migrants for their stubborn insistence on "difference" and "injury" and their melancholic returns to a past they refuse to let go, Ahmed performs an interesting twist, reversing this negative interpretation and powerfully rereading the migrant's backward trajectory as an emancipatory possibility. Drawing on Ahmed's reflection on the affirmative power of such returns, I interpret the refusal to let go of suffering by Hage's protagonist and his stubborn insistence on his own and others' unhappy histories as a progressive step rather than a backward orientation. Indeed, it is an affirmative action that allows him to draw attention to conditions of inequality and injustice shared and produced both locally and globally and to promote awareness, which is the first step to propel political change.

In *Cockroach*, Hage narrates the tribulations and hardships of a dark-skinned and morally shady migrant as he struggles to claim his space in a late-capitalist society that excludes him. I claim that this mutant figure, half-man and half-cockroach, uses his condition of "abjection"[6] to forge spectacular acts

of self-affirmation, to contest the hierarchical and racist system that imprisons him, and to build imaginative interracial, intercultural, and even interspecies alliances as a basis for collective forms of political mobilization. Drawing on subterranean links between past and present, East and West, the fantastic and the mundane, Hage surprises readers with creative and emotionally intense representations of the migrant, and of the racial/ethnic Other in general. No longer just the blinded victim of bad luck, but rather an active and resourceful agent constantly looking for new ways to liberate himself and others from the existential, social, economic, and political confinement in which he finds himself trapped, the anonymous protagonist in Hage's novel willfully uncovers a dark and too-quickly liquidated archive of unhappy stories and vulnerable bodies, thus unmasking the ineradicable traces of violence and racism that still persist in our presumably happy democracies. More specifically, by revealing to attentive readers the imperfections that hide under the glittering surface of the Canadian multicultural nation, Hage urges them to imagine alternative, more equal and inclusive ways, to recreate a different community.[7] Happiness, for the protagonist, is not then a mere motto imposed by the multicultural state on its citizens, but consists rather in enjoying fugitive moments of mutual recognition and affective connection with other human beings who share with him similar conditions of vulnerability, are fully aware of the flawed, imperfect nature of the world in which they live, and wholeheartedly engage to change it for the better.

A Restless and Dissident Performer: Disturbing the Myth of the Arrival as Good

Cockroach's dark and unsettling plot unfolds through the restless wanderings across the city of Montreal by the anonymous immigrant protagonist. His nomadic habits as a night prowler, who roams the streets to exorcize his sense of entrapment in a system that devalues and excludes him, are coupled with an itinerant narration that advances rather chaotically through "flashbacks, therapeutic sessions, philosophical divagations, and surreal adventures" (Urbaniak-Rybicka 453). Besides being an impoverished and estranged migrant, Hage's protagonist is also the representative of a whole category of underprivileged and dispossessed people who try to make a new life in Canada under very difficult circumstances. In the following passage, the brutality of the weather—in a move that cunningly twists Albert Camus' representation of a cruelly asphyxiating summer in *L'Étranger*—epitomizes the estrangement of the protagonist and the absurdity of a world where life has been reduced to mere survival:

> Goddamn it! Not even a nod in this cold place, not even a timid wave, not a smile from below red, sniffing, blowing noses. All these buried heads above necks strangled in synthetic scarves. It made me nervous, and I asked myself, Where am I? And what am I doing here? How did I end up trapped in a constantly shivering carcass, walking in a frozen city with wet cotton falling on me all the time? And on top of it all, I am hungry, impoverished, and have no one, no one. . . (9)

Through a hybrid style that blends dark humor and a pitiless critique, Hage expresses here the psychic disorientation, affective and material vulnerability, social and political alienation that the protagonist experiences in his "new" country. Expressions such as "buried," "strangled," "trapped," "carcass" aptly communicate his sense of suffocation and discomfort; the whole passage is traversed by feelings of loneliness, exclusion, and mental confusion, as he finds himself immersed in a cold, indifferent, and unsympathetic world.

Looking for some sort of connection and refusing to remain confined on the margins, the unruly protagonist in Hage's novel imaginatively allies himself with the cockroaches that infest his house and that mirror his condition of abjection. Like the brown and repulsive little insects to which he feels naturally attached, he too is greedy, voracious, and insatiable; he is in constant need of food, used to breaking into people's houses and assailing their fridges. Mimicking the cockroaches' traditional resilience, he is capable of surviving in an inhospitable environment and is constantly moved by a strong desire for "warmth and comfort" (75).

A newcomer who is expected to impersonate and ultimately metamorphose into a *true* Canadian, Hage's protagonist deviates from the norm to take a radically different path: he prefers instead to mimic and indeed transmutes at times into a brown and pestilential cockroach. I suggest that the cockroach in this novel functions as a *catachresis* (in Deleuze and Guattari's sense): through it, Hage extends the negative implications attached to the concept in unexpected ways, turning for instance what is normally an imposed and abusive category of representation (i.e., migrants as "pests") into a powerful tool of self-affirmation and liberation. Through the cockroach, moreover, Hage denounces the construction of migrants as intruders, parasites, and alien creatures who are absorbed, consumed or simply discarded by the system. By turning the cockroach into "a political statement" (Hage, Interview), Hage further develops a piercing critique against the myth of Canada—and more in general of Western multicultural democracies—as hospitable, benevolent, and humanitarian countries. Indeed, his novel is crowded with migrants living in basements and forced to take jobs below their skill level,

who contradict and negate through their very presence the construction of the multicultural Canadian nation as a "happy object," a harmonious whole constituted by different parts which perfectly fit into the One. The following passage lays bare the matrix of racism and white supremacy that are at the origin of the protagonist's oppression:

> Once I approached Maître Pierre and told him that I would like to be a waiter. He looked at me with fixed, glittering eyes, and said: *Tu es un peu trop cuit pour ça* (you are a little too well done for that)! *Le soleil t'a brûlé ta face un peu trop* (the sun has burned your face a bit too much). . . . I threw my apron in his face and stormed out the door. . . . I promised him that one day he would be serving only giant cockroaches on his velvet chairs. He had better remove the large crystal chandelier from the middle of the ceiling, I said, so the customers' long whiskers wouldn't touch it and accidentally swing it above his snotty head. (29-30)

The protagonist's modest dream of social uplift is here blocked by the racist remarks of the French maître, who embodies the residues of colonial power. In order to oppose a racist system that confines him to fixed subaltern roles, the protagonist in this passage identifies with and prophesies the victory of the cockroaches—and therefore, by extension, the revenge of the poor, "colored," and dispossessed. Thus, through the alliance with the cockroaches, his individual struggle for equality takes a collective, global dimension.

Rather than coming to terms with a system that, despite its ostensible innocence, he views as complicit with and culpable of his own and others' abjection, Hage's protagonist takes a step back and obliquely observes his condition of oppression from the mobile, liminal, and ex-centric vantage point of the cockroach. From there the happiness of the multicultural Canadian state cannot but appear flawed and imperfect, as it is mined from the inside by the presence of vulnerable, subaltern, and underprivileged bodies and by the persistence of their unhappy histories. It follows that the metamorphosis from man to cockroach performed by the protagonist cannot be reduced to a mere escapist strategy, for the protagonist does not simply withdraw from the reality in which he lives by becoming a cockroach; on the contrary, he actively intervenes in it through his spectacular performance, by exposing and ultimately manipulating the categories of representation that were originally meant to transfix and annihilate him.[8] Through the voluntary adoption and re-signification of the despicable category "cockroach," I claim, the protagonist turns it into a powerful tool of self-affirmation and contestation.

In the chapter "Critically Queer," Judith Butler argues that performativity in queer experience takes the form of "a reiteration of the norm" that

constructs (queer) subjects as "abjects" in an attempt to re-signify the original denigratory meaning attached to that category (12). According to Butler, moreover, besides destabilizing the normative discourse that constructs certain bodies as "unthinkable, abject, unlivable" (xi), performativity further functions as a powerful resource to re-assemble a new kind of community based on mutual recognition, reciprocity, and inclusion (21-22). Shifting our attention from queer to ethnic experience, I here read the protagonist's metamorphosis into a cockroach as a subversive strategy through which he *cites* and therefore reiterates a classical category of abjection in an attempt to re-signify it. His condition of abjection thus becomes a platform to negotiate affective attachments and political alliances with other people sharing with him conditions of vulnerability and exclusion.[9]

In *The Signifying Monkey* (1989), Henry Louis Gates Jr. demonstrates that, through a complex process of signification, African American authors have turned "blackness" from an essentially negative property forced upon African American subjectivities by the white majority to a positive self-refashioning. In Hage's novel, I claim, the protagonist departs from the conventional negative use of the term "cockroach" and rearticulates it in more positive terms, thus extending its possible meanings. Through his odd alliance with the cockroaches, in fact, he not only destabilizes the negative cultural perceptions attached to this concept, but also produces categorical confusion and provokes a disturbance in the system of representation and signification. His scandalous performance, more specifically, transforms his body into a terrain of contestation and turns his alienation into a powerful weapon to assert his agency and express his dissent. At the turn of the nineteenth century, as Daphne A. Brooks powerfully argues, African American performers used their bodies to expose, criticize, and ultimately rearticulate their condition of alienation into an occasion for self-affirmation and political liberation. They further engaged in spectacularly odd and resistant performances in an attempt to destabilize fixed identity categories, disturb audiences with unconventional representations of the racial and gendered Other, and put in place alternative, more liberating, categories of identification and representation (2-8). I suggest that a comparable insurgent performance, both discursive and embodied, takes place in Hage's text which, through an original re-iteration and imaginative re-elaboration of a historical engagement by Arab-American writers with "blackness," renovates a long-established affiliation with the African-American group.[10]

A Carnivalesque and Undisciplined Performer: Refusing to be Happy

The oppression and alienation that the protagonist suffers in his adoptive country emerges particularly in the weekly therapy sessions he is forced to attend to recover from his failed suicide attempt. As Smaro Kamboureli explains: "As occasions authorized by the state, on which he is expected both to explain his suicide attempt and be rid of the desire to kill himself, these sessions are not, then, just an instance of simple life-telling, of the narrator remembering at will" ("Forgetting" 147). His accountability to the state, as she contends, is rather symptomatic of his lack of agency and his subjugation. And yet, it is precisely during these imposed weekly appointments with a white, Canadian, female doctor called Genevieve, I suggest, that the protagonist slowly liberates himself from the abjection that keeps him hostage. Through his carnivalesque performances, I argue, he indeed succeeds in neutralizing the forces that want to discipline, correct, and convert his supposedly deviant body into a good migrant and ultimately a happy Canadian citizen.[11] The following passage, outlining the bizarre exchange between a bright and untroubled therapist and her "dark," (both troubled and troublesome), immigrant patient, conveys the sense of unresolved and potentially explosive tension that marks the relation between the two characters:

> The therapist annoyed me with her laconic behaviour. She brought on a feeling of violence within me that I hadn't experienced since I left my homeland. She did not understand. For her, everything was about my relations with women, but for me, everything was about defying the oppressive power in the world that I can neither participate in or control. And the question that I hated most—and it came up when she was frustrated with me for not talking enough—was when she leaned over the table and said, without expression: What do you expect from our meeting?
> I burst out: I am forced to be here by the court! (4-5)

An insurmountable rift separates here the therapist from her patient; the two characters have a different perception and consciousness of the world because their life stories differ. While the doctor looks happy and unperturbed, her interlocutor feels consumed by an existential malaise that is the result of both his traumatic past and his current alienation.[12] Happiness, in this case, not only reveals a position of privilege within society but is also equated with indifference, blindness, and lack of consciousness. In Ahmed's own terms: "to see happily is not to see violence, asymmetry, or force" (*Promise* 132). Having grown up in a war-torn country and experienced first-hand the tribulations and misery of a newcomer, the

protagonist in *Cockroach* cannot but feel a kind of resentment toward his doctor, whom he presumes having had a "childhood of snow and yellow schoolbuses, quiet green grass and Christmas lights" (50).

Far from reproducing the classical representation of the melancholic migrant as a subject stuck in his nostalgic grief, in need of rescue, and pursuing the dream of a happy life in the new country, Hage outlines here a subject who is fully aware of his subaltern position and engages without hesitation to change the existing power relations. He is, moreover, an ambiguous character who is simultaneously emotionally fragile but also a wicked charmer who as such holds the reins of discourse as well of his life. The following passage is particularly telling of his ambiguity:

> A FEW DAYS PASSED, and then it was time again to climb the stairs of the public health clinic and sit in my interrogation chair.
>
> This time, the therapist was interested in my mother.
>
> My mother, I said, has kinky hair.
>
> What else? she asked.
>
> A long face and pointy teeth.
>
> What does she do?
>
> Well, I said, when she was not dangling clothing by the arms or the ankles off the balcony she would stir her wooden spoon around a tin pot, in a counter-clockwise motion, and if she was not busy doing that, she was chasing after us with curses and promises that she would dig our graves. . . .
>
> So do you love your mother? the therapist asked, pasting on her usual compassionate face.
>
> Yes, I do, I said, thinking that if I told her anything more, I wouldn't leave this place for two hours. The shrinks are all big on mothers in this land. (47-48)

Like a resourceful and audacious Scheherazade, Hage's protagonist here performs artful manoeuvres to hold his therapist's curiosity, gain her indulgence, and constantly delay his adverse fate.[13] Reality and fiction, truth and lies, past historical events and fabricated new tales overlap and blur in this bizarre exchange between a composed and authoritarian doctor who hides herself behind a compassionate face and her unrestrained and insubordinate patient. The story of the mother who theatrically hangs out the laundry, mixes various ingredients in her pot, and chases after her undisciplined children, reproduces stereotypical patterns of thought about the Middle East, as a "barbaric" place traversed by chaos, backwardness, and fixed gender roles. Genevieve's interlocutor is clearly an unreliable narrator—reticent, elusive, sly—who withholds information and cleverly circumvents his therapist's questions, offering her grotesque tales about a distant, exotic, and backward Middle East to appease her curiosity and give her what she

wants to hear. As he himself explains: "The exotic has to be modified here—not too authentic, not too spicy or too smelly, just enough of it to remind others of a fantasy elsewhere" (20).

Far from confirming mainstream representations of the "white man" (in this case a white woman) as the subject who "enables the [suffering migrant] to let go of his injury . . . [and] brings [him] back into the national fold" (Ahmed, "Happy Objects" 49), Hage reverses here the traditional picture and portrays a rather carnivalesque migrant, who nonchalantly juggles past and present, Middle East and Canada, subverting existing hierarchies and the power relations that oppress him. It is precisely through this constant play of fort/da, I claim, that the protagonist cunningly gets rid of his impotency and finally reasserts his agency.

In *Proceed with Caution*, Doris Sommer puts us on guard against the danger of what she calls "the ravages of facile intimacies" (xiii); she particularly invites us to look closely at the uncooperativeness of certain characters and at the resistant strategies of certain minority writers who "cripple authority by refusing to submit to it" (10). In other words, Hage here voluntarily frustrates Genevieve's (and the readers') curiosity about the (presumed bad) life of the migrant in his original country and cheerfully blocks her/(their) desire for a glorifying tale about his arrival in the new country as *good*. Not only does the protagonist cunningly keep his previous life secret, but he also willingly manipulates it through creative ruses and minuscule, clandestine tactics. In *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), Michel de Certeau claims that a tactic is "an art of the weak" (37), who can only cleverly play on and confront his/her adversary on the ground carefully established and organized to discipline his/her existence. Hage's protagonist, I claim, exploits the therapist's sessions to subvert the power that was meant to discipline and convert him to the norms of the multicultural, neoliberal state. His precise intention is clearly that of undermining and subverting the power of his host, as the following passage tellingly shows:

> Do you want to tell me more about your childhood today? If we do not move forward, if we do not improve, I might have to recommend that you go back to the institution. Frankly, you do not give me much choice with your silence. I have a responsibility towards the taxpayers.
> Tax prayers? I asked.
> No tax*payers*, people who actually pay taxes. Some of us do. (59-60)

Genevieve's (failed) attempts to convert her patient to the norms, values, and practices promoted by the multicultural, neoliberal state reveal the

inquisitorial quality of the therapeutic sessions and the pressures of integration and assimilation they enact. Genevieve, in particular, interprets here the protagonist's silence and his unhappiness as a refusal to cooperate, improve, be redeemed and redeem his debt, and consequently sanctions it. She further reads his failure to be happy not only as a personal failure, but also as a terrible sin capable of sabotaging not only his own individual happiness but most importantly also the nation's happiness as a whole. An unbending "heretic," Hage's protagonist refuses to conform to and believe in the dogmas of the state—that is, the gift of happiness offered by multiculturalism and the myth of the good life promised by capitalism (Berlant 196). As a consequence, he is blamed for causing unnecessary expenditure with his (presumed) unhappiness.[14]

Anti-colonial and anti-capitalist struggles are here linked in thought-provoking ways. The nation-state's consumeristic logic, which values difference only insofar as it can be incorporated and consumed, is cleverly manipulated by Hage's protagonist who indeed refuses to comply with and support the fantasy of the happy multicultural state. Likewise, he refuses to feed the mirage of "upward mobility, job security, political and social equality, and lively, durable intimacy" (Berlant 3), which liberal-capitalist societies rely on and powerfully promote. Thus, by only apparently conforming to the state's logic and dutifully responding to his therapist's desires, the anonymous protagonist succeeds in bluffing both state and the therapist and he does so in the exact moment when he seems to capitulate:

> TAXPAYERS, THE SHRINK SAYS. Ha! I thought as I finished my chocolate in the alley. Well yes, yes indeed, I should be grateful for what this nation is giving me. I take more than I give, indeed it is true. But if I had access to some wealth, I would contribute my share. Maybe I should become a *good* citizen and contemplate ways to collect my debts and increase my wealth. That would be a *good* start. (65, emphasis added)

The protagonist in this scene is sipping his chocolate in the alley with no hurry, while contemplating ways to become a *good* citizen. I claim that his inertia and reluctance to adhere to the doctor's (read the nation's) norms suggest that he refuses conversion, rejects the role that his host has prescribed for him, and prefers instead to hold on to his own difference. Through his meditative and recreational attitude, he subtly stalls the business of the dominant neoliberal society; by imposing on such a system a slower rhythm, whose difference interferes with the productive imperative of capitalist economy, he voices his dissent.[15] The pleasure he takes in slowly

sipping his chocolate definitely disturbs the very idea that happiness can be found in the fast accumulation of wealth. No longer a blinded victim stuck in his melancholic grief, Hage's immigrant protagonist is both a dissenter and a troublemaker who stubbornly reminds readers of the conditions of social exclusion, and economic and labour precarity that mark our late capitalist societies. I further reread him as a resourceful and pragmatic agent who is constantly looking for ways out of the impasse that affects many of us, and urges venturesome readers to take unexplored paths in search of a community that recognizes and re-signifies precarity and shared vulnerability as the starting point to imagine and make concrete brighter, more equal, and socially just futures.

Conclusion

In this article, I have attempted to show how Hage places at the centre of his novel a shady, marginal, ambiguous (both vulnerable and willful) character who wanders randomly in the streets of an inhospitable multicultural metropolis, uncovering asymmetries, injustices, and violences of all sorts. By replacing traditional teleological migrant narratives of improvement and success with less tidy and more obscure stories about experiences of failure and loneliness, violence and oppression, destitution and delinquency, Hage intriguingly turns into "a chronicler of the unseen, the unspoken, the untold" (Halberstam 104). He voluntarily "turn[s his] back to the future" (Love 7) and orients his attention to a dark archive of unhappy histories, negative feelings, and vulnerable bodies that belong to the past as well as to the present. His writing advances through halts and deviations to present a progression that is also a regression, thus weaving an obscure narrative that illuminates, in his own words, "the desperation of the displaced, the stateless, the miserable and stranded" (13). Not only does he make us plunge into the troubled waters of pain and exclusion, but he also imagines through his carnivalesque poetics the possibility of brighter futures. His writing indeed pays tribute to a sharp and inventive character that is capable of metamorphoses and challenges through his flamboyant performances the dark powers that oppress him.

By shockingly revealing to (self)absorbed readers a familiar world now oddly turned alien, I claim, Hage helps estrange them from the familiar and awakens them to the distortions, asymmetries, and injustices that still persist in today's multicultural societies, so that a new consciousness may emerge. Suffering, in particular, functions in his text as "a heightening of consciousness,

a world-consciousness in which the suffering of those who do not belong is allowed to disturb an atmosphere" (Ahmed, *Promise* 75). Indeed, in his visionary novel, the domestic and sectarian violence suffered by the child protagonist in an unnamed country of the Middle East finds its counterpart in the hardships, abuses, and vilifications that the adult protagonist endures in Quebec. As the past protrudes into the present, so violence extends from one continent to the other, taking on new forms and nuances.

Traditionally conceived as an impasse or "the engulfment of the ego in memory" (Ticineto Clough 6), trauma, in Hage's work, is put back into the ordinary. It is reframed as the starting point to negotiate a different political space, based on "sidewards" horizontal relations (Stockton qtd. in Halberstam 73) and on "stigma-, shame-based alliances" (Love 37), which grow in parallel lines and transgress rigid ethnic, racial, and national forms of belonging. In "Connective Histories in Vulnerable Times," Marianne Hirsch contends that "the retrospective glance of trauma might be expanded and redirected to open alternative temporalities that are more porous and future-oriented and that galvanize a sense of urgency about the need for change, now" (337). I understand such urgency for change as one of the distinctive and more original aspects of Hage's work.

It follows that alienation in *Cockroach* emerges not only as the marginal cultural position occupied by the ethnic/racial Other in the multicultural nation but also as a more universal category, which describes a subjectivity condemned to economic and labour precarity in a rampant capitalist economy; it is further reinvented as a subversive tactic that the marginalized protagonist re-appropriates to inaugurate new forms of solidarity and resistant collective practices that transgress strict racial, ethnic, and national borders because they are based on a shared vulnerability. Through his figurative and embodied alliance with the cockroaches, more specifically, Hage's protagonist recognizes his own vulnerability and that of others as a common ground from which to invent and perform new affiliations and innovative modes of dissent and resistance in the attempt to improve conditions of equality and justice both locally and globally. As the white cockroach explains to the protagonist during a vehement confrontation: "Yes, we are ugly, but we always know where we are going. We have a project. . . . A change. A project to change this world" (202). Undoubtedly then, the recognition of a shared vulnerability intersects in this novel with tangible contestation and functions as a powerful weapon to propel political change. As Hirsch poignantly suggests: "An acknowledgment of vulnerability, both

shared and produced, can open a space of interconnection as well as a platform for responsiveness and for resistance" (337). It follows that the dark-skinned and impoverished migrant in *Cockroach* emerges with an utterly new face: he is not only a wicked killjoy, a politically inconvenient figure who refuses to be good and obliging, to forget about the pain of past and present injustices, and to simply be happy with what the hosting country is giving him—in his own words, merely "a wealth of crumbs" (Hage 43). Rather, he is also a carnivalesque, spirited, and willful man who performs spectacular acts of discursive and embodied insurgency, mobilizes feelings such as wonder and surprise, and insists in declaring his unhappiness with the persistence of violence, injustice, and racism, while at the same time engaging wholeheartedly in both imaginary and concrete practices to change the world for the better.

The tension between confinement and mobility, backwardness and progress(ion), oppression and liberation, individuality and collectivity adds a political dimension to a novel that might otherwise simply appear as a classical narration of the vicissitudes of a dark-skinned migrant in a contemporary urban landscape. On the whole, Hage refuses the blinding clarity of early accounts on migration and privileges dark, fragmentary, and partial accounts over more pleasant, marketable, and totalizing narratives, thereby providing readers with a new, partly defamiliarizing yet extremely necessary, perspective on the migrant, who is no longer simply good or totally bad but full of contradictions and ambiguities of all sorts, and on today's Western democracies, which are far from being perfect and accomplished.

When faced with a crisis, the intrepid protagonist of Hage's novel never loses hope and constantly asks, "which way?" Following his restless wanderings and embarking with him on an unpredictable journey in the heart of today's darkness, we may ourselves become aware of the limits, cracks, and flaws that risk sabotaging the construction of our presumably happy, multicultural, late-capitalist societies and be moved by the desire to imagine and realize other, more inclusive and just communities.

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NOTES

1 See, among others, works by Rabih Alameddine, Diana Abu-Jaber, Abla Farhoud, Nina Bouraoui, Amara Lakhous.
2 On the harmful consequences of 9/11 for Arabs and especially Muslims in terms of social exposure, vulnerability, and stigmatization, see Shu-Mei Shih; Gana, 2008; Hornung and Kohl.
3 On the everyday as a resource for Arab-Canadian writers and filmmakers to contest the negative construction of Arabness, see Gana, 2009.
4 For a more detailed and exhaustive history of Arab migration to Canada and the US, see Abu-Laban; Dahab; Gualtieri; Naff; Orfalea; Suleiman.
5 As Lisa Suhair Majaj notes, early (US) immigrant autobiography is characterized by "a teleological trajectory from Old World to New World," the anxiety to be accepted in the new country, and the desire to distance oneself from one's original culture (63).
6 In *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, Julia Kristeva explains "the abject" as "the improper/the unclean," that which is "radically excluded" and banished. The object of a primary repression, "the abject" mobilizes contradictory and therefore extremely destabilizing but also regenerative feelings of desire and disgust.
7 Among others, scholars such as Nouri Gana and Smaro Kamboureli have offered a critique of Canada's multicultural policies, which they consider as being aimed at responding to and at the same time containing/disciplining the various ethnic communities present on Canadian soil. See Gana, 2009; Kamboureli, 2000.
8 In *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari interpret the act of becoming animal as "a path of escape" and the "cross[ing] of a threshold" (13). In Hage's novel, I contend, the cockroach functions not only as a form of escapism but also as a tactic to expose, attack, and at least figuratively subvert an oppressive system that blocks the subject in fixed roles and marginal positions.
9 The protagonist, in particular, builds meaningful affective attachments and political alliances with members belonging to the Iranian community in Montreal, who have experienced, like him, the damages of war, violence, and racism.
10 On the interracial affiliation between Arab-Americans writers and African-American groups, see among others, Hartman (2006); Feldman.
11 The forces of normalization, medicalization, and assimilation are intricately woven together in Hage's novel to compose an ambivalent and multi-layered narrative.
12 The protagonist's relationship with his therapist is far from being transparent and is also marked by feelings of desire, gender and sexual difference, and most importantly by acts of transference. Simultaneously a "pervert" and a victim, a predator and prey, the protagonist projects both negative and positive feelings on his therapist; this ontological and affective instability complicates matters to the point that it is difficult for the reader to decide who is "the good" or "the evil" character in this scene.
13 Among others, Syrine Hout has underlined the subversive use of Scheherazade's tale in Hage's novel. See Hout, particularly p. 172.
14 On the intersection between capitalism, ethnicity, and discipline, see Rey Chow's *The Protestant Ethnic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Drawing on Max Weber, Chow argues that in capitalism, economic success and moral salvation are the rewards for disciplined (ethnic) subjects who have converted to the Protestant work ethic.
15 In this reading, I am influenced by Saidiya V. Hartman's work on the inventive ways slaves stalled the business of the master.

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Nicholas Bradley

Metamorphoses

> *Quick syluer hath dyuerse tymes fallen out of the cloudes*
> *— Fulke*

The de Havilland Otter bound for Lake Union
leaves the harbour with ten passengers aboard.

The West Antarctic ice sheet, the *Times* reports,
is melting unstoppably. Here come the seas!

Hurricane Ridge, a mile high, is gone, effaced
by fog. Chum and cod in their element hide

from sight. The Pacific halibut's a righteye flounder.
It will grow taller than a man. Larvae start

life with an eye on each side. Then the left orb
migrates to the right plane. Good God, nature

is strange. *Hippoglossus*: horse tongue. Homer,
Alaska, is the Halibut Capital of the Universe.

In the Bering Sea bucking fish whinny and see
half of everything exceptionally well. The poet

said the ocean's another country. Whoso longs
to be skate or bird, basalt or tuff, looks skew-whiff too.

Having nearly fallen from the clouds, the playful weasel
splashes onto the blue lid of the underworld.

Veronica Austen

Spaces of Agency
Installation Art in Dionne Brand's *What We All Long For*

References to the visual arts appear frequently in the work of Dionne Brand. Tuyen and the graffiti artists of *What We All Long For* may be Brand's only self-declared artists, but many of her characters engage in artistic production. To name a few, Violet Blackman of *thirsty* forges art out of manual labour—"her gesso was that wood flood" (36); in *At the Full and Change of the Moon*, Maya transforms peep show into performance art, Kamena makes drawings in the dirt, and his daughter Bola later draws with the sweep of a broom. In Brand's imaginative landscape, artistic production often enables interaction with the socio-political world, becoming a means through which her characters can navigate experiences of (un)belonging. The speaker's pleas in "I Met a Painter" from Brand's first collection *Fore Day Morning* (1978), for instance, value artistic production and connect it particularly to the pursuit of visibility. This speaker demands, "Paint me here. / Painter! Painter! don't forget! / paint me soon!" (24) and insists on describing what can and cannot be painted: "Paint those ladies from the country / [. . .] / but watch that stroke! / Hide that bare foot / hide those worn souls" (22). These comments establish the value of the visual arts as a representational strategy. To be represented or, even more importantly, to create the visual representation is to negotiate one's visibility and potentially counter any previous experiences of exclusion and/or invisibility.

By extension, in Brand's writing, artistic production becomes a way to assert agency over one's circumstances and physical surroundings. The art produced is largely enmeshed with its environment. Marks are made on the floor, ground, or wall, rather than on paper or a canvas. Meaning is created

not by a singular art object separate from its surroundings, but by the orchestration of a whole space. Whether or not overtly named as such, the art produced by Brand's characters most often takes the form of installation art, her most extensive representation being Tuyen's art practice in *What We All Long For*.[1]

What We All Long For depicts the friendship of four young Torontonians—Tuyen, Oku, Carla, and Jackie—all of whom are dealing with various personal and/or cultural traumas. Tuyen's narrative, which centres upon her negotiation of past familial trauma, is the main focus of the novel, and the central concern of critical discussion surrounding this text. Although there is a growing body of scholarship which foregrounds Tuyen's photography (e.g., Austen; Cuder-Domínguez; and Lai), Tuyen is not merely a photographer. She is a self-declared creator of installation art. In analyzing Tuyen's art practice, this essay foregrounds her installation art as a negotiation of available spaces. Installation is by nature an art form that emphasizes one's habitation of space; not only is the artist engaged in designing a whole physical environment, but the viewer is also bodily immersed in the work. In *What We All Long For*, Brand establishes installation art as a form which choreographs one's bodily proximity to material objects. As such, installation art provokes a self-aware visceral response. In that Tuyen's projects largely involve an engagement with her family's traumatic history, installation art functions in *What We All Long For* as an attempt to claim a space in which one can negotiate one's relationship to others and to the past. Brand's interest in how the past haunts the present has been well explored in critical discussion (e.g., Dhar; Grandison; Härting; Johnson; and Moynagh), as has her ambivalence regarding the productivity of seeking belonging or rooting oneself in the past (e.g., Goldman). Aligned with this tradition of Brand scholarship, the following discussion will showcase Brand's depiction of installation art as a method for productively engaging the traumatic past. Installation art, as represented by Brand, gives the past a material presence that can be bodily experienced, which thereby allows for the destructive power of the traumatic past to be diminished.

That the visual arts can provide a way of speaking the unspeakable is perhaps not surprising. In the wake of the work of Cathy Caruth, many have acknowledged that traumatic experience "mocks language and confronts it with its insufficiency" (Gilmore 6). In cases where words are unavailable or too painful to utter, the visual arts—a more abstract mode of expression reliant on connotative impressions rather than denotative

certainties—can create meaning in suggestive rather than prescriptive ways. Installation art, as a form specifically concerned with spatiality, provides special opportunities for communication. Installation art's foundational characteristic is its engagement of the body and subsequent provocation of visceral experience. To experience the work solely through one's eyes is not enough. Walter Benjamin may have lamented the loss of an art object's aura, but installation art, even more than other forms of art, must be experienced first-hand. It must be walked through, smelt, or touched in order for it to communicate. Julie Reiss observes, "There is always a reciprocal relationship of some kind between the viewer and the work, the work and the space, and the space and the viewer" (xiii). The viewer is "implicated with [an installation] in a manner that differs considerably from the conventional relationship between viewer and painting or sculpture" (De Oliveira, Oxley, and Petry 13). As Suzi Gablik suggests, installation art is concerned not with monologue or "self-expression" (82), but with "dialogue" (83). It thereby offers what she deems a "connective aesthetics" that precludes the possibility of an audience member remaining a mere "detached spectator-observer" (86).[2]

As Mark Rosenthal observes, installation art requires that "one becomes aware of one's own experience of such objects. That quality of beholding oneself beholding is often a crucial behavior associated with much installation art" (64). Juliane Rebentisch similarly casts installations as "not only objects to be beheld but simultaneously also the site of reflection on the aesthetic practice of beholding" (15). This meta-critical awareness of oneself elicited by installation art can, of course, be extended to the creator's experience of the work as well. Although most artistic production requires a physical proximity between the artist and his/her work, with installation art the artist is utterly surrounded by his/her creation. Furthermore, the installation artist's key purpose is to orchestrate an audience's bodily relationship to the installation, suggesting that the artist's sense of his/her own occupation of space becomes heightened during the installation's creation. Installation art thus demands that both its creator and its audience be keenly aware of their bodily relationship with the installation and its parts.

To see a photograph or painting can, of course, still provoke a visceral response. For instance, consider Roland Barthes' discussion of the photograph's *punctum*—the wounding a photograph can cause—or theories of the sublime that link vision to visceral, even spiritual, experience. Nevertheless, whereas more traditional art forms encourage a viewer's detachment, installation art privileges haptic, physically immersive experience. Jennifer Fisher describes

the haptic sense as "comprising the tactile, kinaesthetic and proprioceptive senses, . . . aspects of engagement that are qualitatively distinct from the capabilities of the visual sense" (6). A work that is experienced primarily through vision may still promote a physical response, but as Teresa Brennan explains, "for the main part, sight is perceived as the sense that separates, where the other senses do not" (10-11). The audience of installation art does not merely see the work, but instead enters into it, becomes a part of it, is surrounded by it. The audience must therefore negotiate a relationship to the installation in a visceral manner. As Claire Bishop argues, "installation art presupposes an *embodied* viewer whose senses of touch, smell and sound are as heightened as their sense of vision" (6).

Carla's experience of Tuyen's installation *Riot* serves as a wonderful example of the kind of bodily experience made possible by installation art. *Riot*, described as "an installation" (206), consists of a series of photos taken during a protest against globalization that Tuyen attended with Oku. The photographs convey the violence and chaos of the event, an event during which Oku was arrested. This installation may not be as multimodal or performative as Tuyen's other creations; it is, after all, just a series of photos hung on the wall. However, it is Tuyen's choice of space for these photographs that renders this exhibition an installation. The placement of these photos in the stairwell of Tuyen's and Carla's apartment building—versus their placement in a gallery or hanging in a straight line on a wall—suggests that Tuyen is not simply displaying these art objects but is in fact orchestrating the whole space. She constructs meaning not just through the photographs but also through their relationship with their surroundings.

Envision the scenario: one would be climbing or descending the stairs and encountering these images as one moves upwards or downwards. In other words, one's movement on the stairs becomes part of the meaning. A stairwell is a site that, yes, allows for stilled contemplation of individual images, but that does not actually promote such stopping and staring. Stairs are, after all, primarily a site of transit. Stopping involves an awkward balancing act in a constricted space.

For Carla, the experience of these photographs in a stairwell is uncomfortable. Her experience is synaesthetic—she hears sight—and the power of the encounter affects much of her body: she experiences a "flinching ascent . . . her left ear bent to her shoulder as if against the sound of the pictures" (207). Brand writes, "The photographs made Carla queasy. . . . She rushed up the staircase and into her apartment quickly each time she came in. The

photographs, something about the motion in them, their sequence, reminded her faintly of the dream of her mother climbing onto a chair" (206). The photos themselves may foreground motion; they are described as fragmented images: "the arc of a tear-gas canister" (206), and "[t]he arm of the cop entwined with Oku's flailing arms" (206). But, the "motion in them, their sequence" is actually in large part created by Carla's own movement up the stairs. Importantly, it is the movement up, not down, the stairs that is emphasized. Tuyen, the focalizer of this section of the text, describes having "mounted these photographs on the staircase *coming up*" (206, emphasis added). Furthermore, no description of the photographs experienced by someone descending is offered. As Heather Smyth argues, Carla's experience here in part shows her ability to see her own experiences in those of others, which thereby suggests the "nonlogical or provisional linkages between social identifications" (284). Nevertheless, I would argue that Carla's experience of these photos as an uncanny reminder of her mother's suicide does not come from the photographs' content. Rather, her response is provoked by her own movement up the stairs which mimics her mother's action: the mother climbed onto a chair before jumping off the balcony to her death. In that Carla repeats a climbing action, her body's motion itself produces the painful uncanniness of her experience.

As Carla's experience suggests, installation art's engagement of the body motivates an awareness of one's habitation of space, and thus a contemplation of one's relationship both to the materiality of the installation and to its subject matter. Mark Rosenthal observes, "Just as life consists of one perception followed by another, each a fleeting, non-linear moment, an installation courts the same dense, ephemeral experience. Whereas painting and sculpture freeze time and perhaps suggest something eternal, installation abhors such an effect. The viewer is in the present, experiencing temporal flow and spatial awareness" (27). Ronald J. Onorato similarly characterizes installation art as a medium that makes the viewer inhabit his/her present time and space. He writes, "More than anything else, it is a yearning for a sense of 'being there' or, better yet, of just 'being' that informs our preoccupation with installation art" (29).

Installation art's ability to motivate this awareness of one's position in space is what allows it to create productive experiential situations like those addressed by Alison Landsberg as having the potential to forge connections across difference. As Landsberg argues, immersive situations—in her discussion, predominantly those of movies or museums—enable the formation of prosthetic

memories—memories of events one did not experience directly. Such prosthetic memories thereby allow for the development of one's social consciousness and empathetic response to others. Although not referring specifically to Landsberg's work, previous scholarship on Tuyen's art practice frame it precisely in terms of this kind of socio-political potential to form community. Pilar Cuder-Domínguez, for instance, addresses Tuyen's final planned project as a means of "tackl[ing] intercultural communication" (158), while both Kit Dobson and Heather Smyth cast this same project as representative of the city. Smyth, in particular, suggests that Tuyen's plan to form a surrealist exquisite corpse—a collage—out of the longings of many becomes a model for city life in which parts can remain parts amidst a whole and in which a unity is realized, albeit a potentially awkward and/or painful one.

My discussion of Tuyen's art practice will similarly conceive of it in terms of negotiating questions of (un)belonging, but my discussion turns the attention away from the broader city and its dwellers towards the function of Tuyen's art for herself. Tuyen may be the creator of her installations, but since installation art is bodily immersive, Tuyen also experiences her art as an audience member. Tuyen's vision for her final project may be to capture a "gathering of voices and longings" (149) so that she can represent the city as "polyphonic" and "murmuring" (149), but her project also reflects her own attempt to locate herself within this "gathering." As Brand scholarship has foregrounded, Brand largely dismisses notions of belonging; she instead offers "a politically-charged alternative to the desire for belonging and possession" (Goldman 14). Nevertheless, Tuyen, while not confirming belonging as an achievable state, does pursue a space she can more comfortably inhabit.[3] For Tuyen, whether or not she fits into her surroundings and its social groups proves largely dependent upon her ability to find a more productive way to relate to her family's traumatic past. As someone living in a state of postmemory, which Marianne Hirsch defines as a state experienced by "those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth" (22), Tuyen struggles to come to terms with the loss of her brother Quy, a loss that has greatly affected her but that she cannot feel first-hand for herself. It is through her installation art that Tuyen attempts to develop a model for positioning the traumatic past so that it remains accessible and yet consumes less space in the present, becoming less destructively haunting and alienating.

Throughout *What We All Long For*, Tuyen is engaged in forming an installation project which represents personal and familial longings along

with the longings of others whom she encounters randomly throughout the city. This project involves her recovery of physical documents relating to her parents' search for their son Quy, who was accidentally lost as they fled Vietnam. In addition to this focus on familial loss and longing, Tuyen's project includes transcriptions of oral narratives of longing that she solicits from various individuals, predominantly strangers. Modelling the traditional Chinese signpost called a *lubaio*, Tuyen first intends to have her audience "post messages on the *lubaio*. Messages to the city" (17). At another point, she then sculpts figures in "uneasy positions" into the *lubaio*; "some were headless in an extreme agony, or was it elation?" (43). As the project evolves, she chooses to collect messages of longing herself, producing what she calls a book of longings, and transcribes these longings onto a large cloth. By the end of the narrative, the project has become even more expansive; it will require "a larger space, . . . three rooms really, very high ceilings" (309), her plans involving a "diaphanous cylindrical curtain" at the centre of each room "hung from the ceiling, that the audience could enter" (309). Within the three separate cylindrical curtains, the audience would find, first, the *lubaio,* representing "all the old longings of another generation" (309), second, "twelve video projections, constantly changing, of images and texts of contemporary longings" (309), and finally emptiness and silence (309). This final room might represent the future, but its meaning is unstated. In the end, Tuyen cannot give her project a conclusive purpose; she admits that "[s]he still wasn't quite certain what she was making; she knew she would find out only once the installation was done. Then, some grain, some element she had been circling, but had been unable to pin down, would emerge" (309). Given this unending contemplation of her project and Tuyen's implied need to experience her project not just as its creator but as its viewer, the installation is linked to Tuyen's own psychological development as much as to her desire to represent and thereby unite city dwellers. Even though her project remains an unrealized plan, the symbolic significance of her intentions remains interpretable; her project claims space for the past and fashions this space as welcoming and inclusive.

Considering Tuyen's previous lack of control over how her family's loss of Quy intruded into the spaces of her daily life, her choice of installation art—an art in which she can assert agency over a whole space—is appropriate. While growing up, Tuyen could achieve little command over how her family's past entered into her surroundings. Images of Quy "littered the house" (225), as her parents sent copies of the same one photo "around the

world in [their] quest to find him" (225). For a time, Quy invaded all areas of Tuyen's space: "[t]hroughout her childhood Quy had looked at her from every mantel, every surface" (267). Nonetheless, just as Tuyen possesses no control over the overwhelming presence of Quy's image, she too has no control over its eventual disappearance. As Tuyen describes, one picture in particular—an image of the family shortly after the loss of Quy—would be "removed and replaced" on the mantel by her mother, "[a]s if she could not decide whether she admitted or could bear the reality it suggested but that she occasionally had to face" (223). Even the image of Quy that had "littered" Tuyen's spaces of childhood eventually disappears from her visual landscape: "Over the years the photograph was less and less in evidence until it had virtually disappeared. It was not on the mantel of the house in Richmond Hill. It lay in the recesses of her mother's room now with [Quy's] baby picture. . . . Tuyen hadn't seen the picture in years" (226).

Tuyen's lack of control over the image of Quy parallels her lack of control over how her family's loss infiltrates her home, rendering it unhomely and constrictive. With no control over how this loss is made either visually or psychologically present, Tuyen experiences her family's trauma as an uncanny haunting, one that is both vaguely recognizable and yet unfamiliar because not her own. Much as Tuyen's struggle with the loss involves her negotiation of how the loss is materially present in the home, the family's own handling of their loss is depicted as occurring through a negotiation of space. Not only are Tuyen's parents said to sleep in separate rooms because of their separate struggles with insomnia, but also Tuyen theorizes that they, in fact, need separate rooms "so as not to have to talk to each other, to go over the worn language of disappointment" (60). Tuyen's engagement with the family's loss is similarly materialized through the depiction of her own occupation of space. In particular, her knowledge of the family's tragedy is gleaned through her infiltration of spaces that do not belong to her. Tuyen acquires copies of letters sent during the family's search for Quy—letters that she intends to use as part of her installation—by sneaking into her mother's room. Brand writes that Tuyen "had no idea what she would do with these letters, but she sought them out in her mother's room when she went on visits home and held them like ornate and curious figures of a time past" (25). Tuyen's breaching of her mother's space can be read as a beginning effort to control Quy's presence in her surroundings; by seeking it out, she can at last then control its place in her life. Instead of accepting her parents' attempt to hide away their efforts to find Quy, Tuyen goes into a space where

she does not belong in order to negotiate her relationship with a past in which she also cannot belong.

Beyond her negotiation of spaces within the home, Tuyen's plan for her installation also functions as an attempt to assert agency over her family's past and determine for herself its place in her surroundings. Tuyen's history of not being able to control the intrusion of the family's loss, and her subsequent feelings of confinement, results in a pattern of behaviour whereby she seeks to claim more and more space for herself, a claiming of space that is realized because of and through her art practice. Brand offers an important juxtaposition: the first mention of Tuyen's trespass into her mother's room is directly followed by the revelation that Tuyen had "surreptitiously broken down the wall [in her apartment] between her bedroom and the kitchen, making one large room for her installations" (25). This juxtaposition contrasts Tuyen's experience of a confining space in which she does not belong with her ability to control her own living space and give her art—and herself—more room. Carla, Tuyen's neighbour, even worries that Tuyen will one day want to destroy the wall separating their apartments so that she could "extend her sculpture through to Carla's place" (40).

This voracious need for more space can be charted in the evolution of Tuyen's plans for her installation project as well. A project that is at first located within Tuyen's apartment becomes a project needing the space of friend Jackie's store as its exhibition site and then an even "larger space" (309). The expansion of the space required for the installation is a measure to ensure that the site is accommodating rather than confining. The features of Tuyen's planned installation too suggest a desire to craft a welcoming space that not only gives the audience room to move but also is flexible enough to adapt to everyone who enters. Consider, for instance, the symbolic significance of Tuyen's choice of the "diaphanous cylindrical curtain, hung from the ceiling, that the audience could enter" (309). Firstly, its circular and fluid nature represents a distinct contrast to the hard, solid edges that Tuyen, in particular, has confronted elsewhere. In other acts of artistic creation, Tuyen has resisted the solidity of straight lines. Beyond her actual destruction of the wall in her apartment, even her early artwork, purposefully or not, avoided the rigidness of linearity. Tuan, her father, may have given "her pieces of paper and a ruler" so that they could draw "boxes, bridges, pipelines, buildings" (115), but "Tuyen's drawings quivered on the fantastic, first because she was a child and her lines would become wavy, or as her mind wandered she would include a face here and a kite there" (115).

Although unstated by Tuyen, straight lines and their solidity come to signify exclusionary borders that separate. Importantly, the objects that Tuyen would draw with her father are all objects that divide space: bridges, though tying two spaces together, simultaneously draw attention to their innate separation; boxes, pipelines, and buildings all function as containers, delimiting an inside and an outside. The waviness of her lines, although at first a product of her lack of dexterity, also suggests a discomfort with the separations imposed by the linearity of such objects. As Tuyen's drawings evolve, these borderlands dividing spaces are precisely what she destroys: "A head grow[s] out of a drainpipe, a river flow[s] through the roof of a house" (115). Both these images suggest an unwillingness to let divisions persist: the head escapes from inside the pipe, the river penetrates the house. Both images thereby render the division between inside and outside fluid.

Tuyen's choice of the diaphanous cylindrical cloth functions within this context of making borders more porous and hence space less divided and exclusionary. While the cloth does suggest a portioning of space—it is something that the audience will be either inside or outside—its flexibility and translucency render it a shifting border. As cloth, the curtain can, for instance, adapt to those who seek entry, its circumference growing as needed, the space expanding to give room. In fact, Tuyen's insistence on "very high ceilings" (309) also ensures maximum flexibility: the longer the curtain, the more its circumference can expand. Furthermore, the curtain's translucency suggests that its division between an inside and an outside is not definitive. From outside the curtains, one would be able to see the hint of what is inside, and vice versa. The two spaces remain tied. The viewers, thus, are never total outsiders nor total insiders in relation to the curtains and what they contain. As a result, the space that Tuyen envisions symbolically suggests inclusivity and a promotion of one's belonging, rather than exclusion. Importantly, Tuyen's intended use of the curtains, along with her potential covering of the floor with "sand" or "water" (309)—both amorphous substances—suggests that she is fashioning a space that adapts to the bodies which inhabit it, rather than the bodies having to adapt to the space.

Beyond this crafting of an accepting and accommodating space, Tuyen's installation also must be seen as a response to her family's treatment of their loss as something both literally and metaphorically boxed-up and put away, that is, until it again hauntingly surfaces. It is no wonder that Tuyen seeks to destroy the borders that separate, and by extension, that permit repressive secrecy. Her experience has been one of facing spaces,

again both literal and metaphoric, where she cannot go, and yet the family's trauma does not stay politely confined to its given place. Much as the "head grow[s] out of a drainpipe" (115) in her drawings, her family's loss appears where it does not belong and is not wanted.[4] I would argue then that Tuyen's need to "apprehend *the seepages* in her family's life" (115, emphasis added) informs her choice of a diaphanous cylindrical curtain for her installation. This curtain remains a border apportioning space, but its translucency and flexibility not only acknowledge the difficulty of containing what one wants to hide but also, and more importantly, offer a more enabling model for negotiating one's relationship with trauma. Things like her parents' letters and the picture that she has taken of the man believed to be the adult Quy are envisioned to be inside the diaphanous curtain, which thereby becomes a protective covering and yet one that can be seen through or entered. The trauma, thus, can be accessed, and accessed, in particular, by choice; it is no longer repressed or hidden away, nor does it have to be a constant presence.

Furthermore, since installation art is an ephemeral, rather than permanent form, Tuyen's constructed relationship with the past is one that can be experienced and yet eventually put away. As Onorato asserts, "[m]uch installation art is transient and does not survive in the form of permanent objects" (15). Tuyen's installation thus offers an experience to be had but it does not suggest that this representation of the past will achieve a permanence that will constantly have to be confronted.

Nevertheless, this potentially more enabling model for confronting one's pain and the pain of others does not eliminate all discomfort and hurt involved. Tuyen's approach to her installation suggests she is attempting to achieve agency over how the past enters into her life and how it dictates her relationships with others. However, any feeling of control that the installation offers is suggested to be a rather arbitrary and fleeting achievement. The fact that Tuyen's final installation will be structured in a manner akin to her own apartment reveals this fickleness. Tuyen's apartment is described as follows: "One thing with Mrs. Chou's slum apartments—the ceilings were high. Tuyen's dark room [*sic*] was a thick black velvet curtain" (25). Although Tuyen does not acknowledge the connection, in envisioning the rooms of her installation as recreations of her darkroom—albeit using diaphanous cloth rather than the opaque black velvet—she suggests that what is possible in the darkroom, both good and bad, is possible in the installation.

The darkroom for Tuyen is clearly a space of orderliness and a space where she is in control, despite the unruly nature of her materials. The darkroom

is described as "the only neat space in the apartment" (221), a space where Tuyen handles her tasks with precision. All of the descriptors of Tuyen in her darkroom confirm the level of control she maintains within this space: "The lights off, she pulled the film out, cutting it smoothly from the spool, then with a dexterous motion she pulled it onto the reel in the light-tight tank" (221).

Nevertheless, despite this agency, the darkroom remains a space of possible threat. One's control over his/her materials may fail at any moment by, for instance, pouring the developer out "too quickly, leaving some silver on the film" (222). Even more importantly, the darkroom is a space where one must constantly confront the unknown and its revelations. Not knowing what the emergence of the film's image will bring, one enters into an unsettling uncertainty. Tuyen, for instance, experiences trepidation while waiting to see if the face of her lost brother Quy will be revealed in the photographs she has taken of her brother Binh in conversation with a mysterious stranger. As well, Tuyen's control over her materials in her darkroom is juxtaposed with her mind's wandering. She may be concentrating on developing the photographs that will confirm whether she saw Quy, but in the midst of this process, "[h]er mind ran to her mother in another photograph" (221-22), a photograph showing her mother pregnant with Quy, thereby a photograph signifying what the family lost. The installation itself similarly would not be able to prevent such mental wanderings; in fact, it would likely promote them, much as Carla's mind had wandered to her own trauma while encountering the unrelated images of the protest. The audience, and Tuyen too, thus, would remain unsafe in the vagaries of associational thinking brought on by the experience of the installation.

Beyond this significance of the installation's similarity to Tuyen's darkroom, the use of the individual rooms to separate the "old longings" from the "contemporary longings" (309) suggests a desire to experience time in a more orderly fashion whereby the past no longer intrudes into the present but rather has a space of its own. Nevertheless, her description of her plans for the installation confirms that this desire to segment time cannot be realized. Tuyen's description of the installation begins as follows: "she felt for the photographs of Quy still stuffed in her bag. She would make tiny copies of the image, yes, and insert them among the records of longing in her installation. She would take photographs of the people of the city too, and sprinkle them throughout" (308-09). The photographs of Quy are of an adult man Tuyen assumes, without confirmation, to be Quy. As such, these

photographs already signify a complex relationship with time. Not only do they reveal a face that seemingly has not aged, but if Tuyen did make "tiny copies" of the image, she would be repeating her parents' earlier copying of Quy's boyhood image, thereby tying her contemporary longing for Quy to the old longings of her parents. Furthermore, the positioning of the copies of Quy's image remains unspecified; they will be placed "among the records of longing" (308), but which "longings"? The old or the contemporary or both? Will they, like the images of "the people of the city" be "sprinkle[d] throughout" (309)? Despite Tuyen's desire to render time more manageable and the past less intrusive, her plans for her installation reveal that separating the present from the past may not be possible.

Nevertheless, even with the necessary failure of Tuyen's project to eliminate completely the past's power over the present, her project still imagines a disarming of the past's destructive influence, and hence, envisions the possibility of personal healing. By not only making her family's tragic history public, but also doing so in a way that links it to the losses and longings of others, Tuyen can construct a stronger sense of belonging for herself. Although Tuyen's final plan for her installation involves representing her family's experience of loss, this installation reveals an important movement away from the self-focus of prior installations.[5] Her previous installation *The Traveller* along with her unrealized plan for an installation about her family both feature Tuyen as the performer. In *The Traveller*, Tuyen appears "in bubble wrap, with stickers from various countries pasted on her naked body" (64). She is lifted by the audience and "pass[ed] . . . around the room in silence for ten minutes" (64). In her unrealized plan for an installation representing her family, Tuyen would walk around, bumping into invisible boxes that would release such things as "spikes and keys and mouths and voices" (126). *What We All Long For*, however, concludes with a vision for an installation that removes Tuyen from personal, physical involvement in the installation. The installation may still be autobiographically expressive, but the personal revelations are offered anonymously. Tuyen makes no mention that captions will be used either to anchor the meaning of her familial documents/images or to attach the other depicted longings to specific individuals. Consequently, this installation enables the release experienced through confession, while also offering the safety granted through one's anonymity in a crowd. Tuyen can thereby escape being the spectacle that she has been before, both in her past art and in her daily life: note that the novel even introduces the character of Tuyen as someone "you want to look at" (2).

In that the installation represents the experiences of many, Tuyen and by extension those who feel represented by the installation's various parts are offered the chance to evade being the uncomfortable centre of attention. The felt exceptionality of one's experiences can be dispelled. In motivating an awareness of the commonality of exceptional experience—the traumatic, the out-of-the-ordinary, the so-called abnormal—Tuyen's installation enables an alternate, though still uncertain and uncomfortable, experience of belonging. Tuyen's vision for her installation, therefore, reveals the possibility for installation art to offer an inhabitable space of interaction whereby walking through the losses, desires, and other such exceptional experiences of others, one can defuse the destructive power of one's own felt differences.

In *What We All Long For*, installation art comes to signify a negotiation of the spaces one has available and an attempt to forge new more productive and comfortably habitable spaces. Tuyen's installation functions as a model, unsuccessful though it may be, for Tuyen to develop a more stable and supportive relationship with the past and its inhabitants. Her installation attempts to offer her family's traumatic past a space in the present where its presence and influence can be respected and yet its destructive power be limited.[6] Nevertheless, although Tuyen does suggest the possibility that she will overcome the alienation previously resulting from her relationship with her family's trauma, Brand does not suggest that the past can be easily or utopically tamed through its treatment in installation art. Installation art may suggest that it can offer producers and audience members a certain agency over the space that they design and traverse. It may involve a claiming of space when other spaces have proven restrictive or unavailable. Still, in *What We All Long For*, these promises of installation art remain largely unrealized potentialities. In Brand's depiction, there is a demonstrated need and desire to manage how the past is located within the present, and yet Brand's portrayal of Tuyen's art practice simultaneously reveals a continued ambivalence about what such a space will look like and whether it will be as productive or as healing as promised.

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NOTES

1 A longer discussion than can be pursued here would include a consideration of Alan's artistic production in *thirsty*. Not only does he sign the pavement that he helps produce, rendering it akin to artistic creation, but his spilled blood itself is described as a form of art: "A deliberate red, *like Ethiopian henna*, / seeped into the floor grooves when Alan fell" (55, emphasis added). Furthermore, beyond Kamena's and Bola's drawings in *At the Full and Change of the Moon*, the Younger Bola is even more a producer of installation art than her elders. Using the first Bola's drawing, the Younger Bola produces a room-sized installation that replicates the first Bola's rock off the coast of Culebra Bay.

2 Gablik's ideas are more valuable to a discussion of Tuyen's art than I cover here. Her casting of installation art in terms of "connective aesthetics" also involves her sense that installation art "cultivates the intertwining of self and Other" thus producing "modes of reciprocal empathy" (82). Unlike art that promotes a separation between an art object and spectator, installation art can be community-building and provide "a model for connectedness and healing" (86). Although this focus on art as community-building is somewhat tangential to this article, I would note that other scholars, namely Pilar Cuder-Domínguez and Heather Smyth, have contemplated Tuyen's art practice as promoting community formation.

3 The matter of belonging is notoriously complex. It depends both on whether the social group seeks to include an individual and on whether the individual perceives this group as inclusive and actually desires to be a part of it. In this way, although Tuyen may not find a social group to which to belong and although she may still not find herself easily accepted, she does, in the end, experience a sense of belonging in that she can perceive others who are like her. Whether or not she and those others actually unite to form a cohesive collective does not prevent Tuyen from sensing that she does fit somewhere and that is a form of belonging.

4 Her other not-yet-realized installation meant to represent her experience of family uses precisely this imagery of overflowing containment. Tuyen would walk through a room, running into various boxes out of which objects like "spikes and keys and mouths and voices" (126) would fall.

5 Interestingly, the graffiti artists' work also demonstrates a movement away from self-representation towards an expression of the longings of others. While the art is initially limited to their own personal tags, the culminating example of graffiti art is Kumaran's mural depicting the various "places where Angela Chiarelli [Carla's mother] dreamed of going" (302).

6 Emily Johansen offers a similar interpretation, suggesting that Tuyen's intentions for the *lubaio* specifically are "to make the past useful but to avoid becoming marooned there as her parents and older sisters seem to be" (n. pag.).

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Alex Porco

XX
(from *The Minutes*)

Let's begin:
"Compromise,"
a dirty word
only
if the position
you are most fond of
is the position
you are found out in,
we are all of us
centrefolds
but none of us
models.
Measure yourself! sayeth Babrius.
It's the difference between
scrimmagin'
through scruples
maiorem partem lucretur
& rimjobbin'
through loopholes
minorem damni praestet.
Dear Sir, measure:
"I am happy to report
that to generate
a revenue stream,
meter-maids,
Lords of Industry that they are,
mete out ready-made
tickets for violations, as is
their wont or *métier*—

the no-way of know-how—
then collect
under the auspices
of good objective judgment
and *The National Post*."
Measure yourself
but never those selfless acts of love
that burst from the mouth
like a pipe,
making a new better stream
in which to swim
before the eventual
streamline.
Meeting adjourned.

Andrea Beverley

The Feminist Caucus of the League of Canadian Poets
Chapbooks, Archives, and Sara Ahmed's Feminist Affects

> A woman's language conveys the web of interconnectedness, the immense, intricate dance of relationships happening in the most spacious of moments, now.
> —Penn Kemp, "Deftly Stroked Images"

In this essay, I theorize the Living Archives chapbook series, which is produced and published by the Feminist Caucus of the League of Canadian Poets.[1] I explore the first two chapbooks of the series in conversation with the work of feminist theorist Sara Ahmed, focusing in particular on her concepts of feminist wonder, feminist hope, and the "non-presentness" of any particular encounter. In addition to familiarizing readers with the critically neglected Living Archives series, I suggest that reading the series through Ahmed's work on feminism, affect, and the "now" helps us to recognize the multiple temporalities and constitutive emotions of the Feminist Caucus' archival project. In particular, Ahmed offers a lens through which to read some of the project's silences, tensions, and potential inaccuracies productively, from an angle that does more than just point out failings. This essay works through three examples. First, rather than reading chapbook descriptions of Caucus meetings for their factual accuracy, we can read them as narratives of remembered moments of affective feminist community. Second, when the chapbooks lament their own exclusions, we can recognize such self-critique as fundamental to feminist hope. Third, when there is palpable silence within chapbook pages, we can—rather than simply diagnosing a breakdown in communication—look for the potential "elsewheres" of the text. Additionally, multiple temporalities (the cohabitation of the now, the past, and the future) emerge as a theme throughout this investigation in accordance with their centrality in Ahmed's work and in the Feminist Caucus' archival project.

The Feminist Caucus was established as a committee of the League of Canadian Poets in 1982. This founding was achieved amidst "much vociferous discussion" at the League's 1982 Annual General Meeting; indeed, some League members resigned to protest the inauguration of the Caucus (Kates and Springer 245; Struthers n.pag.). The official motion that launched the Feminist Caucus stated that its members would "undertake research and develop strategies to increase participation by and recognition of women in all aspects of poetry" both within the League and beyond (Struthers n.pag.). Founders were mobilized by gender disparities in wages for freelance work, support for reading tours, membership in the League of Canadian Poets, and representation on the League executives and committees (Kates and Springer 245; Nelson, "Sexual Politics" 25-34; Struthers n.pag.). First published in a 1981 League newsletter, Sharon Nelson's report on these disparities was an effective call to arms. Indeed, her article was republished in the first Feminist Caucus chapbook, discussed below, as the text that "represents the Feminist Caucus' beginning" (Ford, "Out" 15). Most texts in the chapbooks, however, arise out of presentations given at the Feminist Caucus' annual meetings, held in conjunction with the League's AGM. The twenty-five chapbooks in the ongoing Living Archives series generally include poems, essays, letters, sketches, and introductory material. The chapbook titles over the years indicate the breadth of topics: from *What's a ~~Nice~~ Feminist?* in 1989 (Nicholls) to *Urban/rural: Women, Writing & Place 1995* (Bannerman and Graham) to *O(pen)ings: Feminism and Postmodernism 2000* (Edwards) to *Poetry and the Disordered Mind 2012* (Monahan). Material from the chapbooks has been collected in two publications: *Siolence: Poets on Women, Violence and Silence* (McMaster) and *Imprints and Casualties: Poets on Women and Language, Reinventing Memory* (Burke). These books are listed as volumes one and two; a third volume is forthcoming (Burke, "Re: Living"). In what follows here, I focus on the first two chapbooks that the Feminist Caucus published: *Stats, Memos & Memory 1982* (Ford and Nelson) and *Illegitimate Positions: Women & Language 1987* (Ford and McMaster). *Stats, Memos & Memory* consists of an essay by Cathy Ford that introduces the Living Archives series, followed by two essays by Sharon Nelson. *Illegitimate Positions* contains texts by Cathy Ford, Erín Moure,[2] Suniti Namjoshi, Lola Lemire Tostevin, Penn Kemp, Margaret Christakos, Bronwen Wallace, and Susan McMaster. This paper draws primarily from the chapbook contributions of Ford, Moure, Nelson, Wallace, and McMaster. I focus on these texts because they relate most directly to the Caucus' conceptualization of the Living Archives series itself.

When we think about the question "why archive?" the most obvious answer might be: we archive so that material is preserved for the future. Jacques Derrida goes so far as to say that "the question of the archive is not, we repeat, a question of the past. . . . It is a question of the future" (36). If the decision to archive is future-oriented, it is a decision made in a present time that imagines future presents. Multiple temporalities are inherent to the archival impulse. For instance, by stating that the Living Archives series is a collection of chapbooks that document the Feminist Caucus' annual panels, I have already alluded to moments that are key to the existence of this self-titled "archive": the moment of the panel, the subsequent moments when its proceedings are collected for publication, along with the far-reaching moment when the Caucus members decided to produce chapbooks in the first place. Similar moments exist for any conference proceedings. But the unique conditions surrounding the publication of the Living Archives series add other temporalities, complicating the timeline from live panel to written text. For instance, the two chapbooks that I focus on in this analysis have dates on their covers: 1982 and 1987. However, the copyright pages of each indicate that they were both published in 1992, although they anthologize the presentations from the 1982 and 1987 Feminist Caucus meetings. Cathy Ford explains in the chapbook *Stats, Memos & Memory* that the series launched in 1992 to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the founding of the Feminist Caucus within the League of Canadian Poets ("Out" 7). This retrospective publishing task was complicated by the fact that material from the previous decade was "drifting in basement boxes or scribbled notes or cardboard files" (McMaster, "A Living" 46). Indeed, to publish annotated proceedings years after the fact was—unsurprisingly—"an arduous task, due to the difficulty of establishing the accuracy of records kept over ten years, last-minute changes to panel participants, and research back to written materials that were spoken from" (Ford, "Out" 10). For these 1992 publications, the chapbook editors also invited the original speakers to comment on their original texts, adding to the temporal multiplicity of each publication.

In thinking through the interconnected temporalities that inhabit panel proceedings, the relationship between the moment of a live panel and the moment of its future written proceedings might seem to be the simplest intertemporal relationship in the publication process. But in the case of the Living Archives, the bumpy process and the intermediary years between the panels and their respective publications may make readers skeptical of the chapbooks' claim to "archive" the panels. For instance, commenting on the editorial processes behind the Living Archives series as described by Cathy

Ford in *Stats, Memos & Memory*, Patrick Finn writes that "Ford's words are moving and her argument compelling, yet I cannot help wondering what actually occurred in 1982. What was said in those early panels that has been excluded?" (104). He goes on to critique a different chapbook for its "invasive revisionism" (105), part of which he attributes to it being "billed as being from 1985-87" when its "construction and publication" actually occurred in the early 1990s (108).[3] Finn problematizes these self-styled "archives" in productive ways, but in turning to the chapbooks' descriptions of their originary panels, I am interested in *how* the panels are described rather than wondering if the descriptions are factually accurate. Rather than scrutinizing the descriptions for their historical precision, I read these descriptions as affirmations that the chapbooks emerged from remembered/lived moments of affective community, thus providing one way of articulating a genealogy of this feminist story and its drive to archive itself.

Ahmed's conceptualization of feminist wonder offers vocabulary through which to describe this point. In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Ahmed discusses "emotions that bring us into feminism," notably wonder and hope (178). Part of the Feminist Caucus' rationale for archiving their meetings sprang from an urge to capture the heady moments of feminist assembly. In response to the question of why the Caucus members acted on the desire to archive, McMaster answers, "Simple, I think. Too many of us had had some kind of significant turn, or rush of relief and freedom, or moment that couldn't be forgotten, in one of these panels" ("A Living" 45). Ahmed states that the experience of wonder—which would be integral to these Feminist Caucus unforgettable moments—can offer decisive instances of feminist self-identification (*Cultural* 180). For Ahmed, feminist wonder is twofold. First, there is the wonder that comes from learning that the world is the way it is because it has been *made* that way over time through work (rather than accepting current conditions as natural or ordinary, which elicits no wonder) (180). This wonder inspires the feminist conviction that "refuses to allow the taken-for-granted to be granted" (Ahmed 182). Second, there is also the wonder that comes from realizing that the world can therefore be different, that it can be changed through collective action (Ahmed 181). This inspires the feminist conviction that "energises the hope of transformation, and the will for politics" (Ahmed 181). Feminist wonder is, for Ahmed, something that occurs collectively, the "affective opening up of the world through the act of wonder, not as a private act, but as an opening up of what is possible through working together" (181).[4]

With this in mind, I turn to Cathy Ford's description of the 1987 Feminist Caucus meeting. In *Illegitimate Positions*, she writes:

> The scents and sense of a hot room in Ontario in summer, a room filled with women, the perfume of bodies and flowers and words, the spectrum of colour, shape, and size, was an intoxication we were welcoming as a gathering of women writers, as a Caucus. There was a sense of amazement, 'we' did this? . . . I remember, again, that time and place which illustrated to me, again, that it is *also* when the strongest, most articulate, most forthright women open their intellects and hearts and written words to discussion, to sharing, that it is both a time of sorrow (those realizations, frustrations, efforts) *and* joy (that giggle, that connection of a common experience). ("Instead" 7-8)

Clearly, Ford remembers this as an encounter ripe with affect: it is electric, erotic, sad, and euphoric. Ahmed's description of feminist wonder offers one way of reading this narrative. To draw on Ahmed's definition discussed above, this is, for Ford, a collective experience ("gathering," "sharing," "connection") that involves both lament for current conditions (the "sorrow" of "realizations") and "amazement" at what might be accomplished through feminist action. Ford's evocation of "a room," "a hot room," "the bodies sprawled; the sound poems played and danced across the room" (7) depicts a space full of women, the atmosphere electric and emboldening. Ahmed, writing more than a decade after Ford, affirms that "[t]he passion of wonder can be passed between the bodies that make up the cramped spaces of Women's Studies" (Ahmed 183). The chapbook that emerged from this particular cramped space explicitly asks the question: what connects feminists? (Christakos 37). One answer to that question is: a sense of wonder, insofar as "what is shared is . . . the capacity to leave behind the place of the ordinary" (Ahmed 183).

But what if—to come back to Finn's questions—that's not what really happened in that "hot room in Ontario"? What if everyone wasn't having such a great time? What if the Living Archives' expressed intention to "collect and present, as far as possible, what had *actually happened* at each panel" (McMaster, "A Living" 46, emphasis added) is an impossibility, given the fraught nature of memory and textual representation, not to mention the potential "invasive revisionism" described by Finn? The chapbook contains other (different) descriptions of this same panel; read collectively, they can offer the impression that we are informed about what "really" happened. For instance, in the piece immediately following Ford's, Erín Moure remembers the panel as "well-attended. There was much questioning and listening, much thoughtfulness, along with a little 'cold air'" ("A Space" 11). Though it may be difficult to imagine "cold air" in Ford's "hot room," we assume that

the composite portrait painted by numerous voices is a more complete, well-rounded remembrance of the live panel. The idea that different participants had different experiences of the shared moment—and the idea that some might have felt more "cold air" than "feminist wonder"—is confirmed in the piece that Cathy Ford wrote as an introduction to the entire Living Archives series in *Stats, Memos & Memory*. There she acknowledges that "[f]or some, this place among women, among poets, is the safest place they have found; for others, this is the least safe place of all—it demands truth, beauty, honesty, integrity, political commitment and action" (Ford,"Out" 16-17). If the euphoria of one remembrance of the panel is tempered by another, does it become impossible to assert feminist wonder as grounds for feminist collectivity? I have made this assertion above by utilizing Ahmed's concept of feminist wonder and it is the breadth of that conception that can actually accommodate "a little cold air." Feminist wonder turns its "critical gaze" not only on oppressive conditions in the world but also on the "very forms of feminism that have emerged here or there" (Ahmed, *Cultural* 182). That is, feminist wonder *includes* turning a critical eye on manifestations of feminism. Ahmed cites Black feminism as an intervention steeped in feminist wonder, a critical wonder, "which includes the very political movements to which we are attached" (182). Part of the intervention of Black feminism has been to denounce the ways in which terms such as "women" and "feminism" have been deployed with inherent exclusions (Ahmed 182). The first two Living Archives chapbooks celebrated the diversity of voices between their pages *and* worried about a lack of diversity. Rather than reading this concern as evidence of the collective's failure, I argue that it can be conceptualized as part and parcel of feminist hope, which Ahmed defines as invested in multiple temporalities. Feminist wonder therefore is experienced by Feminist Caucus poets who felt an unequivocal sense of solidarity *and* by participants who felt marginalized by that particular "we."

In the founding chapbooks of the Living Archives, there are passages that celebrate the multiplicity of voices represented in the chapbooks. Susan McMaster notes the "very disparate things" and "all the different voices" of each annual panel ("A Living" 46-47). Similarly, Ford describes the series as "a celebration of a multiplicity of voices, perceptions, and literary styles" ("Out" 7-8). In fact, the form of the publications was meant to preserve this multiplicity. The Feminist Caucus decided to produce anthology-like chapbooks collected into a series because it was seen as a form that could

accommodate diverse texts without imposing an overarching narrative. The chapbook series was "a flexible but simple format that could accept anything, and still make sense of it" (McMaster, "A Living" 47). This editorial decision is part of what makes the Feminist Caucus conceive of these archives as "living," as in the title Living Archives. The series is conceptualized as a "large, perhaps even amoebaean pool" because of its co-extant diverse voices (Ford, "Out" 12). The amoeba metaphor connotes *aliveness*, and in particular, aliveness that does not have a definite, predetermined shape. Another text conveys the series' aliveness by anthropomorphizing it as progeny. In an extended metaphor that McMaster returns to over three pages, the Feminist Caucus members "give birth" to the idea for the series, and the first two chapbooks are the "twins" they produce ("A Living" 46-47). Her tone is light but the metaphor conveys the real labour of collating these texts. It also conveys their sense that the project insisted on being archived. Their drive to archive their annual meetings gestated over time, growing and "making a fuss. Obviously, vigorously alive" (McMaster, "A Living" 45). The metaphor is slippery: the drive to archive is itself a child that "wouldn't lie down and be quiet" but the chapbooks are also babies. Because McMaster is writing in 1992, when six panels from the previous decade are still waiting to be transformed into chapbooks, they are described as "yet unborn" ("A Living" 47). So when the Feminist Caucus describes these archives as "living" they refer to the persistence of the archival drive, the chapbooks as their collectively birthed offspring, and the collected voices as generative in their differences.

Lest readers be tempted to gloss over these choices of metaphor, one of Sharon Nelson's texts in *Stats, Memos & Memory* is a cogent reminder of the power of metaphorical language in feminist analysis. In "Metaphors, Analogies, and Things That Go Bump in the Night," Nelson dissects common axioms that reinforce a man/woman binary. But she spends the bulk of her essay examining the metaphors used to describe divisions between feminists in the women's movement. She discusses the "sisterhood of womankind" as a dangerous metaphor that blinds us to the vast differences between women's experiences (44). Her reasoning is similar to Chandra Talpade Mohanty's influential critique of the international "sisterhood" evoked in the 1984 anthology *Sisterhood is Global* (Mohanty 109-17; Morgan). Nelson's argument is also akin to those that Ahmed attributes to the critical wonder of Black feminism. What they hold in common is an awareness of intersectionality that leads to a critique of signifiers meant to encompass *all* women or *all* feminists. When the

Living Archives are celebrated as "an amoebaean pool" (Ford, "Out" 12), it is with the hope that they can avoid such a homogenization of women's different perspectives. Yet alongside this hope and celebration ("a sense of amazement—'we' did this?" Ford, "Instead" 7) is a sense of anxiety that the "we" of the Living Archives is not as multiple as it could be. One of the most poignant statements identifying both joy and sorrow appears in Ford's piece in *Stats, Memos & Memory*: "I am as much celebrating what is here as I am grief-stricken at what is not; as proud of what is said as I am ashamed of what's been missed or said without sufficient regard for the place of others" ("Out" 17). Ford declares grief and shame interspersed with pride and rejoicing in response to the contents of the Living Archives inaugural chapbooks. I read this narrative of multiple affects through Ahmed's description of feminist hope. Rather than identifying hope as entirely invested in what the future might bring, Ahmed describes hope as inhabiting a present in which the past unfolds. Multiple temporalities are integral to Ahmed's understanding of feminist hope; indeed, the past, present, and future are of recurring concern in recent reflections on hope and feminist theory (Coleman and Ferreday 316-17). Consider Ahmed's sentence: "To have hope in feminism is to recognise that feminist visions of the future have not been realised in the present" (*Cultural* 187). This hope is connected to the past because present conditions repeat past oppressions and are thus undesirable from a feminist perspective. This hope is in the present because it is predicated on an evaluation of present conditions. This hope is also in the present because it informs feminist action. This hope conceives of the future through a sense of the "not yet," as in "the moment of hope is when the 'not yet' impresses upon us in the present, such that we must act, politically, to make it our future" (Ahmed, *Cultural* 184).[5]

I have paraphrased Ahmed's concepts of feminist hope and wonder in order to place her work in conversation with Nelson and Ford as they address feminist exclusions. In the quote above, Ford laments that certain feminist voices might be excluded from the amoebaean pool of the Living Archives. If we imagine the chapbook texts as the present tense of Ford's comment, her concern is that the past (the panels) that has informed this present was itself misshaped by all the lamentable conditions in the world that would bar diverse voices from participation. Ford recognizes what Ahmed posits as fundamental to feminist hope: that "feminist visions of the future have not been realised in the present" (Ahmed, *Cultural* 187). Key here is the interpretation facilitated by Ahmed, which allows us to read Ford's

realization as integral to feminist hope, rather than to read her realization as a sign of feminist failure. Ford gestures at this reading when she writes: "What has been done so far by the Feminist Caucus is not enough. Perhaps that is its saving grace, the very irony that most feminist action contends with" ("Out" 14). The connection between these two sentences, the second purporting to be an interpretation of the first, may seem puzzling at first glance. But it can be puzzled out as an expression of feminist hope, a hope that recognizes the past and the "not yet" in the present. Neither my comments nor Ahmed's concepts suggest that admitting feminist exclusions is sufficient response to those exclusions. What I am proposing, by placing Ahmed in conversation with the Living Archives, is a productive way to read such admissions. I want to pre-empt the assumption that divisions within the feminist movement are equal to feminist failure and that feminism is therefore not a viable intervention. Imagine an all-too-familiar recalcitrant voice that says, "Well, if those feminists can't even get along with each other or agree on what they want, how can they possibly get it together enough to change the world?" In this viewpoint, feminist disagreement becomes a pretext to dismiss feminism itself.

In her text on metaphor, Nelson gives us good reason to beware this faulty logic. She argues that the metaphor of the "sisterhood of womankind" is a patriarchal construct that functions to undermine feminist solidarity by encouraging feminists to falsely perceive "unity as a necessity, difference as divisive, and division as disunity" ("Metaphors" 45). In other words, the notion that women are all "sisters" rests on the assumption of their sameness; when sameness is meant to beget consensus, disagreement is seen as malfunction and failure (Nelson, "Metaphors" 40-45). This conclusion—that feminism fails when there is internal division—can be rejected if we adopt narratives that do not rest on the sameness of the subjects who identify with the feminist movement. I am reminded of Dionne Brand's reflections on the Canadian women's movement in the 1970s and 1980s. Remarking on the tension within the movement, Brand says, "It was hot. The women's movement is where all this kind of stuff happens. It's very charged and angry, but it's where it happens. People from outside can look at it and see it as fighting, but we're fighting for something. It will look like it's in disarray, a mess, but that's what struggle looks like" (qtd. in Rebick 122-23). A perspective that asserts "that's what struggle looks like" is immediately distinguishable from a perspective that asks "why can't these 'sisters' just get along?" In addition to this example from Brand, I have suggested that

Ahmed's narratives of hope and wonder provide other models for narrating feminist community. Indeed, Ahmed's work is premised on a definition of collectivity as "a process of 'collecting together' without a common ground" (Ahmed, "This" 568) just as community is "a site lived through the *desire for* community rather than a site that fulfils and 'resolves' that desire" (Ahmed and Fortier 257). These two definitions come from different texts and contexts.[6] But what they have in common is the idea that the togetherness of collective action does not rest in the homogeneity of the group or in the perfect execution of its commitment to inclusivity.

Feminist hope, wonder, and struggle are counter narratives to the idea that admissions of feminist disunity are equal to feminist defeat. By rooting feminist hope and wonder in the past, present, and "not yet," Ahmed's arguments in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* echo her essay "This Other and Other Others." One of the central manoeuvers of Ahmed's argument in "This Other and Other Others" is to draw a connection between the "otherness" of the future and the "others" of feminist community. She argues for an "ethics" or a "politics" of thinking through "particular encounters" with others, rather than focusing on the future "as the time of and for otherness" (559). She refers to "particular encounters" with others, rather than "particular others," in recognition of the fact that one cannot fully read and know another other (561-62). Indeed, to suggest that the essential particularity of someone is accessible by encountering them would reify the encounter and privilege the present. Rather, Ahmed proposes that we "think of particularity in terms of modes of encounter through which others are faced" (561). These encounters are always shaped by the "non-presentness of the particular" (568); we come back—again—to the importance of temporality. In Ahmed's lexicon, to hold on to the "non-presentness" of a particular encounter is to recognize "the history that the encounter reopens, as well as the future that it might open up" (568). As the culmination of the essay, Ahmed provides a literary mobilization of her theoretical concepts: she describes her "encounter" with a text (the story "Douloti the Bountiful" by Mahasweta Devi, translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak) (565-68). Similarly, her concept of the "non-presentness of the particular encounter" can frame one poet's contribution to *Illegitimate Positions* in order to explore the historicity and futurity of the chapbook text as a "particular encounter." Like Ahmed's concepts of feminist hope and wonder, her "non-presentness of the particular encounter" is invested in ethical relationships between "others" and a revitalized understanding of "failures" in those relationships.

Bronwen Wallace contributed one poem to *Illegitimate Positions*. Entitled "Bones," it appears toward the close of the chapbook, immediately preceding McMaster's concluding remarks on the launch of the Living Archives series. The explanatory note that precedes "Bones" was penned by Erín Moure and dated 1992 (Moure, "In" 42). In two short paragraphs, Moure specifies that Wallace decided *not* to publish the essay she wrote for the *Illegitimate Positions* panel in this chapbook.[7] Moure states that Wallace disagreed with the two quotes that were sent out to the panel speakers as prompts for their contributions.[8] Moure implies a causal connection between Wallace's response to the quotes and her decision to excise her essay. Readers thus begin this particular encounter with Wallace's poem "Bones" having been advised of an absence in the text, or at least a substitution. In Ahmed's lexes, a literal absence/substitution in the text coupled with Moure's candid note alert us to the "non-presentness" of our "particular encounter" with Wallace's writing. The absence that alerts us to this "non-presentness" is not a lack or a blemish; we are *not* asking, "what's missing?" but rather "what makes this encounter possible (its historicity)?" (Ahmed, "This" 562). Ahmed's point about the non-presentness of the particular encounter is that there is no essence of the other that we strive to access in the encounter. All encounters are mediated and formed by their pasts and futures (Ahmed, "This" 562). Ahmed explains,

> [T]o discuss the particular modes of encounter (rather than particular others) is also to open the encounter up, *to fail to grasp it*. . . . We need to question not only how we arrived here, at this particular place, but also how this arrival is linked to other places, to an elsewhere that is not simply absent or present. . . . [I]t is a particular encounter that I might have with this other that opens up the possibility of encountering other others, a possibility that we can lovingly interpret as the promise of both the elsewhere and the "not yet." ("This" 562)

What I am most interested in mobilizing from her argument is the idea that it might be ethically responsible to recognize how we "fail to grasp" particular encounters. The verb "to fail" in the italicized "*to fail to grasp it,*" recalls my point above on metaphorical and narrative reframings of feminist failure. Rather than lamenting that the *Illegitimate Positions* panel was not properly archived, we reframe this "failure"—itself resulting from a moment of feminist disagreement—as a particular encounter between text and reader. Being denied the end point of perfect representation of the live event is a "failure" that occasions openings. We research the "historicity" of this particular encounter; its "futurity" includes such research, my musings here, and unknown future "not yets."

I choose the example of "Bones" because it is editorially framed as absence or substitution, immediately linking it to an "elsewhere." In the case of "Bones," the "elsewheres" of Wallace's contribution to the chapbook could include: the inclusion of her missing essay in another collection, the inclusion of "Bones" in another collection, material at Library and Archives Canada related to the *Illegitimate Positions* chapbook, contemporaneous feminist discussion on the panel's topics, and—most obviously—the Living Archives chapbook published a year later, *Two Women Talking: Correspondence 1985 to 1987 Erin Mouré and Bronwen Wallace* (McMaster). If we follow Ahmed's lead in her description of her encounter with Devi's text, then "elsewhere" might also include a description of my own material encounter with *Illegitimate Positions* within a variety of institutional structures. In evoking these potential "elsewheres" I am not suggesting that we can thereby access the ultimate Truth of the text. Contextualizations are not fluorescent lights illuminating a text's essence. Deeper historical and intertextual contextualizations are part of exploring a text's "elsewhere," but we perform such investigations not because the text/encounter is hidden or empty, but because it is laden and open. We approach the text with critical wonder, knowing that we will "*fail to grasp it*" (Ahmed, "This" 562) and joyfully reclaiming that failure as the starting point for a more ethical reading of the text. Ultimately, Ahmed suggests that being denied that end point of completion, access, essence, or perfection is a "failure" that occasions openings, inviting us to think harder about intertextualities, inter-temporalities, and "elsewheres."

I began this essay with the question of the temporalities of an archival impulse. Temporalities, particularly the cohabitation of pasts, presents, and futures, are central to Ahmed's definitions of feminist wonder, feminist hope, non-presentness, and the not-yet. These concepts provide one productive way to read the founding chapbooks of the Living Archives series. In particular, I have placed Ahmed's theorizations in conversation with chapbook descriptions of the joys and struggles of feminist collaboration, articulated through various metaphors, affect-laden narratives, or absences. Of course, in describing the Feminist Caucus chapbooks as archives invested in multiple temporalities, I have glossed over the fact that these publications are not, technically speaking, "archives" at all. The editors of the Living Archives figure the series as archival because they hope the series will provide a record of their meetings over time. Their use of the term is thus fitting insofar as it captures their conception of the series. In opposition to

cliché perceptions of archives as closed, highly regimented spaces or as dusty, irrelevant material, the Feminist Caucus specifically labels their archives as *alive* (i.e., the "Living" Archives). The adjective "living" resonates with the importance accorded to living bodies and their affects in the chapbooks. In this sense the "living" aspect of these archives invites readers to consider the weight of the originary event in the pages of its corresponding publication, which has been part of the work of this essay. But the series was also labelled "Living" because the Feminist Caucus anticipated that the contents of these publications would be re-collated differently in the future, as they were for the 1998 and 2000 anthologies and for potential digitized versions.[9] They thus envisioned the series as "living" because of its potential for future evolution. In this sense, their faith in the "living" quality of their work is akin to Ahmed's point on the exponential "elsewheres" of an encounter with a text. These publications are imagined as alive with a multiplicity of poetic voices, manifest in texts that are amenable to future formats, and imbued with the lived experience of Feminist Caucus gatherings. From this standpoint, the "now" during which we encounter them is indeed, as poet Penn Kemp stated in the epigraph above, "that most spacious of moments."

NOTES

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2 At the time of these publications, Erín Moure spelled her name Erin Mouré. This essay uses the current spelling, except in the citations for works published under the previous spelling.

3 Finn's article focuses mostly on *Two Women Talking: Correspondence 1985 to 1987 Erin Mouré and Bronwen Wallace* (McMaster), which is listed as the second chapbook in the Living Archives though it was actually published third, in 1993. *Two Women Talking* is likely the Living Archives chapbook that has garnered the most critical attention. Finn's critical concern that the chapbook has misrepresented its source text is very different from the approach that I suggest in this essay.

4 Based on commentary Ahmed has posted to her blog (feministkilljoys.com), it seems as if her next book's discussion of "feminist astonishment" will have much in common with this conceptualization of feminist wonder (Ahmed, "Feminist").

5 Her repeated emphasis on the imperative "we must act" in this section is noteworthy (Ahmed, *Cultural* 184). Ahmed is clear that feminist hope must induce political action. She acknowledges Anna Potamianou's critique of hope as potential stagnation "which may actually foreclose transformation" (qtd. in Ahmed, *Cultural* 185).

6 In "This Other and Other Others," Ahmed is speaking directly of the grounds for feminist politics (568). In "Re-imagining Communities," Ahmed and Fortier are addressing the idea of "communities" more generally.

7 Moure stipulates that Wallace did publish the essay elsewhere and provides bibliographic information (see Wallace, "Statement").

8 The quotes in question came from Gauthier (162-63) and Spender (51). (Ford and McMaster n.p.)

9 Digital editions of these chapbooks are being discussed. See "Women and Words: Canadian Feminist Literary Collectives 1980-2000," Canadian Writing Research Collaboratory, www.cwrc.ca.

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Andrew McEwan

Cause Effect.

Some signs remain secret, some manifest, some in the body, some in the mind, and diversely. Continues to night. Avert sensitive choirs that grab by turns of logic.

Species directly given to imagination project threats. Watery and terrestrial though burnt and about to fall for it. A chaperone develops in thickets of uneven landscape.

Replicate a thwarted return. Twin-born inseparable companions who swap a fluid dialogue. The specific distinction in these limbs: their consensus.

Like the wild boar a riotous pulse. Now nearer, now farther off, together, asunder. One may delight in faction, though often a strong conceit punishes wits.

Happy is the city that in times of peace dreams of war. A painting captivates cheerlessly. More or less deep impressions that fashion a rigid furniture.

Though altitude and atmosphere do agitate impersonally, every society, corporation, and family is full of some such stimulus. Emulations that shadow a captive envy.

Kerry Lappin-Fortin

Talking Translation
An Interview with Lawrence Hill

Lawrence Hill, "a compulsive storyteller in the oral, African-American tradition"[1] is celebrated for both his works of fiction and non-fiction, which include *Black Berry, Sweet Juice: On Being Black and White in Canada* (2001), his novel *Any Known Blood* (1997), and *Blood: The Stuff of Life* (2013), in the Massey Lecture series. His best-selling novel *The Book of Negroes* (2007) garnered the Commonwealth Writers' Prize and the Rogers Writers' Trust Fiction Prize; its American edition, *Someone Knows My Name*, was a finalist for the Hurston/Wright Legacy Award. This epic story has moved readers around the world—in six different languages—and recently reached television audiences as well.[2] Torn from her West African village as a young girl and sold into slavery on a plantation in South Carolina, Aminata Diallo escapes the cruelty of Master Appleby, leaving the nurturing arms of his slave Georgia, and becomes the "servant" of Solomon Lindo in Charleston. Her remarkable journey continues north to Manhattan, on to Nova Scotia, back to the shores of Africa, and finally to London, where she addresses a group of British abolitionists, and meets the King and Queen of England.

When I sat down with Lawrence Hill, I sought his insight on questions I had raised with my students in the context of an undergraduate course in English-French translation. For example, what challenges does the translator face when working with historical fiction, with passages in dialect, or when deliberating over important lexical choices and searching for *le mot juste*? Much of what follows focuses on Carole Noël's French translation of *The Book of Negroes*, *Aminata* (2011). Winner of the 1986 John Glassco

Translation Prize for *On n'en meurt pas* by Russian author Olga Boutenko and short-listed for the Governor General's Award for *Ce qu'il nous reste* (2003), her translation of Aislinn Hunter's novel *What's Left Us* (2001), Noël recently translated Hill's 2013 Massey Lecture *Blood: The Stuff of Life* as *Le Sang, essence de la vie* (2014). She has said her greatest challenge in *Aminata* was preserving the *musicalité* of the slaves' dialogue; she wanted these passages to ring true (*sonnent vrai*)—but admits she was not wholly satisfied with the results (Noël, "Traduire" 1).

Hill and I also briefly discussed his first novel, *Some Great Thing* (1992, 2009), translated by Robert Paquin as *De grandes choses* (1995) and recently republished as *Un grand destin* (2012). This lighthearted, yet insightful story of a young journalist working for the *Winnipeg Free Press* at the height of French-English linguistic tensions features a cast of colourful characters, including one endearing reporter from West Africa named Yoyo. A translator of novels, advertising, poetry, television and film, Paquin was able to preserve much of the humour and the authenticity of Hill's dialogue.

This is not an interview in the traditional sense; this is an informal yet earnest exchange between a writer and a professor about what can be lost and gained in translation. It sheds some light on the nature of the writer–translator relationship, the creativity demanded of them both, and the knowledge they share: that their work can never be perfect.

Kerry Lappin-Fortin (KLF): *Aminata*, the French translation of your award-winning novel *The Book of Negroes*, won Radio-Canada's *Combat des livres* in 2013 and was short-listed for the Prix Fetkann in France that same year. This is testament to the importance of your book and to your tremendous talent as a storywriter. To what degree do you feel this success reflects the quality of Carole Noël's translation? Has your book been equally well received in other languages?

Lawrence Hill (LH): There are only a few countries where the translation has done well: Norway, the Netherlands, it did well in Quebec, but not so much in France—that's a hard market to crack. There's a perception [in France] that literature coming from Quebec will somehow be less well written. But *Présence africaine éditions* in Paris made very few changes to Carole Noël's translation, so this is testament to the quality of Carole's work.

KLF: You have told me you enjoy a good relationship with your French and Spanish translators and can actively participate in the translation process because you are fluent in these languages.

LH: I do read the drafts and try to answer the translator's questions. In fact, Carole Noël is just finishing up the translation of *Blood: The Stuff of Life*, and she occasionally had comments or questions for me, sometimes on something quite idiomatic. For instance, in *Blood* I used one of my grandfather's expressions: "Prop me up on every leaning side" (354) [he smiles] and I had to explain to Carole what this meant: "I'm not doing too well here and could use all the help you can give me." When she was translating *The Book of Negroes*, I think I was helpful with the dialogue. That is what we spent most of the time talking about. For example, it's important to see Aminata's progress in English over the course of the novel.

KLF: Language does play an important role, particularly when Aminata first arrives in South Carolina. Georgia teaches her how to speak with the *buckra* [the white man], using a non-standard variety of American English—and warns her never to speak too correctly. She also teaches her to use the Gullah dialect as a secret code among slaves. The treatment of the period dialogue and these various codes of communication was no doubt the most challenging aspect of the translator's work. Did you expect something necessarily would be "lost in translation"?

LH: We [Carole Noël and I] were invited to participate in a translators' conference in Banff [in June 2010] where we discussed the problem of translating the dialogue. Carole felt what is called "le petit-nègre" wouldn't be a good solution because it's too simplistic, a caricature—and I agreed with her.[3]

KLF: Yes. Let's look first at the language lesson Georgia gives Aminata (Hill, *Book of Negroes* 128-29), using three phrases in Gullah: *Bruddah tief de hog*, *De hebby dry drought 'most racktify de cawn* and *De buckgra gib we de gam; demse'f nyam de hin'quawtuh*. Georgia explains this means: "Brother done steal the hog," "The long drought done spoil the corn," and "The white people give us the front quarter, they done eat the hindquarter themselves." Then, from that point on, *you* become the translator, and the reader is to understand their private conversations continue in Gullah.

LH: Yes, that's right, because I didn't want to write in idiom.

KLF: Of course. But these three phrases were quite a problem. Noël rendered them in a form of non-standard French: *Frè' voler cochon*, *Gross' chalèr gaspié maï, Boukras donner nous devant; ga'der derrière*, then she had Georgia explain in quite standard language that they meant: "frère a volé le cochon," "La longue chaleur a gaspillé le maïs," "Les Blancs nous ont donné le quartier de devant et ont gardé pour eux le quartier arrière" (*Aminata* 161). And then the novel goes on, and Noël had the task of attempting to translate

countless passages of non-standard dialogue into some kind of non-standard French. And somehow her translation of Gullah and her translation of the second code of non-standard language had to appear markedly different in the French. I wonder, since so few examples of Gullah appear in the novel, could the translator not simply leave them as is? And in doing so, preserve some of the authenticity of the original text?

LH: You mean leave them in Gullah in translation?

KLF: Yes, much like Richard Philcox did when translating some of Maryse Condé's novels. He left passages in Guadeloupean Creole *en créole* in the English (see for example Condé, *Victoire*). Their meaning was always clear from the context (Lappin-Fortin 541). And the meaning of your Gullah passages would have been clear also; Georgia provided the translation of these phrases to both Aminata and the reader. Do you know if any of your other translators took this approach?

LH: I don't think so. I suppose what you describe would be an option, but remember that an attentive English reader is going to be able to understand a good part of those few words of Gullah—I mean *tief-thief-steal-thieve*, it's pretty easy—but certainly a Francophone wouldn't understand, unless they spoke English too. It's certainly a possibility. I've never really considered that before—it wasn't proposed to me—but instinctively, I'd rather see it translated.

KLF: It's astonishing to think about this young girl leaving her village, speaking both Bamanankan and Fulfulde, her parents' languages, and then learning both Gullah and English in such short time.

LH: Yes, that whole issue of language acquisition fascinates me. . . . I've seen few novels about the slave experience pay attention to the skills slaves had to display and exercise and really, you're talking about some pretty severe intellectual gymnastics. And we rarely imagine or stop to admire the challenges that slaves must have faced. Just think of it, you're stepping off a slave ship, half dead, and suddenly you're on an alien planet and you have to learn one or two new languages and even the people who look like you who've also been stolen from your homeland can't communicate with you because they come from another part of Africa. And so the challenges must have been elevated and the *prouesse intellectuelle* required to make that transition is something we rarely ponder. So I kept it in mind while writing the novel.

KLF: Well, certainly it's admirable to see Aminata, already speaking two African languages, go from a lesson in Gullah to saying to Georgia (*Book of Negroes* 140): "I done tell you before. My mama done teach me to catch babies," and

to Dolly (*Book of Negroes* 197): "You get big wit' chile, yo feets swole up." Then not long after, she produces perfectly grammatical, formal English when speaking to Lindo: "I do not know from where I come . . . I do not understand where South Carolina is in relation to my homeland" (*Book of Negroes* 209). The linguistic skills she displays are truly remarkable, and certainly the English reader appreciates how complex her world is, because we too are asked to follow and understand these different varieties of language. Perhaps keeping a few phrases in Gullah in the translation would help *that* readership feel some disorientation, a greater sense of linguistic discomfort. It's something I've discussed with my students. What are the options translators have and what are the consequences? And what is the author's intent? You were trying to make a point, weren't you?

LH: Yes, I'm trying to show the astounding mental gymnastics of these slaves, and I'm trying to tip my hat in respect to the work they had to undergo to survive. Also, most people of African heritage, including in Canada, will have had some experience watching their elders slip in and out of different registers in English. My father had a doctorate in sociology from U of T, so he could speak in academic jargon like any other scholar, but at family functions in the South, he slipped into Black idiom. He was no longer speaking as he would in public as Chair of the Ontario Human Rights Commission. Verbally, he became a different person. . . . And that's not an uncommon thing to see people slipping from one register of language to another. It's not limited to Black folks; I mean when I lived in Quebec, on one hand, I could hear a university prof speaking with grammatical French in the classroom, and then I could hear him joking around later with friends in the hallway in *joual*—and why not? People commonly slip and slide among various registers of speech, so it's normal that Aminata should speak in one way with a fellow slave at the back of the house and then another way with Lindo—especially since Lindo has given her permission; he and his wife have let her know that she's safe in terms of how she speaks and shouldn't have to pretend to be illiterate, or pretend she only speaks in a Black idiom. And so they open up the vista of language that she can use in the household without being punished for it. And so, to me it's normal that she would slide around like that.

KLF: This was very well done in the novel, and the characters—Dolly, Georgia, Claybourne—sound pitch-perfect to me. The dialogue brings them to life. But I find, with no disrespect to the translator, that it doesn't come off nearly as well in the French. Of course, Noël drops the *ne* in negations: *Sais pas. . .* "Si tu travailles pas, tu meurs, si tu fais pas le travail . . . tu meurs . . . "

(*Aminata* 168). Or she elides the pronouns: *Y, t'es, t'as, j'suis*. . . . Georgia says: "Qu'est-ce que t'as à me casser les oreilles . . . Fifille, j'suis morte de fatigue. . . . Dans ton pays, les Africains y jacassent tout le temps?" (*Aminata* 168), but this is all just familiar French. It's a good start, and certainly these are strategies other translators have used, for example Maud Sissung in her translation of Alex Haley's *Roots* (Noël "Présentation" 2). However my students and I have wondered what else could have been done, if anything, to render the Black idiom more authentically in French.

LH: Yes, it doesn't have the same colour, for sure. And so that comes back to the second half of the question you asked a few minutes ago, that is: "What is lost?" We could talk 'til the cows come home about what's lost in translation, but I always think about what's gained. What's gained are the readers, new markets, people who come to your work who would never have discovered it because it wasn't published in French, because Carole didn't translate it. So what's gained is at least a possibility to engage with other readers in other languages. For sure, you can't deliver the original in a translation; you're delivering an interpretation of it. I've read books in their original French or Spanish versions, and then their translations in English. I know that some things may be lost. . . . I always prefer to read them in the original. Sometimes I'll compare translations because I'm interested in how it all works out. So, for sure, you lose the original voice and you lose some idiom, and it's hard to match that, especially if you're talking about Black idiom. Carole negotiated the difficult parts of the translation as best she could. I think she opted for a fairly conservative, unambitious translation in those parts rather than overreaching. Once I was taking a course in translation at UBC where I studied—it was a third year undergraduate French course—and I remember the French prof, in asking us to try and translate something, told us to keep this in mind: "Plutôt un chien vivant qu'un dinosaure mort." . . . So better to not be too ambitious and to try to deliver something simple and at least have it be understood, rather than overreach and come crashing down and have a disastrous translation because you're trying too hard. Carole followed that dictum to not try too hard, to not be too fancy or too literary in her translation. So they're not ambitious translations, they're fairly faithful, and they're fairly cautious. Especially when we're dealing with idiom and dialogue. But I understand that. That was her way of respecting the original. I mean, Carole is a translator. She's a translator *pure et parfaite*. She's not a poet or a novelist, she's a *translator*. So, she's not going to overreach, or try to be more literary, or as literary as the original, when it's not required.

She's just trying to get the job done, I think, in the most straightforward way possible. Those are the tools that she works with. Pura López Colomé, who's now translating the book into Spanish, is a well-known Mexican poet. She can bring a certain literary playfulness to her translation because she can draw on her background as a poet. Every translator brings to the table a different set of inclinations and aptitudes.

KLF: That was actually one of the questions I had for you. In your interview with [University of Waterloo professor] Winfried Siemerling, when asked what you see for the future, you said someday you would like to translate a Québécois writer ("Conversation" 26). I thought, well, you have a BA in Economics from Laval, an MA in Creative Writing from Johns Hopkins, you're fluent in French, and you're a great writer. So the tools you would be bringing to the translation process would be your writing skills and your knowledge of the languages. On the other hand, a translator could possess formal training in translation, and understand all the techniques and theoretical aspects, but not do creative writing. So, how do you see that *métier du traducteur*? What would be the ideal mix, in your view—for literary translation in particular?

LH: I would love to translate a work by a Québécois as I mentioned to Winfried, especially someone who is not known in English Canada, someone I could do double-duty for: translate and also introduce to English-speaking Canadians. But I have my own limited baggage. I would bring my *élan* as a novelist, but I don't have any formal translation training. I believe I could do a good job, an adequate job, my own job, especially with a backup of informal advisors telling me where I goofed up. I'm a consultative sort of writer. . . . I'm also a journalist in my background, so if the writer's alive, I'd engage with him or her and ask a bunch of questions to make sure I wasn't making mistakes.

KLF: Yes, knowing the author's intent is key, isn't it?

LH: If you can. I mean often you're translating dead writers! But if I could ask someone something, I'd like to. . . .There's a Canadian writer named Wayne Grady. He's written many books in English, he's a novelist, and he's often translated French writers into English. When he was longlisted for the Giller Prize last year, one of his translations into English was also nominated for the Giller Prize in translation, so he had two books up for the Giller. Wayne's not a formal translator, but he's done a lot of translation. And so he brings his work as a non-fiction writer and a novelist to the fore.

KLF: I had a question along that line. Baudelaire adopted an instinctive approach when he translated Poe *à la Baudelaire*, whereas Marguerite Yourcenar went

about her translation of *The Waves* in a very systematic way, attempting to recreate Virginia Woolf's style by looking at how she had played with language to evoke the sounds of the sea and the wind (Gauvin 185-86). So, literary translation can be approached in different ways and is a great challenge, isn't it?

LH: It *is* a great challenge and it's a work of great intellect as well as artistry. We've often talked about how you can get a different sense of a work depending on who has translated it. So to a certain degree, every translation will vary even if you're talking about formally trained translators. A person's inclinations, biases, strengths, and weaknesses will affect the tenor of the translation. So, I think that just as you have to look at a novel as a work that's going to have its imperfections and idiosyncrasies, a translation will have its imperfections and idiosyncrasies too. A translation is a work of art too. So, a novelist would probably bring something different to the table than a classically trained translator. On the other hand, if you're a thoughtful, artistically mature person, then I would hope that you're working as closely as possible with the text and you're not creating any more than what the translation requires you to create. You *are* creating, of course, you're creating a way to say something in another language, but hopefully you're being as respectful as possible, not overreaching, and not inventing, unless you're pitching it as something other than a translation. If you're calling it something else, well, that's another matter. Ah, the Calgary writer who lives in Paris. . . Nancy Huston, she doesn't even use the typical word "translation" when she describes what she does with her works.

KLF: Perhaps we could discuss, hypothetically, how one could go about translating your colourful character Yoyo, the reporter, in *Some Great Thing*. Part of his considerable charm comes from the formality of his West African speech patterns, and there are frequent allusions to his accent, even if you don't try to suggest this in any concrete way in his English. Now Robert Paquin preserved that formality well in his translation. But what if the translator were familiar with West African idiom, and attempted to evoke Yoyo's accent in some way. Would you consider this a liberty the translator should *not* take? Or could this potentially enhance the translated text?

LH: As they say with regard to fiction: "When it works, it works." It's hard to comment in the abstract what-if. I suppose it could be done beautifully, or it could be too much. But if Robert Paquin had been a West African writer with a whole access to West African idiom, he might have brought that in the way he translated some of the idiomatic bits into French. We have to

remember, we want the book to be read, understood, and appreciated in a primarily Western context. It's hard to answer that question theoretically. I'd have to see it. But again, we come back to the issue: "Can different translators with different backgrounds and cultures bring different things to the page and offer different possibilities to the reader?" For sure! I guess that's, again, why it's an art as opposed to a science.

KLF: I read *Some Great Thing* a few years ago, but just recently read the French translation, *Un grand destin*, and I was delighted to hear the Québécois voice, for example: "ce gars-là . . . s'en vient" (11), "Mange de la marde" . . . "t'es rien qu'un ostie de nègre pareil" (58-59).To me, this is essential to keeping the novel authentic, given that it takes place in Winnipeg, in the context of Franco-Anglo linguistic tensions, and that some of the characters are *Franco-Manitobains*. Anything other than a Canadian variety of French would have been out of place. . . . Would you agree?

LH: Oh yes! It *was* important to me, and I did notice it, and I was very happy about it. That was the first time I had something translated formally, for major publication. Robert came to my home in Oakville and stayed with me for a few days, and he said: "I'd like to hang out with you and get to know you a little bit . . . see how you speak and just understand your voice a little more since I'm translating *Some Great Thing*." So, here's a man that I'd never met arriving at my door as I did at yours today, and we welcomed him; he was a wonderful guy and he wanted to make that personal connection because he felt it would help him in his work as a translator. And I believe it did. I was happy with the way he played with the language and happy with the Québécois idiom. It's a very Canadian book, a very political book about language politics in Canada, so why not have it translated in a colourful, bold way by a Québécois translator? Robert and Carole are very different people and brought their very different aptitudes to the page. I think Carole is more professorial and Robert is probably a little more *flyé*, as you'd say in Quebec, he's a little more playful and he brought that playfulness to the page.

KLF: And there was a comic undercurrent, a *ton ludique* in that novel.

LH: There was, and humour is tricky to translate. That was a rollicking novel and Robert had a good time translating it. He remains a friend. He was involved with touching up the translation when it was republished a year of two ago by *les Éditions de la Pleine Lune*.

KLF: Do you know what types of corrections were made?

LH: I think they were fairly modest. I was told by the publisher they were minor as opposed to major revisions. She was the one steering that process; she

felt some passages needed to be strengthened, and she had the title changed [from *De grandes choses*] to *Un grand destin*.

KLF: That's interesting. I often remind my students that there's no such thing as a perfect translation. But at some point you have to hand it in and walk away. I found it quite moving when Carole Noël quoted the French poet Paul Valéry in her address at University of Ottawa ("Traduire" 4): "On n'achève pas un poème, on l'abandonne."

LH: [laughs] That's beautiful!

KLF: It's really the translator's fate, and perhaps the writer's fate . . .

LH: Yes.

KLF: I've heard authors say that if they were to sit down and read one of their books, they'd immediately want to rewrite it.

LH: Every time I go to speak somewhere, if I'm reading aloud from a published novel, I always adapt it when I read it because I feel it doesn't work to read it aloud the way it appears on the page. There're some lines in it that are funky or redundant or impede the narrative drive and should be taken out for the reading. And so, I do adapt the page, modestly, when I'm reading from it. So, we all kind of play with our work, even post-publication. . . ."It's never finished, it's abandoned." That's beautiful!

KLF: It is, and as a translator or as a writer, you have to accept that, don't you?

LH: Kind of like a child. Is a child ever perfect? No child that I've brought into the world . . . [laughs]. But hopefully they're not abandoned either! But we bring them to a point and then we send them out into the world, although in their imperfections, and hopefully their imperfections will be part of what makes them beautiful and unique.

KLF: Well, Maryse Condé has been quoted as saying that when she finishes a work, that's it. She lets go. Apparently it's sometimes hard for her translator-husband to get her to answer questions, because she doesn't see the translated work as being hers anymore (qtd. in Kadish and Massardier-Kenney 755; see also Lappin-Fortin 536).

LH: I've always been so touched that someone would bring my work out in another language that I've never refused a request to answer some question from a translator just because I like to cooperate, and translators are very discreet people. They're generally people not used to being in the limelight. They're respectful and focused on the work, and so, I've enjoyed the process.

KLF: Were there any specific lexical items in the *Book of Negroes* that the translator had trouble with? I'm thinking of *wench*, for example, or *catching babies*. There were terms that I found very well chosen, for either historical or

stylistic reasons, but some of their colour is lost in translation: the *medicine man* Aminata describes on the slave ship becomes a banal "doctor" (*médecin*) and she helps "deliver babies" (*elle aide les femmes à accoucher*). I wonder, during your travels in West Africa, did you ever hear another term in French that could capture some of the charm of *I catch babies* . . . or perhaps an African term that could be borrowed in the translation, much as you have used *djeli* (the traditional storyteller) in the novel?

LH: Carole did discuss many terms with me. . . . That's a challenge. How would you translate *medicine man*? It suggests the introduction of folk medicine into medical interventions and not just a straight doctor . . . it's a doctor steeped in folklore and folkloric culture. In the case of *baby catcher*, I believe I put Carole in touch with a midwife I knew of in Quebec to see if she could find a French term, kind of an old-fashioned term that might work, but I don't think she found one. So I think that this is one of those instances where she played it pretty straight. I myself didn't know of anything to recommend to her. I was happy with coming up with it in English!

KLF: *Wench* is another word which frequently appears in the novel, and it's always derogatory, isn't it?

LH: Yes. And it also appears in the *Book of Negroes* itself; as women were registered, the term would be used again and again. Now, I don't think—I'm not about to excuse the British naval officers for what they did—but I don't think being derogatory was the guiding influence when they were writing it down, I just think this was a mode of unexamined speech. . . . It's horrific, and it's insulting, it's especially insulting historically, so I'm not trying to let them off the hook, but I don't believe when a British officer was writing *wench* into the *Book of Negroes* that he was personally trying to be insulting. I think he was just using the regular offensive language that he would use on a daily basis for women, especially Black women. We find it offensive, but I think it was just used in the way so much sexist language is used, without purpose.

KLF: When Lindo wrote his ad, he chose—you chose—to use the word *wench* to describe Aminata. This is an important scene. She reacts, she asks: "What is a wench?" and he says "a woman," and she says "Oh, so Mrs. Lindo's also a wench?" and he insists, "No, she's a *lady*."

LH: Exactly, because she brings it to his attention; she challenges him. I think what we're talking about is intent.

KLF: I ask my students to see how *wench* is translated, to track its occurrences in the novel . . .

LH: What *did* Carole use? I don't remember.

KLF: Well, when Appleby calls Aminata a "stupid no-good Guinea wench" (*Book of Negroes* 185), in the French, the derogatory tone is also clear: "toi, espèce de stupide bonne à rien de Guinée" (*Aminata* 225), and when an African *wench* is being sold off in the streets, the word *négresse* accomplishes the same effect. But the translation for Lindo's ad: "Obedient, sensible Guinea wench" (*Book of Negroes* 200) is translated by: "Demoiselle de Guinée obéissante et sensible" (*Aminata* 242).

LH: That's much more polite.

KLF: Yes! It didn't resonate well with me, and I wondered, "How did the translator arrive at that? Did she see Lindo's intent?" Also, what's interesting in that scene, in translation, is that the indignation Aminata expressed comes from the realization that *demoiselle* means she wasn't married, and Mrs. Lindo was. And of course she protests: "But I *am* married and I have a child! I'm not different from her!" So, it kind of works.[4]

LH: That's a good point. I hadn't thought about that. I wonder if Carole was thinking of the different ways that Appleby and Lindo relate to Aminata. Appleby is a straight ahead two-dimensional rapist, he doesn't bring much humanity to the story and he's not treated in a three-dimensional way. He's just straight up evil, whereas Lindo is a more complex character. On one hand, he does some atrocious things—he participates in the sale of Aminata's baby—on the other hand, he doesn't oppress her in the same way Appleby does. He continues to own her as a slave but he facilitates her learning . . . he treats her better. And so maybe Carole was trying to come up with two different words to depict this woman that would represent the two different mindsets of these slave owners: *bonne à rien* versus *demoiselle*. I'm not sure . . . that might have been something she was trying to get at. I don't remember having that conversation with her, but it's a very interesting point. Is *demoiselle* really the best way to translate it? It sounds like it was striking to you and that you thought there may have been a more appropriate word, and there may well have been. I'm sure that if you were to show Carole her translation, she might rethink a few words here and there. And why not? This happens to novelists all the time. I have seen bits of my published novels that I could fix up in retrospect. But I don't. I just move on.

KLF: Absolutely! But again: What are the translator's choices? How does she go about determining how such an important word should be translated? And . . . *sensible* . . .

LH: How did she translate *sensible*?

KLF: She translated it by *sensible,* which in French means "sensitive" rather than "possessing reason." As I tell my students, it's a *faux ami* (a false cognate), unless there's something the translator knows about that period that I don't.

LH: No, I think it's a mistake. *Sensible* (Fr.) is different [pause]. But also, most Anglophones wouldn't know that the word *sensible*, in English, meant something different in the context of African American slaves. *Sensible*, in twenty-first century English means your mind is ordered properly and you respond appropriately to the world around you. You're *sensible* as opposed to *illogical*. But back then, when a slave was described as "sensible" it meant that particular slave understands English, so it's a value, it's a proof of that slave's higher worth because at least they'll understand instruction and cooperate. So *sensible* is an economic asset. I'm not saying that the word meant that with regard to other people, but it meant that with regard to African American slaves. And survival was often determined by whether or not you were deemed to be "a sensible Negro."[5]

KLF: So it could have been translated: *Parle anglais*?

LH: *Comprend anglais?*

KLF: And when Appleby asks Aminata (*Book of Negroes* 149): "You sensible nigger? [. . .] You learn fast?" she answers "Yessir," but adds: "Just sensible, Master Apbee." She was being cautious.

LH: She doesn't want to oversell her assets.

KLF: However, Noël's use of the French cognate *sensible* ("Demoiselle de Guinée obéissante et sensible" (*Aminata* 242) and "Toi, négresse sensible? . . . Tu apprends vite?" (*Aminata* 184) appears problematic to me.

LH: Yes, that's a slip up.[6]

KLF: Here's another term: *homeland*. There's so much emotional connection implied in that word, and the derivative *homelanders*. It's hard to translate. Obviously one dictionary definition is *patrie*, but that doesn't work, because of the political connotation.

LH: Right. What did Carole use? I don't remember . . .

KLF: Sometimes she would paraphrase. For example, when Aminata met Georgia for the first time, she recognized she was not African-born. She was not a *homelander*; in French: "elle ne venait pas de mon pays" (*Aminata* 158).

LH: But *homeland* and *pays*, they're not quite the same, are they? *Pays* seems more specific.

KLF: For Aminata, weren't the *homelanders* all of these people marched halfway across Africa with her to be forced onto a slave ship? They weren't just from her village. There's a connection to something greater . . .

LH: Yes, it's a question of the land they come from. My *home*, as opposed to a political and geographical definition. In the English, there's a major distinction between *homeland* and *Africa*. Until Aminata arrives in America, the word *Africa*, or *Africans* has no meaning for her. She has to have a word that represents her notion of where she's from that precedes the concept of Africa in her own intellectual framework. It's got to be a word that suggests something more fundamental, something less political. So I chose *homeland* to get at that pre-political sense of where she comes from. When I say political, I mean the fact that she has been brought to this new world as a slave gives birth to her sense of political geography. It's got to be a term she's employing before she learns that other people are calling this place she comes from Africa. She's indignant the first time she hears the word *Africa*. Africa? What's that? *Africa* has no meaning for her. So *homeland* gets at it for her more richly, it's the land that she comes from and that she feels her people have come from too. . . *pays* is a more politicized, concrete notion of geographical borders.

KLF: Yes. What is also interesting to me is that throughout the crossing on the slave ship, Aminata's *homelanders* become, in French, *les prisonniers*—this is what they are in their captors' eyes, this is what they've become; all they are in the white man's, the slave trader's view. That's quite a shift in meaning, in perspective, don't you think?

LH: Yes, that's very interesting. That's a radically different way of imagining these people. . . in *prisonniers* there's suppressed liberty, but *homelanders* share . . . that's a very interesting issue. It must have been very challenging to figure out how to manage that.

KLF: There is a technique in translation which allows for reversing a perspective [modulation]—but that would work best if the narrator on the slave ship were not Aminata, that is, someone else describing objectively, coldly, in French: "The prisoners did this, the prisoners did that, the prisoners got tossed overboard." But this is Aminata speaking of her own people. . . *prisonniers* sounds detached.

LH: Yes, that's an interesting point. . . . That's a tricky one!

KLF: So those are just some of the lexical items I talk about with my students.

LH: It gives you lots to work with and allows for lots of discussion in the classroom, and lots to write about: the choices that translators make and don't make. And you talked earlier of what you lose and what you gain, and here you're losing a word that evokes a certain sense of cultural and land based belonging as opposed to a neat concise word to describe one's state of liberty or lack thereof. So it's different . . .

KLF: What about the title? You have spoken a great deal in previous interviews about the controversy surrounding the title of your novel *The Book of Negroes*, but I am curious to know how easily the French title was chosen, and if other options were discussed.

LH: It was difficult. I was the one who proposed the title, *Aminata*. I felt there was no valid, effective way to translate [the title] *The Book of Negroes* into French in a relatively literal way. Certainly I didn't hear and couldn't imagine any literal translation that worked for my ears and my sensibility. That option seemed completely inacceptable to me. There're so many reasons for that. There's the word *book* which has religious connotations—the book of Exodus, for example—and that isn't as strong with *livre*. *Registre* is far too dry, kind of bureaucratic; it's not nearly as poetic as *book*. *Negroes* is a tricky word to translate into French and to get just right. *Noir*, *nègre*. . . it's very hard to find a word that gets at *negro*, which was meant to be relatively polite by those who were using it at that time, even if it's not seen that way now, and so, it's tricky to translate that word convincingly. Also, the *Book of Negroes* is the name of a specific historical ledger, so that's going to be lost in translation, so there are all sorts of things that just wouldn't work if the title were translated literally. I felt it was better to go with a long-established French tradition of using a person's name as a title. So I proposed *Aminata,* and I had to argue a fair bit to get the publisher to accept it. It was the only part of the translation process where I really weighed in heavily.

KLF: Did the publishers want the French title to be as close as possible to your original title so readers would recognize it, and the book would sell better?

LH: That was part of it [pause] but that wasn't my concern.

KLF: I actually quite liked the solution: *Aminata*. I was curious as to how it came about. The *Book of Negroes* is translated by *le Registre des Noirs*—but I wondered at what point the name of that British ledger existed officially in French, as that was long before official bilingualism in Canada.

LH: It could have been that there was indeed a formal translation of the document, years later, and that's why Carole used it in the novel to refer to the ledger: *le Registre des Noirs*. It would have been a killer of a title for a book! It sounds so boring!

KLF: [laughs] And you're absolutely right about the problem of translating the word *negro* itself. In English, there's a whole range of nuances expressed with the terms *African American*, *Black*, *Negro*, *coloured*, and *nigger*. . . which must somehow be translated by two terms in French: *Noir* and . . .

LH: . . . *nègre*, yes, and *Negro* was considered polite. So there are complicated

racial politics around that word and it would have been hard to translate satisfactorily, and that is why I thought it would be a losing cause to go down that road.

KLF: In Spanish, is the title also *Aminata*?

LH: No, no, it's very interesting in Spanish. First of all, Spanish has a more nuanced approach in this case. The title will be *El Libro mayor de los Negros*—do you speak Spanish?

KLF: Well, *negro* is of course the Spanish word for *black*, *libro* is *book*, *mayor*. . .

LH: In this context it introduces the notion of formality as in a register, an official document. But first of all, *libro mayor* is much more interesting than *livre*, and *negro* more interesting than *noir*. Also, Pura was able to convince me that it would really be understood by a Mexican readership.

KLF: I have one last question: I imagine there is some level of discomfort when a writer hands over his or her creation so that it can be transformed, either as a translated work, or a film adaptation. . . . Do you feel this?

LH: No, Kerry, I don't feel any discomfort whatsoever at the prospect of being translated. If I were told that a work of mine had been badly translated, I would be unhappy to think that it was circulating. But, apart from that, no, there's no discomfort. On the contrary, it's an honour. It's a sign that the world is taking the work seriously, and it's an opportunity to engage with readers in other countries—I've heard from readers I would never ever have reached had the book not been translated and so it expands the reach of my work. It expands it imperfectly, but everything's imperfect. The novel itself is imperfect. So, necessarily every translation will be too. But as long as the imperfections are within an acceptable range, and as long as the work, meaning the translation, is serious and solid and basically good, no, I don't feel any discomfort. Why would I? What I feel is delight and honour that the work is entering other people's hands, and also profoundly entering the mind and hands of another artist who is the translator. So, no discomfort. . . . I wouldn't put a translation and a television adaptation in the same category, except that they are both interpretations. But, my opinion is that a translation, if it's serious and appropriately conservative, is a far less bold, adventurous, and manipulative way to work with the original as is, say, a television miniseries, which has to really project a story in an entirely different way upon an audience. It's a totally different art form, so I feel there's really no comparison in terms of the magnitude of the departure from the original. I didn't feel uncomfortable with the creation of the television miniseries based on *The Book of Negroes*, partly because I had confidence in

the director and producer, partly because I co-wrote it, and partly because the book has been out long enough that I don't feel so wedded to it. I don't worry: "Will this or that be respected?" If the adaptation to the screen were offensive or disrespectful to the original, then I would be troubled. But as long as the adaptation honours the original work, there's no point being anxious about it. It's mostly out of my control anyway and the book is always there! So, I don't tend to worry. I worry about lots of things. I'm not trying to portray myself as being some Zen master who's calm about everything related to my work. . . . For one thing, it's almost entirely out of my control, so why fuss about it? For another thing, nobody forced me to do it. I chose to accept, to engage contractually. And third, look at the worst possible scenario: it's a bad miniseries. But even if people generally disliked the miniseries, the book is still there. And so, there's no reason to be anxious about it. . . . I was a journalist before I became a novelist. Every day my stuff was ripped apart and then reconstituted. Sometimes in the most flagrant and disrespectful way. That's the process of being a reporter and having your stuff yanked around at two in the morning by an editor—especially in your early years on the job. You have to drop the notion that your words are sacrosanct and that nobody must touch them. If you go into a newsroom with that mindset, you'll go crazy. So, newspaper work taught me to be calm in the face of adaptations and translations. So there's lots that I worry about, but I don't worry about things like that.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Text of Carole Noël's address at Banff and at the University of Ottawa, cited below, graciously provided by Marie-Madeleine Raoult, Editor, les Éditions de la Pleine Lune, Montreal, Quebec.

NOTES

1 This anonymous quotation appears as a heading on Hill's website: http://lawrencehill.com.
2 The novel has been translated into Dutch, French, German, Hebrew and Norwegian, and is soon to be published in Spanish. A six-part television series entitled *The Book of Negroes*, which Hill co-wrote with director Clement Virgo, aired on CBC in January 2015 and on BET (Black Entertainment Television) in February 2015.
3 Carole Noël defines *petit-nègre* as the simplified French spoken by African slaves in the French colonies. She found it too condescending, and chose instead to use the technique of *compensation* to translate the passages of dialogue into non-standard French ("Traduire" 2-3).
4 For that reason, I prefer this solution to, for example, *négresse*, which wouldn't have worked at all here. However it's clear to me something was lost in using *demoiselle*.

Indeed, in email correspondance, Carole Noël indicated the translation of *wench* in this passage gave her considerable trouble and ultimately she had to accept what she too considers to be "une perte."

5 In the novel, Hill (through Aminata) explains this distinction to readers in the following passage (*Book of Negroes* 130): "On this plantation, I learned that there were two classes of captives. There were "sensible Negroes," like me, who could speak the toubabu's language and understand orders. And there were the other ones. The insensible ones. The ones who couldn't speak at all to the white man, and who would never be given an easier job, or taught an interesting skill, or be given extra food or privileges."

6 Through email correspondence with Carole Noël, I learned that she had chosen to resort to a literal translation here—in spite of *sensible* being a false cognate—rather than using, for example, the word *sensé* (which translates as "possessing common sense"). When first used, it appears in quotations (*Aminata* 162-63). Thereafter, the reader is to understand that the word does not have the modern meaning of the (French) word *sensible*. Nevertheless, I still question whether this was indeed the best option.

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Memory and Monuments

Jordan Abel
The Place of Scraps. Talonbooks $19.95

Mariner Janes
The Monument Cycles. Talonbooks $16.95

Reviewed by Cameron N. Paul

Questions of memory and memorialization lie at the heart of recent poetry collections by two Vancouver-based authors—Mariner Janes' *The Monument Cycles* and Jordan Abel's *The Place of Scraps*. As the city's real estate development continues to expand and its Downtown Eastside faces increasing gentrification, the questions of memory and memory-making posed by these collections resonate within the context of a city engaged in the fraught task of simultaneously remaking and remembering itself. By leading readers from the momentous to monumental and back again, both poetry collections interrogate the complex, constitutive bonds between memorials and memory-making that help shape our everyday lives and spaces.

Defiantly stating in its opening pages that, "no, we shout these moments across the now," Mariner Janes' *The Monument Cycles* examines the ways ongoing forms of loss are variously memorialized, materialized, and situated as monuments. Influenced by his own personal memories and shared experiences of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, Janes' collection deftly interweaves the many forms of memorialization both borne of, and contributive to, this much-misunderstood community's lost, living, and longed-for voices. These poems collectively straddle the disparate geographical and historical ties underlying monuments and spaces, with entwined topics that range from the bombing of Hiroshima, to the conflicting urban experiences of Main and Hastings, to Stanley Park's commemorative memorialization of E. Pauline Johnson. It is, however, always the monument around which this collection's daunting breadth continually coheres, not into a cacophonous or sanctimonious frenzy, but rather in the pulsing echoes of a poetry aware of time and place, intent on making memory as well as memorializing, and passionately committed to "shout[ing] these moments across the now."

Composed through the interplay of found archival materials and personal narrative reflections, Jordan Abel's *The Place of Scraps* explores the entwined role memory-making plays in shaping one's engagement with place, identity, and remembrance. Abel's inclusion of found, composed, and photographed materials ingeniously calls on readers to consider the process of constructing, honouring, and remembering place and identity through artistic practice. Like its poetic uptakes of anthropological narratives outlining the transportation of totem poles along arterial waterways, Abel's collection is itself a similarly mobile, aqueous journey of artistic creation. Largely free of formal structure, these sinuous poems wind through, wash up against, and suffuse the gaps of the very archival materials it so-often reinvents here through acts of erasure. In a collection that free-flows between found anthropological accounts and its own interjected personal reflections, readers experience here the simultaneously

erosive and imaginative workings of an erasure poetry that continually sees archival authority receding and reworked under torrents of reinvention. As if spilling over onto their surrounding pages, the collection's many anthropological photographs become visually flooded with the sticky residue of textual word art as viscous memories variously submerge, ebb, eddy, and cascade across each image. Collectively, these poems present acts of erasure that question the very limits of erasure, textual accounts that question the very limits of text, and photographs that playfully exceed their documentary frames.

Au pays de la camelote

Marie-Christine Arbour
Utop. Triptyque 15,99 $

Marie-Christine Arbour
Chinetoque. Triptyque 20,99 $

Compte rendu par Nathalie Warren

À la lecture de ces romans la redite saute aux yeux : les protagonistes sont des écrivaillons aimant Baudelaire, ils ont été abusés dans leur enfance et cherchent un amant pouvant venir effacer cette souillure et tandis que l'une tentera, une fois, l'expérience de l'amour saphique, l'autre assume pleinement sa bisexualité. Cependant, bien qu'Alice — *Chinetoque* — et Leucid — *Utop* — aient de nombreux traits communs, ils réagissent différemment face au désenchantement du monde moderne.

L'auteure fait référence, deux fois plutôt qu'une, à *Alice au pays des merveilles* de Lewis Carroll ainsi qu'au symbolisme de la traversée des miroirs. Ainsi, par-delà les intérêts et les expériences de chacun, d'autres similitudes frappent le lecteur, à commencer par la thématique principale qui est la quête d'un « ailleurs ». Pour Alice, cet ailleurs ne peut résider qu'en un autre, c'est-à-dire qu'elle cherche un homme aux sentiments éthérés, qui saura manifester autre chose que la brutalité des corps et sera pour elle un rédempteur capable de la tenir à l'écart de la vulgarité. Tandis que Leucid, lui, part en Équateur comme un poseur qui souhaite pouvoir dire à qui veut l'entendre qu'il est allé dans la jungle. Preuve, donc, qu'il a vécu quelque chose d'authentique, alors qu'au fond il n'y croit pas et que l'idée de ces vacances relève davantage de son penchant pour l'excentricité.

En effet, au contraire d'Alice, Leucid (anagramme de lucide) est non seulement à l'aise avec la superficialité, mais il la revendique tout en affirmant, à la fin, que son périple lui a fait l'effet d'une « bénédiction païenne ».

Arbour exploite le thème des diktats de la beauté et de la surexposition des corps : d'une part, son héroïne abhorre la jeunesse, coupe ses cheveux et cherche à détruire la féminité en elle tandis que, d'autre part, son personnage masculin, un quarantenaire, craint de vieillir, aime le clinquant et continue de porter sa Rolex dans la jungle amazonienne. Ils sont, l'un comme l'autre, des caricatures et Alice, malgré le fait qu'elle aspire à quelque chose de vrai, n'arrive pas à être par et pour elle-même, c'est-à-dire qu'elle ne sait vivre que dans les yeux d'un autre.

La lecture est lassante et les références culturelles qui parsèment chaque roman pas toujours convaincantes. Les histoires empruntent ici et là à un tape-à-l'œil digne de la presse à scandale. À titre d'exemple : Alice a l'idée de se rendre à un bal costumé déguisée en juive tondue au bras de son amoureux habillé en SS. Les personnages sont en proie à un désir confus de sacré qui l'amène, elle, à s'inventer des sentiments pour des hommes spirituels, lui, à partager le temps d'un voyage le mode de vie d'un peuple animiste. Nous suivons ainsi le quotidien d'êtres plats, côtoyant tous deux ce qu'Arbour nomme elle-même des *mystiques de pacotille*.

L'écriture ne vient pas sauver les meubles, à moins que cette série de phrases courtes

et souvent incomplètes entre lesquelles se glissent des aphorismes philosophico-poétiques témoignent d'une intention stylistique qui nous aurait échappée.

Anticolonial Pedagogies

Chris Benjamin
Indian School Road: Legacies of the Shubenacadie Residential School. Nimbus $24.95

George Kenny; Patricia M. Ningewance, trans.
Indians Don't Cry. U of Manitoba P $24.95

Keith D. Smith
Strange Visitors: Documents in Indigenous-Settler Relations in Canada from 1876. U of Toronto P $49.95

Reviewed by Christina Turner

In recent years, scholars of pedagogy have recognized the extent to which Canadian school curricula perpetuate colonial attitudes, and have sought to address this with texts that dismantle Canada's teleological historical mythos. Although this work is by no means complete yet, three new texts provide differential strategies about how to bring both Indigenous knowledge and Canada's colonial history into the classroom.

Indians Don't Cry is a collection of short stories and poems by Anishinaabe author George Kenny. The 2014 edition is republished under the University of Manitoba's "First Voices, First Texts" imprint and includes a side-by-side translation of the original English version into Anishinaabemowin by Patricia M. Ningewance, and an afterword by the late scholar Renate Eigenbrod. The short pieces within cover a diverse range of themes. In "Lost Friendship," in which a Red Lake missionary's friend is murdered, sensory details proliferate as the story builds to a climax so that the "sun filtering through the pale yellow curtains," and the "brewed air of fresh coffee" uncannily foreshadow the horrific news Marianne is about to receive. "On the Shooting of a Beaver" collapses the physical violence of hunting in to the epistemological violence of photography, and "How He Served" presents an intimately poetic portrait of the daily and lifelong rhythms of domesticity.

In her translator's note Ningewance notes the difficult task of translating English into Anishinaabemowin because of the distinct values inherent to each language. However, Ningewance also stresses that Kenny's work already embodies Anishinaabe ethics, as in "Track Star," when Leslie, the protagonist, explicitly characterizes his act of running as something he does for his family and community at home. The fact that the Anishinaabemowin translation appears alongside the English original means that readers can track how words are translated and sentences constructed in each language, so Kenny's collection can be employed in the classroom both as a tool for Anishinaabemowin language learners as well as for students of literature.

Several pieces in *Indians Don't Cry*, including the titular story, stress the intergenerational psychological impacts of residential schools on Indigenous communities. Chris Benjamin similarly emphasizes these impacts in *Indian School Road*, a history of Shubenacadie Indian Residential School, the only residential school in the Maritimes (open from 1930-1967). In contrast to earlier academic works which sought to present comprehensive histories of the entire Indian Residential School (IRS) system, in zeroing in on a single school Benjamin's text is able to draw salient conclusions about the way assimilation policy played out in Canada's easternmost provinces. Early missionaries on the Atlantic seaboard debated issues that their nineteenth-century successors in Indian Affairs would, ironically, dismiss, such as whether to teach children in English or Mi'kmaw or whether it was ethical to separate children from their families. Written on

the heels of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), *Indian School Road* has the advantage of historical perspective that earlier accounts lack. The book even addresses the 2013 study on nutritional experiments that went on in the schools, as Shubenacadie was one of the study's sites.

Benjamin's prose is consistently accessible, making this a useful text for a high school or undergraduate classroom. Stylistically, his writing occasionally exhibits fragmentary colloquialisms that fall flat against the otherwise measured narrative pacing. In his introduction, Benjamin outlines his methodology and explains that he did not interview survivors first-hand because, following Paulette Regan, he did not want to force survivors to relive trauma. As readers, we must respect this decision. Benjamin also outlines the restrictions on archival material about Shubenacadie that hampered his research. These two limitations combined mean that white voices are (unavoidably or unintentionally) privileged throughout much of the narrative—there seems to be a wealth of material from the school's staff and Indian Affairs employees, and while the voices of the Mi'kmaq who attended the school are still present, they are circumscribed in comparison and generally come from a small number of sources (Isabelle Knockwood's and Rita Joe's memoirs are frequently cited). The final chapters, which contain testimony from the 2011 TRC event in Halifax, are exceptions. *Indian School Road* nevertheless manages to strike a difficult balance between articulating the culture of corruption and incompetence that characterized the IRS system in general and Shubenacadie in particular, while stressing the culpability of those who neglected and abused its wards for decades.

Keith D. Smith's *Strange Visitors* is an ambitious intervention in the pedagogy of Canadian post-Confederation history. This textbook outlines significant moments in Indigenous-settler relations from the inception of the Indian Act. Smith introduces the text with instructions for students on how to read "against the grain." Each chapter covers a historical area, from treaties to residential schools, and begins with a short introduction and questions for discussion before proceeding on to documents that highlight the central debates and issues of the topic in question. Rather than present an overarching narrative of Canadian history, Smith's selections instead show the disparities between settler and Indigenous perspectives and reveal the inconsistencies that have plagued colonial policy-making since the nineteenth century. The gathering of so many key documents in one text carries rich pedagogical potential. For instance, students can now read Duncan Campbell Scott's now oft-quoted claim about getting rid of the "Indian problem" in the context of the 1920 Special Committee meeting in which it was actually spoken.

Strange Visitors is an expansive text and Smith's selections are, for the most part, judiciously chosen. However, some key topic areas are unmentioned or underexplored. There is no mention of cases of missing and murdered Indigenous women. As well, Smith elects to focus on the 1995 conflict at Ipperwash rather than the Oka crisis. And although there is a chapter about landmark court cases, Delgamuukw v. British Columbia, the 1997 case that permitted the inclusion of oral testimony in legal proceedings, is absent from it. While these texts all share similar themes, pedagogically they do different things. The new edition of Kenny's work showcases his poetic craft while presenting Anishinaabemowin and English on an equal plane. Benjamin offers a previously unexplored regional history while Smith's work provides students of all backgrounds tools with which to critically explore the middle and recent Canadian historical past.

My G-G-G-G-Generation

andrea bennett
Canoodlers. Nightwood $18.95

Stevie Howell
[Sharps]. Goose Lane $19.95

Reviewed by Tina Northrup

andrea bennett's *Canoodlers* begins with lighthearted cheek, as the poem "Epigraph" sets the tone:

> You have a poetic sensibility,
> my father says. Maybe,
> when you clean your room,
> you will find it.

Subsequent poems consider the staged lives of the "hot messes" and "handsome wrecks" who live famously, while others reflect on more intimate scenes of families made tense by frays and tears in the ties that bind. While family relations are severed via Facebook's "unfriend" function, bonds are forged elsewhere as bennett's poems memorialize friends, lovers, and the folks who drift in and out of our lives.

Throughout *Canoodlers*, bennett trades in dreamlike, surreal connections. The uncanny is everywhere present, leavened by snatches of conversation and the vernaculars of the everyday. In "Because the Juices Run Pink," a litany of reasons replaces an unspoken question:

> Because you are at home, deciding if you can go home for the holidays. Because your mother forgets that you called. Because you are working, but not quite enough. Because you are working too much. Because you are an appetite. Because you take the organs and the neck out of the bird before it goes in the oven. Because no one has called you. Because you forgot to call, or your call has been forgotten. Because decisions need to be made. Because of saturation points. Because of satiation. Because you have to open yourself up, expose your organs to a hand. Because eventually the juices run clear.

In "Talons," desire is caught by an image striking and resonant enough to bring Anne Carson's translations of Sappho to mind:

> She said she'd play the part of the owl
> now, if I wanted.
> And though her eyes opened
> like a blade unsheathing, she kept
> her nails so short they flashed
> a slip of pink skin.

bennett's poems are captivating and clever, with varied tastes for the comedic, the macabre, and the stuff of daily living. Theodor Adorno walks into a kitchen to pronounce on the weakened culture of homemade yogurt; squirrels are invited, Hansel and Gretel-like, into the warmth of a hot oven; a lesbian fraternity considers the dynamics of "long hairs and short hairs" as they hit the road—"It's conceded: long hairs can date short hairs, yes. But who's going to carry the stuff?"

Canoodlers is a welcoming collection—one that invites readers into homes made and left behind throughout years of early adulthood. By contrast, Stevie Howell's *[Sharps]* opens with "The Guard"—a poem that appears before the collection's title page, and that serves simultaneously as a gesture of admittance and an administered pause:

> King Tut, 5'6", lies supine on mould-
> flecked cotton,
> ceiling-transfixed. Body broken
> as if struck by lightning. Dead at nineteen,
> before purpose, before the remark.
> My avatar.

Throughout the collection, Howell's poems are edged with violence and whetted with measured and attentive lines. The speaker of one reflects on her First Communion, then on experiences with Hare Krishnas and Bahá'ís before concluding:

> My school and church were poverty and
> violence. A quadriplegic
> classmate lived in a Winnebago. Her

mother's ex
cowered in a laundry hamper with a gun
and shot her dead
one Sunday after mass. That's all
I know.

Howell's poems speak of people who "fumble towards intention," who compare social rivals to the eerie children in *The Shining*, who see Rip Torn's likeness in portraits of the Queen, and who debate the longevity of "the three-winged, / fluorescent snow angel of radiation"—a symbol that may mean zilch to whomever or whatever is alive to come across it in 100,000 years. Some poems are sharp and playful, eschewing the Roman alphabet to copy the wax rubbings of children in museums of natural history—"Dinosaurs have a Jungian resonance / with the <5 set," after all. Others are worrisome and ominous. Some probe "the one thing you can do / with a sawed-off rifle, a low IQ, and curiosity / about human biology"; others chronicle inventories of online vitriol and hate. Readers may find that Howell's work calls Karen Solie's to mind, or that of Ken Babstock (who provided a back-cover blurb). It is exquisitely visceral, and arrestingly intelligent.

Imagining Histories

David Bezmozgis
The Betrayers. HarperCollins Canada $29.99

Kathryn Kuitenbrouwer
All the Broken Things. Random House $24.00

Reviewed by Joel Martineau

David Bezmozgis models the protagonist of *The Betrayers* on renowned refusenik and Israeli political figure Natan Sharansky, who was born in Russia after World War II and who attempted to emigrate during the Brezhnev era, only to be arrested in 1977 and charged with passing state secrets to the American Defense Intelligence Agency. Sharansky was sentenced to thirteen years of forced labour; his wife, Avital, worked tirelessly to develop an international campaign that secured his release in 1986. Sharansky immigrated to Israel, became a spokesman for Russian Jews' absorption into Israeli society, and was elected to the Knesset in 1996. He held various ministerial posts during the ensuing years but resigned from cabinet in 2006 to protest plans to withdraw Jewish settlements from the Gaza Strip and West Bank.

Bezmozgis assumes this life history for his central character, Baruch Kotler, and imagines a thirty-six hour whirlwind that begins with clandestine agents blackmailing Kotler in an attempt to hush his opposition to the withdrawal. Kotler refuses to betray his political convictions and instead betrays his wife and family: he impulsively jets away to Yalta, accompanied by his young mistress. Kotler's family had vacationed there in his youth and his choices of destination and companion are foolishly nostalgic.

In Yalta, a remarkable coincidence lands him in the home of Chaim Tankilevich, the very man who had betrayed him to the KGB some forty years earlier. Bezmozgis establishes this crucible for exploring the novel's themes so economically that I willingly suspended disbelief, fascinated by prospects. The remaining two-thirds of the compact novel work through Kotler's complex reconciliation with Tankilevich. Kotler realizes that his betrayer has led a shamed, hollow life, unable to reveal his true identity, his Zionist dreams extinguished by existence within the witness protection program, while the vitality of the Crimea crumbles around him. Kotler also realizes why Tankilevich denounced him to the KGB interrogators. The novel's trajectory suggests Kotler will recognize his own betrayals and return to his wife and daughter and son with the humility necessary to seek forgiveness.

Whereas Bezmozgis has the confidence to model his protagonist on a real life

character and assume that readers will recognize and accept the departure into fiction, Kathryn Kuitenbrouwer prefaces *All the Broken Things* with an "Author's Note" that asserts "The strangest of the truths in this novel are the facts of a bear wrestling circuit in Ontario, the production of Agent Orange in the small town of Elmira, Ontario, and freak shows at the Canadian National Exhibition (CNE)." Her project braids these conveniently forgotten "truths" into a narrative that will compel readers to revise their Ontario histories into more inclusive, responsible accounts.

In contrast to Bezmozgis' taut, poetical sentences Kuitenbrouwer writes in an expository style that usually tells rather than shows. She sets her story in 1983 and 1984, when protagonist Bo turns fourteen. A few years earlier his family escaped Vietnam on board a rickety boat; the father perished at sea, and mother Rose (Thao), Bo, and younger sister Orange Blossom now occupy a church-sponsored home in Toronto's Junction district. Rose works miserable shifts at menial jobs and drowns her sorrows, ashamed of her severely deformed daughter. Bo fights the school bullies, cares for Orange, tries to cheer Rose, and cringes when his overly earnest teacher directs attention his way. A carney spots Bo battling the bullies and recruits him to wrestle somewhat domesticated bears. Bo excels, gains perspective, and improves family prospects; then the real snake enters the garden. The carnival proprietor spots Orange, sees a perfect attraction for the seediest section of his show, and conveniently spirits away Rose and Orange. The narrative requires Bo to work through the combination of exploitation and abandonment, and—to Kuitenbrouwer's credit—as the story becomes increasingly fable-like it gains credence. A statement Kuitenbrouwer made during an interview illuminates the importance of the novel:

> The most surprising thing to discover about the manufacture and spraying of Agent Orange over Vietnam . . . was that the companies that produced it knew the dioxin by-product was both carcinogenic and mutagenic. Vietnam is in its third generation of AO mutations. The companies and countries involved in this heinous war crime have a responsibility to clean the soil of Vietnam but they resist. . . . They knew they were not only defoliating Vietnam but that they were violently attacking civilians. This behaviour is genocidal.

Feathering the Caw

Yvonne Blomer
As If a Raven. Palimpsest $18.95

Natalie Simpson
Thrum. Talonbooks $16.95

Christine Smart
The White Crow. Hedgerow $18.00

Reviewed by Crystal Hurdle

As If a Raven is the resplendent love child of Ted Hughes' *Crow* and Jay Macpherson's *The Boatman*. Blomer's Crow and his colleagues are less cartoony, her God, less ditzy; while Hughes focuses on Genesis, she harks to Job, Exodus, Numbers, Psalms, the Song of Solomon, and the New Testament. Like Macpherson, she goes beyond biblical myth ("amens of song") and evokes creations and creator: "Poem, Bird, Bible: Wild. There is my thesis of sorts." This, her third collection of poetry, is both arcane and endearing: a call to, of, and for the wild.

The work is technically superb, with disquieting internal rhyme and a frequent bird-like *gliiiiide*. In "The Turtle Dove," a seven-part sonnet-like sequence, the end of one song begins the next, as bride and groom birds call and respond. The rich ekphrastic poem "Have you been hunting?" refers to a Breughel painting of Christ with Martha and Mary, lovingly capturing them and the birds at his feet. "At the Pizzeria la

Fornera" reads like a painting with humans transformed into birds: "the Dutch couple, burnt red, becomes scraggly / Vultures." The prettiness of the Audubon bird portraits is questioned, cleverly, through the passive voice: "What was nest has been skimmed."

Precise sounds—"*quip-ip,*" "*tirrr*," "*Krok Khoa Kark*," "*zizizizizziiie-diuh*"—allow the book to soar beyond the page into multi-sensory beauty, with a range of colour, specificity of bird name, genus, lore, texture, and portmanteau words: "ravenravingravenous" and "*humthrob*." It is ornithologically/ornitheologically captivating in turns.

The comment of the eponymous the Lord God Bird, "there is not a word for a thing existing / because a word is there to name it," could prove an antithesis, of sorts, for Natalie Simpson's *Thrum* (her second poetry collection), which chooses not to name, not to classify. "Dear Poet, [sic]" begins, "You can colonize your reader's hope" and ends, "This reader you've trailed craves capture, lavishing, balm." Reader, writer, and language are elusive. Two companion poems play with the admittedly funny word "tot" in found reportage, such as, "teaching tactics to tots hot tip: keep it simple tots need grown-ups not / grow ops." "Home" variously defined, for example, "is how hard you eat your heart out." Birds (pelicans, an owl, pigeons, a seabird, black birds) sneak in. She intriguingly reconfigures parts of speech, inventing the gerund "doving" and the adverb "featherly," amongst others. Simpson's birds exist for language play: "Lapwing sounds fluttery. An evil birdish. Nobody inhabits white."

Christine Smart's second poetry collection, *The White Crow*, suggests otherwise with both poem and poet in "The Sounds of the World" recognizing the impossibility of creating "an intimate / close to the heart of the universe / poem." Her book is not as species-specific as Blomer's, but it nets a wide cast of animal characters, explores, as Simpson does, what home means—literally (physically building a house), metaphorically, then and now, or rather, "Here" and "There" (the clever presentation of sections in the table of contents reads like a poem), and "Here and Now." Making good use of first person, "Donated to Science" features the dissection of cadavers (Smart is a nurse) and is beautiful in spite of (because of?) its grim subject matter:

> I looked behind his eyes, named
> the optic nerve, ventricles, and pineal gland
>
> kept searching
> for something I couldn't find or label.

She exposes what happens at the back of the hospital. "New Beds" veers into magical realism with discarded old beds still holding "a patient or two." Humanity bleeds from these poems, many of which are about the loss of family members. Especially affecting are those about the aftermath of her mother's death. "Released" (who or what has been?) has the speaker dialling her mother to tell about the garden's glories, simultaneously remembering she's dead. Possessions reverberate in "Auction Sale," "Directives," and "Cigar Box." Twelve place settings, a porcelain lady, and a needle already threaded with black evoke and bear their tangible pasts into the affected, honoured present. "Buttoned Up" moves backwards: "Imagine all the quilts reformatted / into our dresses," but the whimsy ends on an unsettling note: "Buttoned up / like our lips."

Smart's final poem, "The Box," invites the reader to draw a box and to contemplate it: "You don't own it just because you drew / it, coloured it or placed something inside; not even the air is / yours. It belongs to everyone." Simple profundity is highlighted, as in the penultimate clause of Blomer's collection:

> In all this metaphor perhaps
> their wildness goes
> forgotten
> Hardly likely. The cacophony of (her) ravens
> feathers the earth.

Obsession Examined

Dennis Bock
Going Home Again. HarperCollins Canada $27.99

Claire Messud
The Woman Upstairs. Knopf Canada $29.95

Reviewed by Jan Lermitte

Dennis Bock's latest novel *Going Home Again* explores themes of loss, middle age, and obsession in the context of modern family life. Claire Messud's *The Woman Upstairs* similarly engages with these themes, but with a passionate intensity that is both compelling and challenging. Although both stories are marked by betrayal and loss through surprise endings, readers are left with a sense of hope in the way human beings can survive and thrive in seemingly hopeless circumstances.

Bock's novel, a finalist for the 2013 Scotiabank Giller Prize, departs from historical fiction (like *Olympia* and *The Ash Garden*), through a contemporary story of family breakdown and the impact of past secrets on present reality. Charlie Bellrose is an entrepreneurial language teacher grappling with "bachelorhood" after his marital separation. His relationship with his daughter suffers when he moves to Toronto to distance himself from his life in Madrid. Charlie's new life in Canada is haunted by the past as he returns to the city of his childhood and the home of his brother, Nate, a troubled soul navigating a vicious divorce. When he unexpectedly encounters Holly, his first love, Charlie becomes somewhat obsessed with her, despite the fact that she is married and has children. The novel then develops through a series of flashbacks in which Bock recounts Charlie's youth, his friendships, and his move to Spain where he begins his career and starts a family with Isabel, his Spanish lover. Passion, unacknowledged secrets, and betrayal lurk in the edges of the story. As Charlie re-examines his past in light of his present, two tragic events become the locus of the story. Throughout, Charlie is both insider and outsider: he draws closer to his brother and nephews, he imagines a new (yet impossible) future with Holly, and he remains separated from his family in Madrid. Only as Charlie comes to terms with reality is he able to imagine living with hope and possible reconciliation with Isabel and their daughter, Ava. Bock writes sparingly, and with an ease that emotionally draws in the reader, who can relate as a sibling, parent, spouse, or "ex" to aspects of Charlie's story. Charlie's hope becomes our hope, and we imagine finding fulfillment in the midst of life's complexity and suffering.

The Woman Upstairs shares elements with *Going Home Again*: an outsider who longs to be an insider, an examination of obsession, a dissection of the idea of "family," an extended flashback, a heartbreaking surprise. However, Messud's novel centres on a female character, Nora Elridge, the proverbial "woman upstairs" who is quiet, responsible, and basically "invisible" and who admits in the opening pages that she is furious. The reasons behind her anger remain unclear until the novel's conclusion, but we marvel at her growing obsession with the exotic Shahid family. In an interview with *Publisher's Weekly*, Messud describes her desire to create a character who explores the range of possibilities of socially unacceptable emotions. She states, "if it's unseemly and possibly dangerous for a man to be angry, it's totally unacceptable for a woman to be angry. I wanted to write a voice that for me, as a reader, had been missing from the chorus: the voice of an angry woman." Such a goal would seem important to contemporary readers interested in "outsiders"—those elided from "traditional" views of family, work, or lifestyle.

Messud magnificently captures this anger—portrayed through the protagonist, a woman who puts aside her own ambitions

to care for her dying mother, and who then must come to terms with her losses: her mother, her plans to be an artist, her dreams to have a family of her own. Her complex relationship with the Shahids rekindles these buried desires and, for a while, Nora imagines that her fantasies are possible. The dramatic betrayal at the end of the novel connects readers with Nora's anger in the opening chapter. We feel her pain and reel in shock ourselves. How could they? What really happened? Who knows the truth? The novel suddenly becomes a delicious, gossipy whodunit, and the needy, obsessed Nora is the primary victim. However, Messud's theme is not so simple. She asks us to consider questions of morality and, as she states in her interview, "how then must we live?" This she says "is at the heart of it, for me."

Although Bock and Messud examine similar themes, it is Messud's book that forces nuanced questions about reality, relationships, art, and women's roles. Bock's story is well written and compelling, but it is Messud's *The Woman Upstairs* that kept me turning the pages long into the night.

Exultation des corps, des cœurs

Virginia Pésémapéo Bordeleau
L'amant du lac. Mémoire d'encrier 24,50 $

Compte rendu par Sarah Henzi

L'amant du lac, de l'auteure métisse cri Virginia Pésémapéo Bordeleau, est le premier roman érotique autochtone à paraître au Québec; mais il s'inscrit dans un mouvement littéraire en expansion, celui de la réappropriation de la beauté des corps, de la sexualité, du désir et de la vulnérabilité. Selon l'auteure Anishnaabe Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm, la littérature érotique a été « séparée, exclue » de la littérature autochtone, et ce à cause d'une sexualité réprimée due à l'oppression politique et religieuse des Premiers Peuples. Cette répression fut, en partie, appliquée lors de la traduction et de la transcription des récits, afin de les rendre plus « convenables » pour un lectorat anglophone. L'écriture érotique a donc deux objectifs pour Virginia Pésémapéo Bordeleau : la réappropriation de l'érotisme et de la beauté des corps, et la célébration de l'intimité et de la vulnérabilité comme aspects fondamentaux de l'humanité. « Célébrer le corps », nous confie l'auteure, « constitue un véritable défi » (quatrième de couverture) : comment, en effet, récrire la souveraineté du corps et du désir à la suite de 150 ans de répression? Pour cela, l'auteure choisit de placer ses protagonistes « dans un monde qui n'a pas encore connu les pensionnats pour Autochtones et les abus multiples des religieux sur les enfants . . . afin de déterrer la graine de la joie enfouie dans notre culture, profondément vivante, échappée du brasier de l'anéantissement ».

Et pourtant, *L'amant du lac* est contenu — littéralement — par deux viols; le premier, au chapitre 3, voit la jeune Waseshkun — « Éclaircie » — violée par un prêtre. Le deuxième, au chapitre 21, survient quand Gabriel se fait violer à son retour de la guerre. Pourquoi donc cette violence sexuelle au sein d'un roman érotique? « Dans la parenthèse de la violence », confie Pésémapéo Bordeleau, « on raconte la beauté du sexe » : tout comme l'héritage des pensionnats et de l'enfance volée, le traumatisme hérité de la violence sexuelle doit être négocié, cathartique, à travers le récit. Si les chapitres 3 et 21 sont les parenthèses, ce qui se déroule en-dedans est la résurrection du désir et l'exploration du plaisir : l'amour redécouvert et titillé par Wabougouni — petite-fille de Waseshkun, dont le nom fut remplacé par Zagkigan Ikwè lorsqu'après le viol, « sa magie tourna au noir » — et par Gabriel « arrachera de notre lignée le noir souvenir de cet homme dont tu portes la couleur sur tes cheveux, qui me rappellent chaque jour la mort de

mon désir et de ma beauté. Transpose en l'enfant que tu portes le désir, le goût de vivre, de sourire, de rire, de jouir! » Gabriel, quant à lui, est réimaginé pour « son rôle d'homme » : celui qui donne du plaisir et non celui qui le prend. Pour Zagkigan Ikwè, tout comme pour Pésémapéo Bordeleau, la « parenthèse de la violence » dévoile ainsi un transfert de pouvoir : l'impudence et l'intrépidité de Wabougouni — car celle-ci est mariée à un autre et enceinte — alors qu'elle « absorbe » son amant — « il ne comprenait pas le sens de cette rencontre, mais acceptait ce moment » — offre une réinscription du plaisir consenti et partagé. La sexualité (re)devient ainsi langage et mémoire relationnelle.

Raconter autrement

Hervé Bouchard
Numéro six. Passages du numéro six dans le hockey mineur, dans les catégories atome, moustique, pee-wee, bantam et midget; avec aussi quelques petites aventures s'y rattachant.
Le Quartanier 20,95 $

Compte rendu par Benoît Melançon

Quand il s'agit de représenter le hockey, la culture québécoise fait beaucoup appel au récit d'enfance et à la nostalgie. C'est le cas en chanson (Sylvain Lelièvre, « La Partie de hockey », 1971), en littérature (Marc Robitaille, *Des histoires d'hiver avec encore plus de rues, d'écoles et de hockey*, 2013), au cinéma (François Bouvier, *Histoires d'hiver*, 1998). Selon son sous-titre — *Passages du numéro six dans le hockey mineur, dans les catégories atome, moustique, pee-wee, bantam et midget; avec aussi quelques petites aventures s'y rattachant* —, *Numéro six* d'Hervé Bouchard relèverait également du récit d'enfance. Pourtant, il rompt avec les cadres narratifs, formels et linguistiques du genre, et il ne donne à lire aucune nostalgie.

Le texte raconte le passage de son narrateur, dont on ne connaîtra jamais le nom, dans le monde du hockey dit « mineur ». Au Saguenay–Lac-Saint-Jean, durant les années 1960 et 1970, le « numéro six » joue dans diverses catégories, où il est de moins en moins habile, sous la direction d'entraîneurs inégalement doués. Une réalité s'impose à lui : le hockey n'est pas fait pour s'amuser.

À cette éducation sportive se mêlent d'autres expériences : la première cuite, le bizutage, la perte de la virginité. Le narrateur est entouré de personnages dont l'identité est aussi floue que la sienne : son père (le « montreur »), sa mère (la « captive »), des filles aux noms souvent inventés (Pompon Julie), des personnages secondaires à l'onomastique étonnante (Minier Desroches alias Sautillant Blanchon alias Roger Santillon). Autour de lui, c'est la culture populaire (sportive, musicale, télévisuelle) qui domine, pas la lettrée.

Le livre est divisé en neuf « passages », eux-mêmes constitués de fragments souvent brefs. Chacun de ces « passages » est précédé d'un sommaire annonçant son contenu. L'auteur mêle volontiers reprises et variations (de mots, d'évènements). Le ton est parfois à l'humour, comme dans ces cris confondus de deux spectateurs, « Premier bonhomme » et « Second bonhomme » : « Tue-le! Enlevez-la-lui! Tue-le! Enlevez-la-lui! » À d'autres moments, le ludisme ne masque pas la gravité des sujets abordés : « C'était en juillet quand le montreur entier des choses et la naine captive ont eu l'annonce du cancer à venir de l'un et de la cécité de l'autre ».

La langue d'Hervé Bouchard mêle inventions lexicales (« J'ai connu la peur du ftougne »), allusions aux langages religieux (« J'étais nu et tu m'as équipé ») et sportif (« réapprendre la vitesse du jeu en revenant à la base et retrouver le fond du filet » et figures de rhétorique, notamment le zeugme (« Ils couraient nus dans les corridors et dans la joie »). Sa ponctuation rompt volontiers avec la régularité : « J'ai couru dans la rue du Pow-wow devant l'abri des

galériens à l'heure où les peupliers asséchés et cuits s'avançaient déguisés vers la caserne des hommes qui portaient des chemises à manches courtes et des lances à poignée ». *Numéro six* est certes une œuvre sur l'enfance, mais destinée à un public qui apprécie la singularité narrative, formelle et linguistique maîtrisée.

2011: A Retrospect

Michel Marc Bouchard; Linda Gaboriau, trans.
Tom at the Farm. Talonbooks $16.95

Robert Chafe
Oil and Water. Playwrights Canada $16.95

Brad Fraser
Five @ Fifty. Playwrights Canada $16.95

Reviewed by Denyse Lynde

The year 2011 saw three new plays produced by three seasoned playwrights. *Five @ Fifty* was first produced by Royal Exchange Theatre in Manchester, England; across the ocean, *Tom At The Farm* was presented at Théâtre d'Aujourd'hui in Montreal and *Oil and Water* premiered in Newfoundland. The three playwrights all received many distinctions for their work. They also share an extraordinary talent as storytellers. The tales they create and the characters that emerge are all equally compelling but, in this case, could not be more different. From the five female friends in *Five @ Fifty* to Tom's encounter with his dead lover's family in *Tom at the Farm*, two remarkably different worlds are revealed. Contrasting these two worlds are the two stories about Lanier Phillips in *Oil and Water*.

Five @ Fifty is the story of five women, all aged fifty, who have been friends for years. They all remember a fateful high school dance when no one would dance with them. The heart of the story is a lesbian couple, Norma and Olivia, and when the play begins they are all gathering at their home to celebrate Olivia's birthday. Fraser takes time and care to create each woman. First to arrive, as usual, is Tricia, a journalist. Next to arrive in a new dress is the real estate agent Lorene who is now on her fourth husband. Mother of three and passionate about yoga is Fern and as is characteristic of her, she arrives on time. It is Norma, a doctor, who has made the amazing birthday cake and bought champagne to honour her partner, Olivia. When Olivia does arrive, she is drunk. Things begin to disintegrate as the birthday girl decides to dominate the party with a long rambling story about restaurant food. Then she makes an offensive toast to her supposed friends and more. Olivia and alcoholism is part of this tale. Equally compelling is the story of the enabler, in this case, Norma. However, each of these @ fifty-year-olds struggle with their own addictions whether they be painkillers or sex. The heart of the story are the relationships tested and strained by addictions and rehabilitation together with what is changed and reinvented by facing addiction. Surrounding the couple are the three friends who want to help; however, each in turn realizes that she can only help herself. The play ends with Olivia alone, heading once again for rehabilitation.

Bouchard creates a very different dramatic world in *Tom at the Farm*. Tom travels to his dead lover's rural home where he meets his mother, Agatha, and previously unknown brother, Francis. While *Five @ Fifty* is about denial and self-deception, *Tom At The Farm* is about deeply held secrets and violence. Tom came to find something, something about himself, something about his lover, Jeff. Before he knows it, he is sleeping in Jeff's bed and wearing his clothes. It is in this bedroom that he first meets Francis, Jeff's brother, who attacks him and warns him to keep Jeff's homosexuality secret. Mother, brother and lover fall into a nightmarish relationship where all play dangerous roles. Agatha accepts Tom

as her son and Francis and Tom move into a violent relationship where Tom carries the wounds. In fact after a particularly violent encounter, Tom curls up with Francis in his bed. It is only when Sara, a co-worker and supposedly Jeff's "pretend" girlfriend, arrives and expresses shock at seeing Tom's beaten body, that a shift occurs. She refuses to play her assigned role and her refusal breaks the roles they were all clinging to. Their false world explodes.

Yet another dramatic world is realized in Robert Chafe's *Oil and Water*. This play is really two stories. The first is the story of a young, angry Black man, Lanier, aboard the U. S. S. Truxton, which struck the rocks near St. Lawrence, Newfoundland, in February, 1942 and how the local people struggled to save survivors.The second story is set in Boston, 1974, when a judge orders massive busing to integrate Boston schools. Lanier's daughter is on one of those buses. How Chafe brings these two disparate stories together is masterful. The older Lanier must not only remember what St. Lawrence taught him but also now must let what happened in that small Newfoundland town teach his daughter, Vonzia. His experience in St. Lawrence changed him fundamentally. He found a world where racism did not exist. He spends two days in a brave new world that he decides to bring back to America with him. He realizes that Vonzia, in her fear and anger, must be saved, changed, in fact, be baptized as he had been. She must be told the story so that she too can find her way and learn this important lesson.

In staging their stories, each playwright is extremely comfortable with his craft. Fraser moves his interesting females from public to private spaces as he weaves his web of addiction and denial. Simple lighting moves the audience through the carefully plotted tale. In a similar manner, Bouchard moves us through his violent world but what is remarkable is how he creates Tom. Tom moves us in and out of the narrative by frequently addressing his dead lover or himself. Through this dual consciousness, the audience must share the pain and violence of homophobia. Chafe's world is rich and deeply moving, as one expects from this artist: here we have three distinct perspectives maintained by choric music and staging. All three plays deserve attention, and, if you are lucky, a viewing.

Beautiful Constraint

Catherine Bush
Accusation. Goose Lane $21.95

Michael Crummey
Sweetland. Doubleday $32.00

Kim Thúy; Sheila Fischman, trans.
Mãn. Random House $25.00

Reviewed by Hannah McGregor

Early in Catherine Bush's *Accusation,* protagonist Sara and her lover David discuss why so many dictators were also writers. Sara wonders if there isn't "an impulse toward poetry not only as something potentially beautiful but also controlling, a way to give formal shape to experience, emotion, rhetoric, and so sway people." This image of language as both beautiful and violent—a "beautiful constraint," as David calls it—lies at the heart of three new novels by renowned Canadian authors.

Accusation, Bush's fourth novel, spans five continents as Toronto-based journalist Sara becomes increasingly fixated on Raymond Renaud, a Canadian teacher who has founded a children's circus in Addis Ababa. Shortly after seeing his circus perform in Denmark and meeting him in Toronto, Sara hears that several of the circus' child performers have accused Raymond of abuse. She quickly becomes obsessed with finding the truth: "She knew nothing for certain. It was only an accusation. . . . Yet, as she knew, an accusation, regardless of truth, has its own life when let loose in the world."

The rest of the novel circles around Sara's need to know for certain what happened, a need rooted in a false accusation from her own youth that continues to haunt her. Travelling to Addis Ababa to find Raymond, she instead uncovers evidence of other aid workers in Ethiopia abusing young boys. When she writes an article further implicating Raymond in the systemic abuse of power amongst international aid workers, he responds with a startling act of violence that calls into question the ethics of representation in both journalism and literature. A story, once told, can have unseen consequences, and doubt, once planted in someone's mind, is difficult to assuage. *Accusation*'s refusal, in the end, to let us know whether Raymond is guilty or innocent constitutes the novel's final statement on the ethical vagaries of language. Words once "released, [go] on uncoiling themselves," whether they are true or not.

This epistemological instability, how language might honour or betray reality, is also at the heart of Michael Crummey's fourth novel, *Sweetland*. The narrator, Moses Sweetland, is a bachelor in his late sixties living off the southern coast of Newfoundland, on a remote island that shares his name. This parallel between narrator and setting is an early sign of the novel's interest in the relationship between place and self. The government has offered the small community on Sweetland a generous settlement package to relocate to the mainland, with the condition that everyone has to sign on. Sweetland is the only holdout, and as the second half of the novel unfolds, he has faked his own death and settled in to live out his life alone on the island.

At first *Sweetland* reads like textbook CanLit: man versus nature, remote rural setting, lots of references to cod and buffalo. But we are warned that the novel is doing something more when Sweetland's neighbour Queenie complains about the CanLit her daughter keeps sending her: "Half the books supposedly set in Newfoundland were nowhere Queenie recognized and she felt insulted by their claim on her life." Meaning, the novel suggests, is a communal activity. In the absence of community, Sweetland—the place and the person—begins to unfurl. The clearest example of this "widening fracture in the world" is Sweetland's increasing fixation on maps. He begins to pass the long nights mapping the island in his mind, "naming every feature and landmark"; later, trapped by a snowstorm in a remote cabin, he finds a commemorative map of Newfoundland that he sets about correcting, "adding missing names along the coastline, drawing in small islands that had been inexplicably left out." When he rediscovers that same map, crumpled in his bag, all his amendments are there, with one difference: "Where he expected to see Sweetland there was nothing but blue water." As representations of his environment become increasingly divorced from his world as he experiences it, his narration becomes similarly unstable, haunted—perhaps literally—by the ghosts of his past. In the novel's final pages, its earlier attention to regionally specific realism gives way to a surreal dreamscape that blurs the line between Sweetland as place and narrator.

Language is also entangled with identity in Kim Thúy's second novel, *Mãn*, named for its Vietnamese protagonist. Mãn is a woman whose world is structured through language, particularly the act of translation. Like the novel, Mãn is multiplying translated and transformed, from abandoned child to beloved daughter to uprooted Canadian bride to celebrated chef. Through language she negotiates the complications of her country's history, her place in Montreal, and her relationships with her husband, children, and, eventually, lover. The novel is structured as a series of short vignettes, each linguistic snapshot visually framed

by a different Vietnamese word and its translation, unfolding a dimension of Mãn's story through the lens of that word. In "*Me Ghe* / cold mother," for example, Mãn contemplates the cruelty of her Maman's stepmother, noting that "*ghe*" means both "cold" and "mange," and wondering "if that mangy mother would have been less bitter had she been called *stepmother*." Language becomes not an arbitrary symbol system but a material force in Mãn's life, shaping how she engages with the world. Ironically, this novel about translation, itself translated from French to English, is also a meditation on what remains untranslatable.

If Mãn struggles with language, committing "millions of errors in grammar and logic, but also in comprehension," she finds in her cooking a more visceral method of communication. Food lets her build a community in her new country while maintaining ties to the old. She expands the menu at her husband's restaurant with dishes that remind their diasporic clientele of home; one customer, eating her soup, "murmured that he had tasted his land, the land where he'd grown up, where he was loved." Food is also what takes her to Paris where she meets the lover who will test her commitment to her traditions and her family. This genre-bending novel, part dictionary, part cookbook, breaks a love story down into the basic units of language, showing how a life can be made or unmade with just one word.

Unsettled Belongings

Adrienne Clarkson
Belonging: The Paradox of Citizenship.
Anansi $19.95

Esi Edugyan
Dreaming of Elsewhere: Observations on Home.
U of Alberta P $10.95

Reviewed by Lorraine York

Taken together, these two books, print versions of public lectures, form a spirited debate on Adrienne Clarkson's two key terms: belonging and citizenship. And their positions could not be more dramatically divergent. Clarkson, in these 2014 Massey Lectures, traces what she sees as Canada's innate characteristics of generosity, communitarianism, equitability ("The social norm in Canada is to be equitable"), and altruism, back to Greek democratic thought, even though she recognizes that ancient Greece was a society that condoned slavery and denied equal rights to women and "barbarians"—foreigners. Rather than pausing to think about the implications of such a mixed ethical inheritance, though, Clarkson tends to subordinate the discussion of inequitable practices in favour of examining lofty communitarian ideals. The same thing happens when she narrates her own fascinating history as a child refugee from Hong Kong; only this year, she tells us, did she discover archival evidence that she, her father, mother, and brother, were listed on the Chinese head tax registry. "While I always felt implicated by this law because of its innate racism," she observes, "somehow I never thought it really applied to me." In thinking of her implication in systemic Canadian racisms, Clarkson quickly turns to individual experience as a remedial counterbalance: "No one ever told us that we didn't belong."

In Esi Edugyan's 2013 Henry Kreisel Memorial Lecture, *Dreaming of Elsewhere*, individual stories become means of probing,

rather than deflecting, larger systemic questions of non-belonging. Indeed, Edugyan implicitly reframes the terms of Clarkson's discussion by wondering why "belonging" needs to be the horizon of human need. Thinking through her own story of living in many countries in her late twenties, and revisiting her parents' country of origin, Ghana, in 2006, Edugyan reflects that "I, who had lived so much of my life looking elsewhere, was slowly coming to acknowledge that non-belonging, also, can be a kind of belonging." Belonging, Edugyan concludes, is not "the most important of our possibilities, long for it though we might." This is the diametric opposite of Clarkson's contention that the human is not healthy or whole without a sense of belonging.

To consider belonging a paramount objective, Edugyan suggests, runs the risk of enforcing "a simple 'us' vs. 'them' manner of thinking." And while this is certainly not Clarkson's explicit objective, her prizing of Canadian citizenship as a performance of willed mass belonging tends to replicate us-vs.-them modes of thought. She consistently refers to Canadians as "we" (even at one point strangely referring to "our Anglo-Saxon tradition"), and positions immigrants to Canada as those who are about to be welcomed into the ranks of the "we." (Indigenous people are repeatedly referred to as "our Aboriginal people," as though they belong to the notional Canadian "we".) The objective, always, is to join the ranks of the "we," and doing so entails adoption and adaptation: "I believe all new citizens must acknowledge that they are being adopted into the family that is Canada; they must accept everything." (To be fair, by "everything," Clarkson means the totality of the nation's history, including its injustices, which all Canadians are honour-bound to redress.) Still, the model is one that is, troublingly, adaptable to a much less diversity-friendly agenda than Clarkson's.

What we have, then, in these two books, is a debate between a liberal reading of Canada's imagined community, and a critical race perspective, between belonging as a plenitude and completion, and belonging as radical unsettledness that should not be read as failure to alight. Edugyan speaks from her experience of the question that Canadians who think of themselves as "we" so often pose to racialized Canadians: "Yes but where are you from *really*?" This is the moment, like Adrienne Clarkson receiving the Head Tax Registry listing of her family, when the state disavows one's belonging, but Edugyan does not seek recourse in the individual will to belong (whereas Clarkson, drawing on her early reading about Greek society, concludes "that an individual could find a way to belong, to overcome the biases and prejudices of her time"). Reading these two books, side by side, reminds me of Dionne Brand's much-quoted remark in *A Map to the Door of No Return* that "[t]oo much has been made of origins," to which I would be tempted to add, "[t]oo much has been made of belonging" too.

Shadow Play

Judith Cowan
The Permanent Nature of Everything: A Memoir. McGill-Queen's UP $34.95

Jason Potts and Daniel Stout, eds.
Theory Aside. Duke UP $24.95

Cynthia Sugars
Canadian Gothic: Literature, History, and the Spectre of Self-Invention. U of Wales P $189.24

Reviewed by Coral Ann Howells

These three books all engage with the relation between the present and the past—how we recall it or reinvent it or reassess it through various forms of private and collective memory. But there the similarities end, for one is a family memoir, one a literary history, and one a collection of essays about critical theory.

Judith Cowan's memoir is a haunted narrative written after her parents' deaths, a "salvage operation" where she attempts to "unearth both the treasure and the hard truths from the unconscious past." This is not a conventional elegy; instead it is constructed out of the scar tissue of childhood memories of growing up in a dislocated middle-class family in 1940s and 50s English Canada. Cowan now lives in Quebec where she is an award-winning translator of French poetry, though "[n]othing goes away" as Margaret Atwood reminds us, Cowan too is aware in one of her rare lyrical moments of "the permanent nature of everything." The book charts a sensitive girl's responses to "the shifting waters of family strife," -the result of her well-educated parents' disastrous wartime marriage in 1942. The emotional damage inflicted on a child by unloving parents locked in mutual battle forms the substance of this memoir, giving the lie to the family portraits included here. Yet there are buried treasures also, like the memory of the glistening summer of 1948, "the happiest year I've ever known," when her family moved to an old farmhouse in what is now Mississauga and the five-year-old child was free to discover her own secret world. That house was demolished in the postwar building boom as suburbia spread into Toronto's outskirts. This private record of lost things and vanishings is paralleled in the wider sociological perspective of Canada's transition to modernity. Cowan's memoir ends with her first day at high school in Toronto: "There might be a future after all," but her book reads like a series of unfinished conversations with the shades of her past.

By contrast, the ghosts in Cynthia Sugars' *Canadian Gothic: Literature, History and the Spectre of Self-Invention* are the products of collective memory and literary imagination. The "spectral turn" in postcolonial studies has been fashionable for over a decade as a way of addressing anxieties over national identity and heritage, though most of that research has focused on contemporary writing, as did the essay collection *Unsettled Remains: Canadian Literature and the Postcolonial Gothic* (2009) co-edited by Sugars and Gerry Turcotte. This new book, which traces English-Canadian Gothic from its colonial beginnings to the postcolonial present, engages quite specifically with historical perspectives signalled but not explored earlier. The Gothic is always characterized by anxiety and fear, but what Sugars has discovered in sifting through the cultural complexities of an emergent nation's literature is a peculiarly unstable Canadian attitude towards Gothic discourse, which she describes as "a dynamic interplay of Gothic presence and absence in the way texts utilize and refute their own relation to the Gothic." Her intriguing analysis of this ambivalence shifts the emphasis from Wilderness Gothic and Frye's "deep terror in regard to Nature" towards "Gothic domestication," arguing that English-Canadian settlers' feelings of unease generated an awareness of absence in the lack of hauntings in their New World place. This could only be compensated by "a conscious act of forging or Gothic self-invention." Her excellent chapter "Local Familiars: Gothic Infusion and Settler Indigenization" traces that deliberate fashioning of settler ghosts and local legends through a host of major and minor works from the 1830s to the 1940s, a tradition continued in settler postcolonial historical fictions, where ghosts are creatively resuscitated as a political and cultural response to white Canadians' anxieties. However, the inherently unstable nature of the national narrative is amplified in the final chapters on diasporic and Indigenous Gothic where non-mainstream voices tell different stories of ghosts and hauntings. Sugars offers a superbly comprehensive revisioning of Canadian Gothic with its ever-increasing complexity; indeed, as she argues, the

appeal of Gothic might be seen as "a way of reaching towards the larger spectre of national self-invention."

Even a book of critical theory may be haunted, not by *Specters of Marx* but by earlier scholars whose works, sidelined in the era of High Theory, are now reassessed in the fourteen essays in *Theory Aside*. Addressed to fellow academics, this interdisciplinary collection offers some lateral thinking about theory, arguing that "the devotion of our collective attentions to one current line of theoretical thought obscures our ability to recognize other valuable modes of inquiry." Ian Balfour's afterword superbly summarizes the editors' aims while recognizing that "There is no discourse in the humanities and social sciences that is not in some measure theoretical . . . it is only a question of *how* one does it." The collection is divided into three sections: "Chronologies Aside," "Approaches Aside," and "Figures Aside," covering an eclectic variety of approaches, of which I mention only a few. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's "Writing the History of Homophobia" highlights the difficulty of reconstructing alternative histories of sexuality, a problem shared with writing about women's history or about any marginalized group. That topic is explored from a different angle by Natalie Melas in "Comparative Noncontemporaneities: C. L. R. James and Ernst Bloch," an essay on postcolonial theory and historiography. The importance of history is again emphasized in Simon Jarvis' "What Is Historical Poetics?" with its evocation of the Russian formalists in his exemplary analysis of Alexander Pope's versification, while Irene Tucker's "Before Racial Construction" returns to Kant's writings on race and skin colour to draw attention to discontinuities between Enlightenment ideas of human equality and the invention of racialized bodies. George Ainslie, A. N. Whitehead, and Erving Goffman are reassessed, though my favourite is Frances Ferguson's wonderfully aleatory essay on I. A. Richards that investigates the psychology of reading in its analysis of Richards' principles of literary criticism. One sentence here sums up this volume's openness of approach: "texts, being made up of words, were never going to be more stable than the words they were made up of."

Narrative Resistance and Lyric Personae in *School*, *Pluck*, and *The Vestiges*

Jen Currin
School. Coach House $17.95

Jeff Derksen
The Vestiges. Talonbooks $16.95

Laisha Rosnau
Pluck. Nightwood $18.95

Reviewed by Natalie Thompson

Upon first perusal Laisha Rosnau's *Pluck*, Jen Currin's *School*, and Jeff Derksen's *The Vestiges* have one overarching, grand thing in common: very short titles. They are disparate in subjects, themes, line breaks, stanzaic patterns, narrative employment, etc. *Pluck* has a traditional lyric "I" while *School* has remnants of a central persona woven throughout, though Currin always undercuts its authority. *The Vestiges*' title poem has a central collector of fragments, and in a later poem Derksen shows Karl Marx in new, personable light. Though these books are incredibly different, the reader can locate a central mood of uncertainty as the tremulous world scene offers little comfort and opaque hope.

In *Pluck* Rosnau questions the social prescriptions put upon women. The title poem has a numbered, episodic structure, and each section profiles a woman's choice in contrast to and harmony with the conventional wisdom of various eras. For example, in section one, the subject "Get[s] married

at seventeen" and "take[s] to the field—there's land to clear," and in section two the subject waits until an "unfashionable" age to get married, and so on. Arguably, the women in this piece grapple with the opposite of being plucked—being planted in restrictive social norms.

It must also be noted that the construction of Rosnau's poems is very clever. "Shame, Revisited" laces the line "Other people do it better, I'm sure," throughout its pantoum-like framework, the incantatory phrases all "balanced just so." And this rhythm mimics the face of shame—a little devil one can never quite shake. "Decadent Nut Orchard" has a revolutionary scaffolding, as every second line ends with the word "open." Certainly, Rosnau's traditional lyric "I" is the "mother" of great invention.

Speaking of invention, Currin is a virtual Penelope weaving a conversational tone throughout *School*, but just when it feels a story is coming on, narrative is unwoven. In "Fragmented Lesson Plan" the poem begins, "Yes, we took walks. / & we were just getting to know each other sexually." So the reader thinks, "what is the couple's 'lesson'?" And then lines like, "Soy milk separates from coffee" have the reader wondering what the through-line is. Seemingly, she has lifted lines from various sources and knit them into a pastiche.

But what does this personable, fragmentary style signify? In the poem "Half Life" the antepenultimate stanza gives a clue: "Accused of being optimists / we did a lot of thinking and hesitating." There is an optimistic yearning to trust that things—relationships, gender biases, politics, economic instability—will get better, and yet a hesitation to fully believe so. In "My Prison Studies" three lines express the angst best: "We finally wanted it all to make some sort of deep sense. / we want to live that way now / & we knew there was not one trapped person who would disagree with us." Unsurprisingly, *School* has angst.

The Vestiges is a masterful collection of long research poems, two of which have wildly incongruent commitments to having a knowable speaker. In the title poem, there is a cold, accusing eye observing the world scene and concluding: "that's legislation over flesh." We see the sickening irony of song lyrics embedded throughout: "What we need / right now is / fresh availability / of cheap labour / and land / 'and love sweet love.'" But there is a call to arms in lines like, "'barbarism unifies nature' / that's an irony / to work against together." In the end, Derksen gives the reader vestiges of hope.

Derksen's brilliant research poem "I WELCOME EVERY OPINION BASED ON SCIENTIFIC CRITICISM" gives a curious sideways glance at Karl Marx. The poem is an amalgam of every personal "I" statement from *Capital*, volume I. Lines like, "I shall come back to the agricultural labourers later on" and "I shall merely glance at their housing conditions" show a man deeply concerned with solving the problems of his world. And so too, this book urges readers to stay bunkered in the remnants of opaque optimism—but with their dukes up.

In essence, each poet does precisely what a poet should: observing the world, reflecting upon inner worlds, and distilling the two into poetry. That each one challenges the traditional lyric speaker is expected. The brain wants narrative, wants to "make sense" of women's changing roles, the spirit in times of loss, and reason when greed takes over. All three are commanding, questioning artworks asking us to do what humans should—to strive, to seek, to find answers.

Times Squared

Katie Dale
Little White Lies. Doubleday $14.99

Ben Lerner
10:04. McClelland & Stewart $29.95

Reviewed by Tina Trigg

In *Little White Lies* and *10:04*, Katie Dale and Ben Lerner have crafted narratives of the moment for different generations, exploring temporality, tipping points, and translucent identities. Aimed at a young adult audience, *Little White Lies* spins a tangled web of deceit through the tropes of freshman university experience and a love triangle, complete with the emotionally wrought, impulsive idealism of youth. Lucinda Willoughby-White attempts to reconstruct herself to escape her family's high-profile criminal case, but finds herself in love with a presumed killer, fleeing for her life, and desperate to make the right decision.

Dale delivers on the level of genre while also engaging in social critique. The plot is surprisingly complex, combining predictable coincidence with a Gordian knot of possible betrayals, illusions, and falsehoods. A vigilante quest becomes an exposé of ugly family secrets: broken marriage, alcoholic rage, racism, murder, and scapegoating. Alongside the recognizable foibles of university life—parties, pranks, and peer pressure—Dale examines age-appropriate issues of love (distinct from sexual intimacy), belonging, and career paths, complicating them with sobering realities. Social media deception and technology-hacking rapidly escalate from pranks to life-threatening exposure; legal and judicial systems face suspicion and (some) validated allegations; and traditional media is lauded for revelation of truth while also condemned for sensationalistic distortion.

Little White Lies is a thriller verging on contemporary fairy tale. Following harrowing escapes, false identities collapse and Lucinda achieves her "happily ever after" with the handsome exonerated Leo—at a cost. Ultimately, Dale affirms the significance of family alongside the redemptive powers of love, truth, and justice made possible through difficult individual decisions in a moment of time.

Akin to the GPS-laden wristwatches of Dale's characters, the "retro" digital timestamp of Ben Lerner's *10:04* pinpoints the urgency of time for a thirty-something generation. Alluding to the 1985 film *Back to the Future*, the title collapses the author/protagonist's lived experience with the contingencies of narrative time. While not time travel per se, *10:04* enacts a subtle mutation of life as constantly forming in response to material conditions and personal actions—from reproductive choices to lexical ones. The world is described as multivalent, ever leaning towards "the world to come, where everything is the same but a little different." Dizzyingly shifting among minutes, lifespans, and even epochs, the novel recounts the narrative of Ben, a poet-novelist, living in contemporary Brooklyn over the span of about two years.

Structured into five discrete sections, the novel ranges widely in subject and form yet is oddly circumscribed. Meta-fictively tracing Ben's journey to write his second novel, Lerner muses about mortality (through biological clocks, cataclysmic storms, and life-threatening diagnoses) and the paradoxes of contemporary life. Signalled by the insistent recurrence of the term "propiocentric," an octopus motif functions as a metaphor for self-consciously navigating environments for which one is ill-equipped, whether animal or human. Ben is at the mercy of the elements (natural and constructed) as well as of volatile social norms (relational, artistic, medical, ideological, among others). The self-doubting protagonist (speaking variably as "I," "he," or "the author") luxuriates in art galleries

and gourmet dinners while also vacillating between underprivileged students and Occupy Wall Street sympathies. Collapsing reality and art, the novel consistently elides boundaries through pastiche. Traditional narrative is blended with innumerable other modes, including still frames from films, poems in fragment and entirety, photographs and drawings, literary criticism, a child's brontosaurus book project, Lerner's published *New Yorker* story, and fabricated e-mail messages. Far from attempting reconciliation either in character or structure, *10:04* clusters and overlaps, revelling in interplay and contradiction, thereby creating an unsettling picture of contemporary urban life.

Lerner claims in a recent interview that being a poet makes him "more interested in pattern than plot" and places his current interest "in a novel at a moment where the fictions we've been telling ourselves, personally, politically, whatever, feel fragile." Patterning, instability, and reconstruction dominate *10:04* in its representation of the interdependence of past, present, and future, but the self-conscious hermeneutic creates a mildly oppressive mood. Combined with an indulgent tone and dense diction, the novel's tenor may be off-putting to some readers. Nonetheless, dubbing it "a social experiment," Lerner indeed presents a worthy contemplation. Firmly situated in contemporary New York, *10:04* offers challenging re-visions of art (notably through the Institute for Totaled Art), relationships and reproductive options, time, and the layers of selves through which one lives—without a road map or known expiry date and "on the very edge of fiction."

Derksen's Affections

Jeff Derksen; Kathy Slade, ed.
After Euphoria. JRP-Ringier Kunstverlag AG
$29.95

Reviewed by Dan Adleman

Jeff Derksen's *After Euphoria* is a nuanced and far-reaching essay collection that, in many respects, picks up where his 2009 collection *Annihilated Time* left off. Drawing on an impressive repertoire of scholarship in cultural studies, critical theory, urban geography, and economics, as well as his own experience as a poet, critic, and community activist, he is still deeply invested in exceptional creative practices—ranging from artwork to protest movements—that antagonize neoliberal notions of space, place, freedom, community, nation, and state. More so than in the previous collection, Derksen, following Henri Lefebvre, interrogates the political implications of conceptualizing urban space as a neutral empty vessel, choosing instead to home in on the various ways in which urban spaces, especially that of his hometown Vancouver, are contoured and worked over by the forces of globalized neoliberal capital. Another shift from his previous work is his heightened emphasis on the visual arts, whose emancipatory potential, alongside other creative "productions of space," he valorizes with utopian fervour.

In "How High Is the City, How Deep Is Our Love?" the author explores the stakes of loving one's city and the role that spatializing practices play in configuring the city's political, aesthetic, and libidinal ecology. Here, Derksen breaks new ground in extending and consolidating a strain of affect theory emerging out of Raymond Williams' "structures of feeling" that inhere to entire "ways of life." In this pursuit he finds common cause with Sianne Ngai's recent work on "uncanonical affects" and Sara Ahmed's "cultural politics

of emotion," both of which diverge from the more subject-centric strains of affect theory derived from either psychoanalysis (Tomkins, Sedgwick, Berlant, . . .) or Gilles Deleuze's Spinozist reveries (Massumi, Hansen, . . .).

Derksen's valuable contribution to the ongoing conversation about the role of affect in theorizing aesthetics and politics comes in the form of the undertheorized affect of "euphoria," a term that, etymologically speaking, signifies "to bear an illness well." In Derksen's agile hands, this collective structure of delirium signals the intensification of certain forms of excitation, not as an expression of vigour but as a deceptive symptom of the incapacitation of vital systems in a city aggressively marketed as "a nature-drenched lure for those global citizens bold enough to lay down some capital in a sustainable city vibrating with the post-Fordist pleasures of investment and tourism."

In "Art and Cities during Mega-Events," Derksen brings critical acuity to both the political economy and euphoric rhetoric of global mega-events like Vancouver's Expo '86 and the 2010 Winter Olympics. The latter, a two-week spectacle that cost taxpayers ten billion dollars (paid for, in no small part, through the evisceration of social services), also involved unprecedented prohibitions on dissent. The Olympic Charter, Derksen observes, undemocratically negates extant freedoms of speech and association by banning any "demonstration or political, religious or racial propaganda in any Olympic sites, venues or other areas." Across the province, this pernicious form of "zombie governance" galvanized local artists and activists to engender what Derksen views as genuinely creative strategies to subvert the IOC's dictates.

Here, Derksen brings the term "creativity" into relief as a contested site. In direct contradistinction to the narrow economic sense of the term proffered by Richard Florida in *The Rise of the Creative Class* (wherein creativity is more or less the exclusive purview of hip, young urban professionals), Derksen advocates for a notion of creativity that emerges out of and impacts the dynamic "production of everyday life." His survey of creative expropriations and "autogestions" of IOC strictures ranges from Pivot Legal Society's "Red Tent Campaign" (which set up a homeless "Tent Village" in a Vancouver Olympic Committee parking area), to Ken Lum's referentless (and therefore unprosecutable) *I Said No* art exhibition, to The Olympic Resistance Network's postering campaign querying the contradictions between the Olympic Charter's lip-service to human rights and the IOC's draconian suppression thereof.

On the issue of discrepancies between the vapid branded messages presented to the media and the odious underlying economic realities of the Olympics industry, Derksen minces no words about Shane Koyczan's popular spoken word performance "during the unimaginative opening ceremony, hauling out every retrograde trope of Canadian cultural identity." For Derksen, Koyczan's bromide-filled poem about Canada as a polite "experiment going right for a change" deploys the red herring of self-aggrandizing nationalist euphoria to occlude the gaping wounds caused by the systemic ailments whose metastases the Olympics exacerbated.

In "Citizens of the [World] [Nation] [City] Unite and Take Over," Derksen considers the modern "globalized city," which he frames as a locus of both collusion and tension between the "alluring local" and "all-inclusive global" scales. He scrutinizes the interoperation of neoliberalism (the ideology of the primacy and freedom of "the market") and globalization (the so-called flattening of the world) in such urban "hub[s] of control and management" as post-9/11 New York City. As with his

analysis of different interpretations of "creativity," Derksen narrows his rhetorical gaze on the notion of "freedom," a term bandied about deceptively by both neoliberal ideologues of "the invisible hand of the market" and neoconservative hawks who tendentiously espouse that America's opponents despise Americans for their God-given freedoms.

In "The Ends of Culture," he mobilizes Williams' pioneering conceptualization of "culture, as a long revolution of process and change," against American cultural imperialism, such as that exhibited, according to Derksen, by Sophia Coppola's Japanophilic film *Lost in Translation*, a movie he analyzes with Žižekian aplomb. Sadly, he is too wary of the groundswell of heavy-handed film criticism that emerged out of English departments in the 1990s to devote much space to his analysis. But his account of the Americentric fantasy system subtending the film's problematic figuration of Japanese cultural immaturity cuts like a knife.

Fans of Derksen's paratactic "socialist one-liner" poetry will find in *After Euphoria* a rich hypotactic corollary and complement. Even more so than in *Annihilated Time*, there is, in all of the essays, a delicate and refreshing tension at play between critique as a philosophical-poetic discourse for probing "conditions of possibility" and criticism as a strategy geared towards solving deeply ingrained societal problems.

Fame, Us, and Last Words?

Joel Deshaye
The Metaphor of Celebrity: Canadian Poetry and the Public, 1955-1980. U of Toronto P $50.00

Phyllis Webb; John F. Hulcoop, ed.
Peacock Blue: The Collected Poems.
Talonbooks $29.95

Reviewed by Owen Percy

Taking its place alongside recent books by Lorraine York and Gillian Roberts on literary celebrity and prizes in Canada, Joel Deshaye's *The Metaphor of Celebrity* offers the first in-depth study into the way that the extra-textual cultural capital of celebrity shaped the poetry of a quartet of Canada's most recognizable writers. In brief, Deshaye's critical conceit—the metaphor of celebrity—is that, in the poetry of Irving Layton, Leonard Cohen, Michael Ondaatje, and Gwendolyn MacEwen, privacy *is* publicity, and that these poets unwittingly forged "a Faustian bargain" by garnering some degree of national celebrity—"the devil granting success in exchange for the soul, the private self." As such, Deshaye deftly shows how the poetic careers of each poet provides a model for understanding how the extra-textual trappings of literary fame can inform and challenge the notion of the private self altogether. Deshaye frames the era of celebrity in Canadian poetry as 1955-1980; he is careful to distinguish celebrity from fame and public from nation, and his opening chapters demonstrate a deep, sophisticated understanding of the ways metaphor, celebrity, and poetry functioned as idiomatic forces in CanLit's golden age. Deshaye crunches numbers and analyzes stats (with plenty of caveats and qualifications) from the CBC, CPI, and *The Globe & Mail* archives in order to establish some frame of reference for quantifying the celebrity of his subjects. His insights on how Layton and Cohen become pseudo-religious, hypermasculine parodies of

themselves in the glare of fame, and how Ondaatje and MacEwen "grandstand" as famous others in their flirtations with celebrity, offer fresh readings of texts that might seem to have already had more than their fair share of critical ink. Like the works by York and Roberts, Deshaye definitively articulates and explains widespread cultural phenomena that we might generally (cynically) understand from our ivory towers, but cannot quantify; the result is a book that can and will act as a critical touchstone as celebrity continues to evolve and involve itself in the "literariness" and visibility of texts.

Peacock Blue collects the complete poetry of Phyllis Webb, whose contributions to the kind of celebrity culture Deshaye explores perhaps came more tangibly through her work as co-creator of CBC Radio's long-running program *Ideas* than through her own poems. As a whole, Webb's poetic oeuvre displays a range and formal daring—free verse, sonnets, sestinas, haikus, concrete and sound poems, long poems, found poems, prose poems, ghazals/anti-ghazals—unmatched in Canadian letters. Both the trees and the forest of *Peacock Blue* make indisputably clear that she has been and remains one of our finest, most linguistically sensitive poets.

John F. Hulcoop's introduction takes pains to separate text from biography, but he also lovingly traces Webb's poetic trajectory from the early 1950s by considering the influence of her early socialism, her participation in the 1963 Vancouver Poetry Conference, and the ominous backdrop of Cold War in her poems. Still, he makes clear that the poet has always had a lot to say about the stuff of existence: love, freedom, the quest for mastery or a reliable master (which Hulcoop calls the "central struggle in Webb's life and in her art"), and, in the poet's own words, "shy, succulent (tenured) Professor Death." The poems, presented chronologically according to publication, allow readers to chart Webb's exploration, experimentation, development, and exhaustion of several poetic forms, and perhaps of formalism itself. Consider the ecstasy of the closing lines from 1962's "Poetics against the Angel of Death": "I want to die / writing Haiku / or, better, / long lines, clean and syllabic as knotted bamboo. Yes!" We watch her take on different lyrical voices, experiment with political disinterestedness, and later rage angrily at that same apolitical apathy. What remains constant throughout Webb's work is her seriousness, which mostly appears as a kind of fatalistic resignation masking a more genuine hope or wonder. But she can be wryly, wickedly funny too, like when she exhorts "I speak, therefore I am, / or so I say" ("Self City") or when she notes in "Non Linear" from *Naked Poems*:

> I have given up
> complaining
>
> but nobody
> notices

The volume concludes with forty-nine uncollected or previously unpublished poems from throughout Webb's half-century of poetic practice. Like her published work, they demonstrate remarkable range, from the angsty and lyrical ("Little Lines"), to the whimsically playful ("New Year Message for J. Alfred Prufrock"), to the overtly, satirically political ("How the Indians Got Left Out of the Business of Patriating the Constitution"). *Peacock Blue* should long have a place in any and all CanLit libraries; as Webb predicts (correctly) in her poem "Letters to Margaret Atwood," "I'll leave a legacy of buried verbs, / a tight-mouthed treasure." With a bit of exploratory treasure hunting and critical spadework, *Peacock Blue* will pay staggering dividends to readers and scholars for years to come.

Endings Ad Infinitum: Looking For An End After the End After the End

Scott Feschuk
The Future and Why We Should Avoid It: Killer Robots, The Apocalypse and Other Topics of Mild Concern. Douglas & McIntyre $22.95

Teresa Heffernan
Post-Apocalyptic Culture: Modernism, Postmodernism, and the Twentieth-Century Novel. U of Toronto P $27.95

Reviewed by Niall McArdle

As I write this, the number one film at the box office is a post-apocalyptic adventure story that imagines a ravaged future populated by bandits and marauders in tricked-out vehicles warring over gasoline, and one of the most popular television shows features hordes of flesh-eating "zombies" walking the earth following a worldwide plague-like viral outbreak. The Apocalypse has never been more popular, it seems, which makes Teresa Heffernan's *Post-Apocalyptic Culture* first published in 2008 more timely than ever.

A lively and spirited rereading of some classics of modernist and postmodernist novels, Heffernan's starting point (even that phrase is rendered problematic in the context of a treatise on beginnings, endings, and the possibility of narratives that have neither) is a response to Frank Kermode's thesis that much, if not all of, modern literature is a secular version of the biblical narrative from Genesis to Revelation, and that stories need a traditional beginning, middle, and end: "Endings in fictional narratives," he argues, "are mini-expressions of a faith in a higher order or ultimate pattern that, though it will remain perhaps forever obscure, nevertheless lends a sense of purpose to our existence in the world."

Pointing out that the word *apocalypse* "is literally understood as a revelation or unveiling of the true order," Heffernan argues, "we live in a time after the apocalypse, after the faith in a radically new world, of revelation, of unveiling." What follows is a series of postmodernist readings of twentieth-century literature—works that often came after cataclysmic or pseudo-apocalyptic events (the First World War; the Holocaust; the dissolution of empires). While the usual suspects of postmodern theory make appearances—Derrida, Baudrillard, Foucault—Heffernan acknowledges that "the terms modernist and postmodernist themselves suggest the twentieth-century crisis over teleological narratives precisely because they beg the inevitable question of what can possibly come after the modern or 'after' its after."

The book is divided into four sections: The End, History, Nation, Man; and, in each section, seminal works are given close readings. William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* and Don DeLillo's *White Noise* are examined in terms of how they treat the notion of "an ending." Modernists posited the idea of an end as impossible, and "open-endedness" in narrative form became standard (think of the endless circularity of Joyce's *Finnegans Wake.*) Faulkner was dissatisfied with his classic *The Sound and the Fury*, calling it his "most spectacular failure" precisely because he felt the story was incomplete. DeLillo's *White Noise* is set in a post-nuclear America where the hero is bombarded with images of unreality through TV and advertising—the white noise of the title—which leads to a classic postmodern ambiguity about what is real and what is fake, and finds an end of sorts in the authenticity of Nazi Germany.

Heffernan also gives post-apocalyptic analyses of Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier*, D. H. Lawrence's *Apocalypse* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* ("sex in the modern world, Lawrence suggests, has become nothing more than a commodity"), E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India*, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, Toni

Morrison's *Beloved* (the heroine of which disrupts storytelling because "even as she feeds on narrative, her story cannot be accommodated by narrative conventions"), and Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus*.

If Heffernan sees a world in which "there is no functioning symbolic code or underlying universal order that can be reflected in art," a place "that cannot be righted because there is no right," then it's best that nobody tell Scott Feschuk. The *Maclean's* humorist is a postmodern version of a nineteenth-century Luddite: he's terrified of the future; he knows it's already here; and he's miserable (in part because *The Future* as he imagined it as a child has not come to pass—he still has no flying car.)

His very funny, eminently readable *The Future and Why We Should Avoid It* offers several reasons why we should be concerned with advances in technology and what the consequences might be if they go unchecked (mainly that we will be sold ever-refined version of products we don't really need). Feschuk observes: "Because of the human imagination, the future will always amaze. Because of every other aspect of humanity, the future will always disappoint."

Covering topics as diverse as health, death, vacations, and killer robots, Feschuk casts a sardonic eye on the intricacies of the postmodern world (for an ostensibly comic work, Feschuk has done an awful lot of research, even if that research consists of Internet searches for sex dolls). As a sign of just how accelerated our culture has become, one of the book's early targets, Google Glass (or "dork monocles"), has already become defunct.

Adaptation/Translation/ Intermediation

Daniel Fischlin, ed.
Outerspeares: Shakespeare, Intermedia, and the Limits of Adaptation. U of Toronto P $34.95

Kathy Mezei, Sherry Simon, and Luise von Flotow, eds.
Translation Effects: The Shaping of Modern Canadian Culture. McGill-Queen's UP $39.95

Reviewed by Alana Fletcher

Daniel Fischlin and the contributors to *Outerspeares* use Eric Vos' concept of "intermedia"—those "artistic phenomena that appear either to fall between established categories [of media] or to fuse their criteria"—to examine adaptations of Shakespeare's works in a range of cultural forms. *Outerspeares* is written from a Canadian perspective and privileges Canadian adaptations, though not with the nationalist concern of Brydon and Makaryk's *A World Elsewhere* (2002), for which both Fischlin and contributor Mark Fortier also wrote. The collection addresses a wider range of media than previous volumes on adapting Shakespeare, using the concept of intermedia to describe both media-to-media transpositions (play text to film, to Twitter feed, or to object) and the multiple-media nature of many of these adaptations.

The volume is divided into four parts: the first includes pieces on Shakespeare in new media; the second is on film adaptation; the third section concerns TV, radio, popular music, and theatre adaptation; and the fourth section, "The Limits of Adaptation," explores community theatre and the Shakescrafting movement and ends with a short meditation by Fortier on what is beyond adaptation. In addition to this smart conclusion, which suggests three unlikely alternatives to adaptation—the unmitigated newness, total static, or absolute oblivion of a work—other standout contributions

include the interview by Fischlin and Jessica Riley with director Tom Magill about *Mickey B*, Magill's 2007 film adaptation of *Macbeth* set in a Northern Ireland prison and cast with inmates. Another high point is Sujata Iyengar's piece on "Shakescraft," the production of consumer objects inspired by Shakespeare. Her explanation of how remaindered editions of Shakespeare are revived in these crafts recalls the point made by Christy Desmet about the way YouTube mashups disrupt the chronological concept of cultural capital that is "one of the tacit assumptions of appropriation studies": in these cases, the value of Shakespeare derives from the currency of handmade crafts and popular shows, and not the other way around. There is little left unaddressed in Fischlin's collection, though I found its insistence that "intermediality" also connotes cultural transposition disappointing; the term could be much more powerful if confined to media-related aspects of adaptation.

Kathy Mezei, Sherry Simon, and Luise von Flotow's *Translation Effects* "starts from the ubiquitous nature of translation in Canada, and explores events that mark the presence as well as the effects of this activity." This collection is comprised of thirty-two brief articles, each examining a particular "event" of translation under a journalistic "headline." The shortness of contributions leaves little room for complexity; instead, pieces describe a particular instance of translation with the conclusion that "this was a significant translation event." Rather than a collection of positional essays, *Translation Effects* is thus a kind of encyclopedia of significant translation events in Canada. Given this style, the standout contributions here are those that succinctly describe how a given act of translation was undertaken and identify its significance in shaping Canadian culture. Rebecca Margolis's essay on the 1992 translation of Michel Tremblay's *Les Belles-soeurs* into Yiddish provides a clear delineation of the translation's contribution to "intercultural dialogue" or "rapprochement" between Jewish and French Quebecers. A number of contributions pinpoint instances of political translation via linguistic translation: Brian Mossop's delineation of the way self-empowering rhetoric was translated into the gay rights movement in Germany's Weimar Republic from a socialist context and then from the Weimar movement to Toronto's in the 1970s, for example, is clear and insightful (and novel in a collection with no other German-language content).

The volume is divided into five sections: Translating Media and the Arts; Translating Politics; Translating Poetry, Fiction, Essays; Translating Drama; and Performing Translation. These divisions seem somewhat unsatisfactory; the section on "Translating Politics" concerns only French-English issues, which is strange given the highly-charged politics of translations between other languages—for instance, between Indigenous languages and English, to which contributions by David Gaertner and Sophie McCall (in a recycled version of a 2003 article) attest. The collection could perhaps have been better served with two broader categories—Political and Socio-Cultural Translation, on the one hand, and Textual Translation, on the other. This would have allowed contributions on specific linguistic acts of translation to converse while gathering together contributions treating translation more metaphorically, as a shift from one context to another—that is, more as adaptation.

This question of where translation ends and adaptation begins unavoidably emerges when these two collections are read together. Both translation and adaptation concern movement from source to target contexts and both bring to the fore the political and cultural issues that attend such movement. In my own view, the lens of "adaptation" seems to place more weight

on cultural, generic, and media-related shifts, while "translation" takes language as its starting point. The resistance of these categories to easy definition, however, is part of the appeal of both *Outerspeares* and *Translation Effects*, in which various interpretations of each concept collide.

Collective Grievances

ryan fitzpatrick
Fortified Castles. Talonbooks $16.95

Nikki Reimer
Downverse. Talonbooks $16.95

Reviewed by Eric Schmaltz

Amid austerity, rampant racism, trans- and homophobia, economic precarity, and political failures, it is hard to suggest that our modern conditions are anything other than bleak. This review will briefly identify some of the ways that these two authors have developed immersive writing strategies that reflect and respond to this turbulent landscape, where despondence and cynicism reign amid a noise of hashtags, commentary, and inflated personalities.

Downverse (2014), Nikki Reimer's second full-length collection of poems, is both humorous and sharply critical. Reimer immerses her writing within the conditions of millennials—a generation of supposedly disappointed and disenfranchised persons faced with social, economic, and political uncertainty. Employing tactics of erasure, collage, and unconventional typography, *Downverse* intervenes into and reconfigures the linguistic materials of new media to work through these issues in a way that is reflective of the disjunctive information age, but also critical of the conditions that come with it. The opening poem, "Prorogue," intimates the angst of the collection through a series of negative statements such as "Not shop not fuck / Not medicate not cry / Not deny not distract," effectively articulating the sense of stasis that overwhelms the millennial generation. The following poems variously speak to this seemingly insurmountable situation. For example, "television vs. the real" blends the language of psychoanalytic discourse and tvtropes.org to identify the often conflicting and impossible advice offered by TV personalities, while "insurance outcomes" uses numerical facts to show the ways in which a body and its parts are reduced to capital by a flawed system. Both a lament and an expression of frustration, *Downverse* perfectly captures the cynicism of a generation, but also represents a desire to find a pathway out of these mired conditions.

In contrast to the noisy and visually disjunctive *Downverse*, ryan fitzpatrick's *Fortified Castles* (2014) is a strikingly balanced work that is broken into three sections "21st Century Monsters," "Fortified Castles," and "Friendship is Magic." The poems in the first and last sections are composed in couplets while each of the poems of the middle section comprise twelve lines each. This compositional symmetry is distinct from *Downverse* yet the two share much in common—mainly, their shared interest in grievance. Minus the visual clutter of informational realms, fitzpatrick writes from within egocentric spheres, enraptured with selfies and branded personalities—indeed, our own fortified castles—to create paratactic lyric collages, adequately described in "I'm Through With You" as "reams and reams of falling apart." Though at times the text seems to mock this culture, there is a strong undercurrent of hope. At the core of *Fortified Castles* is a question regarding the possibilities of cooperative action in the face of failures to collectively mobilize among interfaces and networks that are designed for singularity and isolation. In "Passive Recreation" the text articulates responsive mechanisms to these conditions: "How can we develop trails in the watershed? We need to pack even tighter. We need to

create a density." In these tightly formulated poems, fitzpatrick uses poetry to collect the disparate sentiments of a divided people to demonstrate that, as an epigraph notes, "All our grievances are connected" and it is from here that we must begin to work.

Friends Talking Poetry

ryan fitzpatrick and Jonathan Ball, eds. *Why Poetry Sucks: An Anthology of Humourous Experimental Canadian Poetry in English Written By Canadians for Canadians (or American Bodysnatchers) in the Early Years of the 21st Century with an Overly Long and Not That Clever Subtitle the Publisher Rightly Refused to Put On the Cover.* Insomniac $19.95

Earle Birney and Al Purdy; Nicholas Bradley, ed. *We Go Far Back in Time: The Letters of Earle Birney and Al Purdy, 1947-1987.* Harbour $39.95

Laurence Hutchman, ed. *In the Writers' Words: Conversations with Eight Poets.* Guernica $20.00

Reviewed by Owen Percy

The letters between poets Earle Birney and Al Purdy collected in *We Go Far Back in Time* chart a lengthy friendship between two CanLit giants, and offer a backstage glimpse of two recognizably literary lives. Purdy's early letters to Birney are marked with a self-conscious formality and anxiety; he first writes to "Mr. Birney" as "Alfred W. Purdy," before becoming "Al Purdy," and finally in 1964, "Al" (long after Birney had become "Earle"). The early, discernable aesthetic tension between the two is shattered by a hilarious drunken 1955 missive penned by Purdy and a friend alternately praising and lambasting the notoriously touchy Birney. Birney's response, excusing the drunken gall and inviting Purdy to lunch, sets the tone for the gracious and forgiving friendship that was to unfold over the next half century.

As the poets warm to one another (and as Purdy essentially *becomes* a poet throughout the 1950s) the letters begin to take on greater substance and intimacy. They write of love and sex and aging and travel, but also of what editor Nicholas Bradley calls the "business" of poetry—publishing, grants, festivals, and tours—through the mid-twentieth century. These letters show these poets in their respective primes as they exchange drafts of poems and variously offer, take, and leave advice on each other's work. They gossip and kibitz about writers they love, loathe, or can't agree on, and navigate the uncertain waters of living a life in service of their art. The poets are versions of their public selves here, but often much more too; as Bradley puts it, in the letters Birney is "laconic and often guarded," revealing his petty jealousies, his vulnerability to criticism, and his substantial ego, whereas Purdy is "digressive and anecdotal," laying bare his self-doubt, stubbornness, and, well, substantial ego. What becomes clear throughout several letters (performances as they might be) is the mire of struggle and satisfaction the writing life afforded each. Even as Purdy's reputation begins to eclipse Birney's in the 1970s (and both seem to know it), Purdy still finds cause to ask advice about how to write, why to write, and what to wear to receive his Order of Canada (Birney's response: "Only poetaster finks wear monkey suits & medals—be Al Purdy for christ's sake.")

Bradley notes that this volume, at 479 pages, contains most but not all of the correspondence, and that he has "silently corrected" some typographical and spelling mistakes and omitted parts of some letters that contain sensitive medical information or when "the poets express views that seem to me gratuitously offensive, tactless, or cruel about people who are not public figures." Whatever one thinks of this decision, this excellent volume—the first significant publication of Birney's letters and the latest in the long line of Purdy's—will prove as

valuable to scholars as it will to fervent devotees eager to pull back the curtain on two giant poetic personas.

Like Bradley, poet and professor Laurence Hutchman performs a great service to Canadian letters with the publication of *In the Writers' Words*, a series of interviews he conducted between 1991 and 2003 with eight poets who shaped Canadian verse in the twentieth century. Hutchman proves to be the best kind of interviewer, intimately familiar with and appreciative of the work of his subjects, and spare but generative in his questions. His conversations with Ralph Gustafson, George Johnston, Fred Cogswell, P. K. Page, Louis Dudek, Purdy, Anne Szumigalski, and James Reaney are all very different in tone and pacing, but share a sense of generosity and openness. Interestingly, most interviewees mention Yeats, Blake, and Housman as influences. The names Rilke, Eliot, and Wordsworth pop up regularly (for better or for worse) and many of the interviewees are, strangely, in the process of reading Ahkmatova around the time Hutchman darkens their door. This metaphor is not accidental: Hutchman interviews all but Reaney in their own homes, which seems to set the poets, and us, at ease as we listen in on their relatively uninhibited exchanges. In the interviews, there is a general malaise about the encroachment of technology on literature (Johnston asks not to be tape recorded because it creates an "artificial effect"), a host of assertions about what is most essential or difficult about writing a good poem (Gustafson: "love and a sense of comedy"; Johnston: "anonymity"; Page: "the unreliability of the senses"; Szumigalski: "punctuation"), and a general hatred of academic literary theory and criticism (Dudek: "[t]he plain synonym for deconstruction is destruction"). As such, there are many revelations in *In the Writers' Words*, even if many seem familiar. At its best the book does what good poetry itself does: allows us to understand anew that which we thought we already knew.

One general rule of comedy is that if a joke requires an explication in order to be funny, it's not really that funny. But Jonathan Ball and ryan fitzpatrick, editors of *Why Poetry Sucks*, will be first to tell you that the hallmark of Canada's "experimental" poetry is that it throws the general rules out the window. In the introduction to this new anthology, the editors do a lot of explicatory set up, but the poems themselves deliver inconsistent punch lines. The editors (both of whom, along with seventeen of the forty-three contributors, have studied and/or worked in the English Department at the University of Calgary) begin with a theory-heavy introduction that wonders, "What sucks about poetry? The short answer is the words, and their combinations." They go on to posit, after Victor Shklovsky, that, like comedy, poetry relies on defamiliarization as its basic gesture. The joke of most of the poems seems to be confronting strawman readers.

In defending the hilarity of this kind of conceptualism in their preamble to derek beaulieu's poems, the editors assert that "the concepts involved are often obvious jokes that its critics just don't 'get.'" Truer words might not be found in *Why Poetry Sucks*. The funniest poems in the anthology are those by Annharte, David McGimpsey, Ian Williams, Jon Paul Fiorentino, Kathryn Mockler, and Dina Del Bucchia; but they also tend to be the least recognizably "experimental" in that they do not require anything outside of themselves to be funny, even though each section in the collection is graced with a biographical and explanatory note contextualizing why and how the poems that follow are humorous. We learn, for example, that what we are about to read "produces a static snow between the guffawing and weeping that accompanies cultural recognition," or that a contributor's dark poems "don't simply parody the

primness of poetry through a fusion of high and low culture" because the poet's "black jokes and bad taste both puncture and secure the tragic stance." Suffice it to say that laughter is visceral and involuntary; applause, on the other hand, is deliberate. *Why Poetry Sucks* seems more concerned with how it's funny than how funny it is.

'Disfluent' Reading

Cathy Ford
Flowers We Will Never Know the Names Of. Mother Tongue $18.95

Trish Salah
Lyric Sexology Vol 1. Roof $15.95

Rachel Zolf
Janey's Arcadia. Coach House $17.95

Reviewed by Linda M. Morra

By coincidence, I began reading Cathy Ford's *Flowers We Will Never Know the Names Of* on December 6, 2014. A long poem that commemorates the lives of the women who died at L'École Polytechnique, the text is written within the tradition of the flower-celebrating arts; specifically, Ford makes reference to the stories of Turkish and Arabian women who "sent letters to one another using flowers, and their meanings, in message bouquets" about "artistry, support, love, celebration, sorrow, warning." So it is that, within her work, she invokes a variety of flowers and their associations to pay tribute to the fourteen women who lost their lives over a decade ago in the Montreal Massacre.

The shape of the poem largely follows an alphabetical format that is accompanied by illustrations and that relies on alliterative and floral associations to reflect on, mourn, and celebrate the lives of these fourteen women. Readers are invited to make links between the flowers depicted and their properties and significations in order to build meaning into the text—as, for instance, Ford does with the reference to Georgia O'Keefe's paintings in section "F." She argues that these associations are necessary to work out the "unfathomable," to develop a "new sense of language" and "a new way of seeing," and to apprehend the "inexcusable, the indefensible." These efforts, although noteworthy, are only limited in success because she does not have consistent command of her poetic technique. Sometimes, the conflation of images seems to generate confusion: how do "words strangle up out of the earth," "like the first tulip shards in December?" Also, several poetic lines do not live up to this "new way of seeing": "cut down in your prime, before your time" is a poetic line that is inadequate to the purpose, even clichéd.

If Ford's work is a sorrowful rendering of the loss of innocence, Rachel Zolf's *Janey's Arcadia* is a gritty, vituperative account of the violence associated with colonial practices, the systemic violence inflicted against the Indigenous, and the appropriation of their territories. Writing against the grain of Canadian pastoral mythologies, Zolf undercuts depictions of Canada as not "exactly a Utopia, Ltd." She opens with Janey, a "fracked-up, mutant (cyborg?) squatter progeny" who makes her way in "focked-up arcadia," and then shifts to other "infallible settlers." She captures the clash of cultures and intermingling discourses: "Indigns" and "Chrispmas" are indicators of that collision, especially the means by which Indigenous nations are approached as "potential" for further exploitation. She juxtaposes the lexicon of Christian conversion and economics in ways that are appropriate but disturbing: if the "persona of Chrispmas" is shared "with every / young person within our target group," the "aboriginal youth community" as a whole is characterized as a "prime area of development."

Zolf's poetic forms and language are sharp and intelligent, both explicit and implicit in terms of how the process of colonization was underwritten by economic interests and socio-political concerns that

served only "The Grab of Canada." She eschews poetic and moral effusions—and to great effect: "dextermination" and "Gord bless / our land" are evocative of the slipperiness of language (and political intent), of the "hauntological errors" that require what she calls "a kind of disfluent listening" that ultimately reveals the legacies of colonial violence, including the disappearance or deaths of close to 1200 Indigenous women in contemporary Canada.

"[D]isfluent listening" and reading are also required for Trish Salah's *Lyric Sexology: Vol. 1.* Therein, Salah pushes the boundaries of normative values, how "becoming sexes" is, in fact, "so rarely acknowledged, art." Divided into seven chapters, the collection as a whole explores how definitive categories are scripts of a culture that dictate identities and behaviours: "How is it," she asks in chapter five, that "in a man's voice—that of a doctor or a judge—a law has been scrolled / for both the sexes?"

Adopting various incarnations of the figure of Tiresias (Madame Tiresia, as one example), Salah tries to penetrate "all possible and probably worlds" and to undo these scripted formulations. Boundaries that dictate normative intimacies are tested and pushed, and the rehearsal and performance of sexualized identities confronted, as in, respectively, "3 am on Maitland" and "Two Self Portraits." Scintillating poems often emerge from tender moments experienced by the poet's persona who relays the challenge of "walking between fissure." Those challenges are addressed with a compassion that ultimately reminds us that "we have such small distances between our skins."

Couper la tête pour un navet?

Dominique Fortier et Nicolas Dickner
Révolutions. Éditions Alto 32,95 $

Compte rendu par François-Emmanuël Boucher

Les problèmes sous-jacents à la refondation traversent le XVIII[e] siècle. Oser penser par soi-même, sortir de sa minorité, reconfigurer la temporalité historique et la destinée de l'homme selon des critères qui ne trouveraient plus leur ultime appui dans la verticalité des antiques révélations : voilà ce que prétendait définir le principe des Lumières. Comment alors s'y prendre pour faire table rase et brûler les ponts avec le passé religieux honni et désespérant afin de reconfigurer la morale, le droit, l'ordre économique et social selon des principes humains, beaucoup plus humains que les précédents, de sorte que tout esprit sain et rassis pourrait les accepter comme allant de soi tant ils ne feraient qu'un avec lui-même?

C'est à l'une des illustrations de cette refondation que s'intéresse l'extraordinaire livre de Fortier et de Dickner, soit « le calendrier révolutionnaire, en usage de 1793 à 1806 [qui] prétendait mettre un terme au règne des saints et des saintes qui peuplaient le calendrier grégorien, pour marquer les jours au sceau des plantes, d'animaux, et d'outils davantage en accord avec les vertus républicaines ». Le défi de ce projet littéraire singulier consiste alors « à écrire tous les jours quelques lignes sur le thème proposé par le calendrier révolutionnaire », autrement dit, à donner un sens, une épaisseur, une signification à ce qui, à la fin du XVIII[e] siècle, incarnait l'une des manifestations les plus spectaculaires de cette rupture définitive tant souhaitée avec le passé. Comment, dès lors, s'enthousiasmer en ce début du XXI[e] siècle pour la nature de la troène, pour la gentiane (« à laquelle je ne parviens pas à m'intéresser »), comment trouver l'inspiration nécessaire lorsqu'on est confronté jour

après jour au lupin, au buglosse, au sénevé, à l'apocyn, au grés (« Je suis zéro inspirée »), au sureau, à l'asaret (« espèce qui me laisse en panne d'inspiration »), à l'ancolie, au serpolet, pendant une année révolutionnaire entière, sans oublier l'existence des sans-culottides dues aux caprices des années bissextiles, le jour de la vertu, du génie, du travail, de l'opinion, des récompenses et de la révolution?

Ce sont les difficultés inhérentes au fait d'écrire deux siècles plus tard sur ce calendrier conçu par André Thouin (« ce *golden boy* de la botanique ») et Fabre d'Églantine (« décapité un 16 germinal, jour de la laitue ») qui font la richesse de cet ouvrage original. À une époque où le fanatisme religieux se propage et hante les civilisations du globe, il semble paradoxalement de plus en plus impossible de s'en remettre à la glorification de l'inventaire du Jardin des plantes pour trouver un sens plus raisonnable à la vie. Cette soi-disant mystique matérialiste qui s'appuie sur le savoir botanique de l'époque est devenue en grande partie impénétrable. Non seulement l'inspiration manque mais, encore, on est las (« Ras le bol de la France rurale ») de tout « ce déluge de plantes entrecoupées de quelques bêtes et de deux ou trois instruments aratoires ou contondants » dont la compréhension ne va plus de soi. Pour effectuer « ce travail de détective », on s'en remet ainsi, faute de mieux, à Wikipédia (« Sur la page anglaise que Wikipédia consacre au salsifis. . . »; « La lecture de Wikipédia permet de constater qu'un certain nombre de personnages de fiction ont porté le nom de Pivoine »), à l'étymologie savante ou à des recettes de cuisine : la tartiflette, le « dîner tout en bœuf », le gruau, la raïta ou encore la soupe aux cerises à l'allemande. « À la fin de l'année, écrit Dominique, nous serons mûrs pour ouvrir une pépinière, un restaurant ou une pharmacie. » C'est pourquoi les passages du livre les plus émouvants ne touchent que très rarement ce calendrier mais se développent à partir de souvenirs (Cap-Rouge, Roberge « une authentique roulotte », mon père ce héros, le chalet, l'enfance, etc.), ou prennent forme grâce à la présence et à la mort d'animaux domestiques, si ce n'est à l'évocation d'un enfant à naître (Zoé). Le calendrier devient un prétexte à une dérive narrative sur un fondement qui apparaît plus solide, qui est peut-être le seul qui reste, l'intimité du narrateur ou de la narratrice. Fait « par un poète médiocre », ce calendrier républicain devient, au mieux, un « foutoir » qui offre une « image faussement universelle », « enracinée dans l'imagerie empaillée du 5e arrondissement », un tout finalement « très parisien ». La Révolution elle-même finit par perdre sa signification progressiste, peuplée qu'elle fut de « forcenés qui s'entreguillotinaient au moindre prétexte ». Elle est, tranche Nicolas en dernier lieu, « digne des purges staliniennes », aussi inacceptable pour ne pas dire incompréhensible que le calendrier qu'elle produisit et imposa à grands coups de guillotines. C'est sans doute l'une des explications possibles du titre au pluriel : révolution d'une année, révolution politique, révolution du calendrier, mais aussi révolution face à la compréhension de ce désormais lointain passé historique.

Conducting Unreliable Narrators

Steven Galloway
The Confabulist. Knopf Canada $29.95

Sean Michaels
Us Conductors. Random House $24.95

Reviewed by Joel Martineau

Imagine the challenge that Steven Galloway faced in planning a novel to succeed the sublime *The Cellist of Sarajevo* (2008). In *The Confabulist* he takes Harry Houdini (1874-1926) as his subject and invents a layered narrative structure to link Houdini's latter years to current times. The novel

begins with a first-person narrator seeing a doctor, who warns him, "Mr. Strauss . . . you will lose your mind. . . . It is a degenerative physiological condition, and there isn't anything at this time that can be done about it." Minutes later Martin Strauss sits outside the hospital and decides that if he soon "won't remember" his life he should tell "what has happened." He becomes the confabulist of the novel's title, destined—as *Webster's* defines—"to fill in gaps in memory by fabrication." The preface concludes with Strauss proclaiming, "I didn't just kill Harry Houdini. I killed him twice."

In an abrupt shift, an omniscient narrator then relates a lengthy chapter that introduces Houdini in 1897, age twenty-three, as an aspiring but little heralded performer. The novel will contain three further major chapters describing Houdini attracting thousands during a European tour in 1904, caught in the vice of international espionage in 1918, and lecturing against charlatan spiritualists and their promoters (especially Sir Arthur Conan Doyle) in 1926. Interspersed among these foci on Houdini are nine shorter chapters in which Strauss describes his life-long fascination with Houdini. He first reveals his role as the Montreal university student who challenged Houdini's boast about steely stomach muscles by punching the magician (a blow actually inflicted by J. Gordon Whitehead). Houdini refused medical attention, continued his tour, and died a few days later in Detroit due to a ruptured appendix, perhaps caused by the punch. Strauss believes that his act precipitated Houdini's death and he bolts—probably from shame, perhaps from fear of illusory avenging forces. He becomes a friendless man on the run who dreams of communicating with Houdini's daughter. While Strauss studies magic and memory, and thus capably voices Galloway's interests, his narrative reconstruction becomes increasingly arcane as the novel progresses. A pulpy noir shootout in which Strauss kills Houdini for the second time fails to exorcise his ghost and makes for an underwhelming conclusion to *The Confabulist*.

Sean Michaels uses a simpler structure in *Us Conductors*. First-person narrator Léon Theremin is locked in a cabin on board the vessel *Stary Bolshevik*, writing to Clara Rockmore, née Reisenberg, whom he has loved without reciprocation from the moment they met. It is 1938, and shadowy figures have spirited Theremin (1896-1993) from his New York residence and are returning him to his Russian homeland after eleven years during which he was slipped "like a hand into America's industrial pocket." The letter comprises Part One of the novel and allows Michaels to reconstruct Theremin's life to that point. Michaels sketches Theremin's emergence as an inventor during the turmoil in Russia as Lenin yielded to Stalin, his ascendance to stardom during the go-go 1920s when the musical instrument (precursor to the Moog synthesizer) that bears his name became faddish in America, and his increasing entanglement in a web of deceit spun by his clandestine Russian "handlers." Professionally and artistically brilliant, handsome and born to dance, Theremin cuts a dashing figure. The wealthy and the powerful flock to him, but he seldom wavers from his infatuation with Clara, a Lithuanian émigré to America. She masters the theremin and adores him as her teacher, but never returns his love. He is a fallible man, worthy of our empathy as the *Stary Bolshevik* returns him to an uncertain future in Stalinist Russia.

Part Two plunges us into the Gulag. Lev Sergeyvich Termin, as he is known in Russia, has become prisoner L-890 in Marenko, a work camp for scientists situated outside Moscow—but only after being declared an enemy of the state and sentenced to work in the Kolyma gold mines, in effect a death sentence. There he uses his acute intelligence to win the attention of the

prison commandant, to form an orchestra, and to improve productivity so dramatically that he is reassigned to the benign Marenko prison so that the state can take advantage of his inventive abilities, and, where he updates his personal history in a second letter to Clara. *Us Conductors* allows a remarkable man to tell his life story, all the while foregrounding his gallant commitment to his imagined love.

Sublimations variables

Karoline Georges
Variations endogènes. Alto 20,95 $

Compte rendu par Adrien Rannaud

Artiste multidisciplinaire, Karoline Georges a fait de la sublimation le matériau central de ses productions vidéographiques, numériques, photographiques et littéraires. Elle n'en déroge pas dans son récent recueil de nouvelles, *Variations endogènes* (2014). Annoncé par une couverture botanico-sexuelle — un anthurium très suggestif —, ce « cabinet des perversités » (quatrième de couverture) propose quatorze tableaux où violence sexuelle et désirs morbides servent une tentative de réflexion générale sur le pouvoir de la fiction sur nos sens. Karoline Georges a fait le choix de n'introduire ses nouvelles que par des titres courts et polysémiques : « la victime », « l'amour », « la promenade », etc. Mais de quel « amour » parle-t-on? Dans la nouvelle du même nom, de quel « lieu » s'agit-il? Dans le sillage de ces titres ambivalents, les nouvelles de *Variations endogènes* respectent un certain art du renversement de situation et de la « chute ». Dans « L'Amour », un homme raconte sa passion singulière pour Laura qui n'est autre, on l'apprend à la fin, qu'une poupée gonflable. L'ensemble des nouvelles s'appuie sur une chute similaire où le sublime devient grotesque, et inversement. *Variations endogènes* oscille constamment entre ces deux pôles, selon un rythme à la fois agréable et lassant.

Les sujets privilégiés de Karoline Georges? L'acte sexuel, le meurtre ou le suicide, le rêve d'être un autre (ou d'être soi), et l'amour parfois inaccessible, parfois hors-norme. Les nouvelles du recueil pourraient être qualifiées de « glauques ». On y meurt, on y nait, on se bat, on se brûle aux cigarettes. Les quatre personnes âgées de « La Promenade » se vautrent dans une indécence dont un chien devient, malgré lui, le complice et la victime. Dans « Le Plafond », on suit le parcours de vie d'une vieille femme qui s'apprête à mourir, presque seule. La mort, également, domine la nouvelle « La Communion » : cette fois, il s'agit d'un fœtus qui raconte le suicide de sa mère, et par conséquent, sa propre mort. Les descriptions et les récits se suivent, amusent et agacent. La propension des personnages à vouloir mourir ou/et à être pris en flagrant délit d'acte sexuel est grande, comme s'ils cherchaient à assouvir un impossible besoin d'être. Dans l'univers de Karoline Georges, chacun est coupable de vice, tous sont victimes du désir des autres, et l'envie d'en finir n'est jamais loin.

On s'amuse parfois, mais on sort surtout un peu moribond de ce cabinet des perversités. Dans cette tentative de sublimation d'un sexe, d'une envie indésirable ou d'un homicide, on sent la facilité et l'exagération. Que comprendre aux overdoses d'images de sang et de sperme, que cachent-elles? Dans « L'Incitation », Pierre assiste au suicide de Claire. Les derniers échanges sont marqués par une banalité qui fait rapidement oublier la nouvelle en question. Peut-être est-ce justement ce souci du banal qui fait l'intérêt de ce texte, et plus largement de *Variations endogènes*. Derrière l'excès se trouve l'ordinaire.

La lecture du livre s'achève par une nouvelle bien étrange. Dans « L'Ordre du jour », l'auteure se livre, par le biais d'une assemblée imaginaire, à un questionnement naïf sur le monde. Cette séquence métaphorique

et politique contraste nettement avec le réalisme cru et le dilettantisme du reste du recueil. Décevant, ce dernier tableau vient clore de façon abrupte la lecture d'un livre à la qualité variable, tant par les sujets que par l'art de la nouvelle que déploie Karoline Georges.

Quand la fiction révèle l'histoire et ses fabrications

Louis Hamelin
Fabrications. Essai sur la fiction et l'histoire.
PUM 24,95 $

Compte rendu par Francis Langevin

L'essai de Louis Hamelin est un codicille à son roman *La Constellation du lynx*, qu'il vient enrichir d'un questionnement sur le roman, la fiction et l'histoire. S'y retrouvent au surplus des réflexions sur les cellules Chénier et Libération du FLQ, et sur le rôle inductif qu'auraient joué les autorités en amont et durant la crise d'Octobre. Il s'agit d'une lecture suave et parfois ironique qui, à l'instar de la *Constellation*, refuse le monologisme. *Fabrications* propose en effet une séduisante mosaïque argumentative faite de plusieurs voix aux tons justes : un Hamelin empirique; un Hamelin fictionnel qui dialogue avec Samuel Nihilo, son alter ego anagrammatique venu du monde romanesque; des citations tirées du roman; des archives déjà citées dans la fiction et retransplantées dans le réel; des conversations avec des sources anonymisées plus vraies que vives; autant d'artéfacts rebrassés à la faveur d'une mise en lumière de la posture herméneutique du romancier historien. *La Constellation* serait donc « un roman heuristique », une fiction qui aide à organiser l'entropie, mais qui permet surtout, en vertu de la puissance d'évocation du récit et de la vraisemblance romanesque, de se dégager des crispations des parties prenantes qui, depuis 1970, et de l'avis de plusieurs, produisent des récits qui ne tiennent pas toujours la route.

La multiplication des points de vue n'est pas ici un exercice de style. Comme dans *La Constellation*, Hamelin y réfléchit à partir des postures du romancier (Tolstoï et Mailer), de l'historien-témoin-acteur (Alberto Franceschini), et l'oppose au monologue de l'acteur-témoin-source (Francis Simard ou Mario Moretti). L'essayiste discute ces postures en s'intéressant à la place qu'elles réservent aux subjectivités individuelle et collective, et à la crédibilité qu'on devrait leur accorder. Pour Hamelin, il s'agit d'adopter une méthodologie susceptible de rendre compte d'une masse considérable d'information, de témoignages, de brefs de procès, d'articles de journaux, d'enquêtes, de fictions, de confessions, de rumeurs, sans parler d'une épaisse sédimentation « dans notre mythologie nationale moderne » . . . Cela voulait aussi dire faire appel aux facultés d'empathie du romancier envers sa culture, à son imaginaire (ce dont parle Mailer), à ses capacités de naviguer dans un univers où se multiplient « des significations et des points de vue » (façon Franceschini), mais en usant du rasoir d'Occam afin de trancher, pour ainsi dire. Hamelin laisse trois belles traces bien nettes qui permettent de décoder *La Constellation du lynx* et qui posent sur nouveaux frais la question de « l'instrumentalisation de la violence terroriste à des fins de consolidation du pouvoir » au Québec dans les années 1960-70 : 1) Pierre Laporte serait mort accidentellement; 2) Le FLQ était infiltré, et on a permis, voire facilité, sa radicalisation; 3) Pierre Laporte aurait pu être sauvé par les autorités.

Trace 1) Laporte serait mort accidentellement lors d'une tentative de « déplacement automobile avorté ». Ceci prouve, affirme le personnage Hamelin, « la non-préméditation d'un homicide qui sera ensuite, dans un pathétique effort de transmutation du non-sens en sens, pour tenter de sauver la

face de ces tueurs malgré eux devant l'histoire, présenté comme une exécution. Un mensonge de proportions historiques que le Québec, à travers les silences des papis du FLQ et les œillères des autres, continue de se raconter. »

Trace 2) On a, sinon encouragé, du moins laissé se faire la radicalisation des cellules Chénier et Libération du FLQ, notamment en les infiltrant, ce qui fait dire au personnage Hamelin : « on n'a pas envoyé l'armée parce que deux personnes ont été kidnappées, on a permis que deux personnes soient kidnappées pour pouvoir envoyer l'armée ».

Trace 3) Ici, ce ne semble pas être le personnage Hamelin qui prend la parole : « Les autorités avaient eu la possibilité de le secourir [Laporte], mais ensanglanter les mains d'un mouvement révolutionnaire de gauche, le disqualifiant ainsi à jamais aux yeux d'une population de prime abord sympathique à une partie de ses revendications, représentait un objectif plus souhaitable que la survie personnelle d'un homme politique local, de surcroît compromis par les liens de son appareil électoral avec le crime organisé. » Un accident? « Le nœud de l'affaire, c'est qu'on permit à cet incident d'arriver. »

Canadian War Stories

Ross Hebb
Letters Home: Maritimers and the Great War, 1914-1918. Nimbus $17.95

Alistair MacLeod
Remembrance: A Story. McClelland & Stewart $19.95

Noah Richler
What We Talk about When We Talk about War. Goose Lane $24.95

Reviewed by Alicia Fahey

The three texts under consideration deal with the correlation between Canadian identity and Canada's participation in three wars. Ross Hebb's *Letters Home: Maritimers and the Great War, 1914-1918* chronicles the First World War through letters that enlisted men wrote and sent home to their families. Alistair MacLeod's *Remembrance* tells a fictional story about the transgenerational effects of the Second World War on three men from Cape Breton. Noah Richler's *What We Talk about When We Talk about War* explains how and why the Afghanistan War complicated Canada's peacekeeping identity.

The letters in Hebb's book, compiled from public archives and private collections, are arranged chronologically into five sections: In Canada; In England; France and Belgium; The Reality of War; and The End Has Come. Hebb's intention is not "to pass judgment with the advantage of hindsight," but rather to "understand our own past as it was understood and experienced by our people at the time." Although the focus on letters of enlisted men excludes the perspectives of women, Hebb does observe that women (mothers, in particular) tended to be the primary recipients of the letters; he reasons that this pattern reflects the integral role of women on the home front during times of war and peace. *Letters Home* is a noteworthy endeavour that preserves the content of primary historical documents at risk of being lost due to lack of space and funding in public repositories. Hebb's annotations and introductory notes to each section are useful, although he does occasionally delve into the rhetoric of what Paul Fussell has called "high diction"; Hebb's framing of the letters with words such as "sacrifice" and "courage" are reminiscent of the romantic point of view that frequently dominates narratives about the First World War and its legacy.

In *Remembrance*, MacLeod complicates romantic depictions of war. The story takes place on Remembrance Day at twilight (a time that signifies transition and ambiguity) and traces the transmission of trauma and

memory experienced by Second World War veteran David MacDonald to two subsequent generations of family members, also named David MacDonald. *Remembrance* is replete with repetition, imitating the phenomenon of repetition compulsion often associated with trauma. The recurring motif of headlights through the trees (an image that facilitates connections between the home front and the battlefield), the reiteration of certain phrases ("he remembered," "how the war changed everything"), and the habitual behaviours associated with the ritual of the Remembrance Day ceremony are some examples of the ways in which traumatic memory of the war is manifested in the story. The message of this poignant narrative is that the effects of war are not limited to the battlefield; they continue to be perpetuated across the boundaries of time and space.

Richler also traverses the boundaries of time and space in his thoroughly researched and polemical non-fiction *What We Talk about When We Talk about War.* Drawing on myriad sources, including newspapers, journals, television broadcasts, fiction, non-fiction, poetry, statistics, reports, video games, websites, and the Bible, Richler traces the ways in which war has shaped Canadian identity. He argues that while the two World Wars laid the foundation for Canada's reputation as peacekeepers—a reputation that became prevalent in the Lester Pearson era and dominated the Canadian consciousness for fifty years following—public support of the war in Afghanistan required a reworking of the peacekeeping narrative. The new narrative, according to Richler, adopted the form of the epic, which, "reduc[es] the world to a dichotomy of black and white, a world peopled by heroes and villains in which good and evil are absolutes." The epic narrative of Canada's participation in Afghanistan, Richler contends, has resulted in the militarized version of Canada as a "warrior nation" (an observation corroborated by Ian McKay and Jamie Swift in their 2012 book *Warrior Nation*). The book does, however, end on a hopeful note. In his final chapter, Richler provides a compelling three-part plan that would allow Canada to re-establish its international peacekeeping status.

Taken together, these three texts demonstrate that national identity and personal/private identity are not static concepts; both are constantly evolving and—at least for Canadians—war seems to be inextricably linked to this process.

Je est les autres

Nancy Huston
Bad Girl. Actes Sud 21,99 $

Compte rendu par Anne-Claire Marpeau

Bad Girl de Nancy Huston se présente sous la forme d'un arbre généalogique linéaire. S'y enchaînent de courts chapitres, qui font rarement plus d'une page, semblables à des vignettes dans lesquelles l'écrivaine fait le portrait de ses ancêtres, en remontant jusqu'à ses grands-parents. Ces vignettes font ensuite place au récit de la vie future de Dorrit, l'héroïne autobiographique au nom emprunté à celle d'un roman de Charles Dickens. S'intercale par ailleurs entre le récit du passé et du futur de la petite Dorrit, celui, imaginé, de la grossesse de sa mère. Le texte se finit sur une mise au monde dont au comprend qu'elle est à la fois la naissance d'une petite fille et d'une écrivaine.

Cette structure qui fait alterner récit des autres et récit de soi défend mieux qu'une thèse la conviction au cœur de ce texte, qui semble être que l'autobiographie est intersubjective et intergénérationnelle, ou en d'autres termes, que « je » est les autres, et que les autres font « je ». Ce que confirment les choix stylistiques inhabituels de *Bad Girl* où l'héroïne s'adresse à elle-même à la deuxième personne du singulier (c'était

déjà le cas dans la très belle biographie de Romain Gary par la même auteure) et où le futur récurrent, parfois lourd à la lecture, annonce et prédit le devenir d'une petite fille en écrivaine. Le récit de Nancy Huston est donc une autobiographie d'un genre nouveau qui se concentre sur la généalogie d'une écriture individuelle. Il s'agit pour l'héroïne d'exposer et de comprendre les motifs récurrents de ses écrits — le thème juif, l'avortement ou encore les enfants battus — ainsi que les raisons expliquant son besoin de créer par les mots et par la musique.

Malgré la beauté du texte, l'érudition et l'émotion qui s'en dégagent, on peut reprocher à *Bad Girl* de verser parfois dans l'apitoiement. Surtout, on peut y lire la construction d'une mythologie personnelle qui puise sa source dans le grand Mythe psychanalytique et psychologique de la famille comme explication et prédestination de l'individu. En ce sens, l'épigraphe du livre empruntée à Roland Barthes est une clé de lecture : « Tout ceci doit-être considéré comme dit par un personnage de roman ». C'est bien un personnage qui retrace dans *Bad Girl* ses classes de littérature, qui trouve les raisons de son devenir d'écrivaine dans la vie de ses ancêtres, et qui transforme la suite chronologique des évènements de sa *vie* en un processus logique, en un *destin* intergénérationnel. On peut donc considérer la citation finale comme un ultime geste de sincérité ou bien comme une dénégation dérangeante qui protège l'incomplétude du récit. Car, qu'en est-il des cours de littérature auxquelles Nancy Huston a assisté dans une salle de classe? Des rencontres autres que celle des membres familiaux qui ont certainement aussi forgé son talent et son écriture? De ses lectures fétiches? De la poésie des mots, du plaisir esthétique des textes particuliers qui l'ont faite écrivaine? Bref, si ce récit est l'histoire de la destinée d'une femme de lettres, on peut lui reprocher de manquer de littérature.

War: Secrets and Loss

Keith Inman
The War Poems: Screaming at Heaven.
Black Moss $17.00

Frances Itani
Tell. HarperCollins $22.99

Reviewed by Jan Lermitte

As Neta Gordon recently observed in *Catching the Torch*: *Contemporary Canadian Literary Responses to World War I,* "Most works written since the mid-1990s . . . express a desire to make productive use of the war, even if simply to set ahistorical contemporary ideas—such as belief in duty, justice, or community—into a meaningful context of living history."

Itani and Inman, using two different narrative forms, fit well into the category Gordon describes. Both writers examine the experiences of "ordinary" people in communities in postwar Canada. Itani's novel, *Tell*, describes the lives of those who must adjust to emotional and physical wounds wrought by war, disease, and trauma. She also invites readers to consider the effect of secrets or loss on families. Likewise, Inman situates his poetry in the common experiences of people whose lives have been touched by war—not just World War I, however—but two hundred years of war which have affected Canadians, beginning with the War of 1812 and concluding with Canada's peacekeeping efforts.

The War Poems: Screaming at Heaven is Inman's first trade poetry book. His poems, some of which have appeared in literary journals, experiment with form, dialogue, irony, and humour. Inman has said he wanted to look at the lives of those who funded the war through taxes and family. His domestic subjects are revealed through powerful, evocative images, and rhythmic, alliterative language. All the poems begin with a short epigraph that sets the narrative that follows in the context of world conflict,

popular culture, artistic representation, important inventions and historical events. Yet they also describe the private lives of citizens, such as Albertha, who "liked her second beer / better than the first," and Jack, the veteran who sends his wife's "cracked / and re-glued china figurines . . . into tragic flight."

Inman's collection effectively explores universal questions about human suffering and injustice through both its title and content. The poem which includes reference to the title is not about war, as one might expect, but rather about a child's frustration as she waits in the rain for her mother: she "stood with her head tilted back, mouth wide open, / screaming at heaven." The references to 9/11 and the SARS epidemic in the epigraph of this poem emphasize Inman's interest in examining the complexity of tragedy and the far-reaching effects of war, disease, and more subtly, innovation.

Like Inman, Itani writes about private lives in communities touched by war. *Tell,* longlisted for the 2013 Scotiabank Giller Prize, is a sequel to *Deafening* (2003). *Tell* is the story of Tress and her husband Kenan, a disfigured war veteran who has recently returned home to resume "normal" life. Their story, set in Ontario in 1920, becomes entwined with that of Tress' aunt and uncle, Maggie and Am, a couple whose marriage is threatened by emotional distance and untold secrets. *Tell* is a domestic story, set in the "meaningful context" of small town life in Canada.

Itani is a master of fine detail. Newspaper articles, playbills, and letters add veracity and create the kind of "living history" that Gordon describes. Rather than emphasize the plot, Itani describes the common yet complex things that create barriers to intimacy and community: emotional and physical withdrawal due to war wounds and shell shock, alcoholism, the pain and sorrow of infant mortality and infertility, and the secrets related to adoption and infidelity. Itani eloquently captures a sense of Canadian culture in the early 1990s, with its recitals and homemade skating rinks. However she is careful to draw the dark side as well, through the complicity of the whole community in keeping secrets.

As the title suggests, Itani is interested in the theme of "telling." She contrasts silence with the sharing of secrets. Healing, she emphasizes, requires telling one's painful stories. In a key scene, Am reveals: "I grew up around silent men. . . . Speak when spoken to. That was the message." As Kenan and Am break their silence and share their secrets, Kenan develops new self-awareness that may represent the reality of all war veterans: "The world I knew doesn't exist anymore. All I want now is to let out the dangerous words that are in my head. I can't say them. . . . I can't set things right. What happened over there."

As Kenan continues to "tell," he experiences healing. This is alluded to most poignantly in a series of letters exchanged between Kenan and his comrade Hugh who is recovering in a sanatorium. In response to Kenan's missives of daily life, Hugh shares his feelings of regret and loss through the image of an empty chair set on the hospital porch when a patient dies. He asks Kenan to "imagine if we had placed a chair in no man's land for every loss." Hugh speaks, I think, for most people affected by war: "How could we not be angry at the staggering waste of life—well the millions of empty chairs?"

These texts add to the list of Canadian war narratives written in the last twenty years. These accounts of regeneration, healing, and loss give voice to veterans, to women, to the poor, and to the marginalized in periods of international conflict. *The Stone Carvers*, *Three Day Road*, *The Blind Assassin*, and the works of Itani and Inman offer glimpses into the private lives of Canadians, those whose stories of suffering and secrets deserve to be told.

At the Same Table

Robert Alexander Innes
Elder Brother and the Law of the People: Contemporary Kinship and Cowessess First Nation. U of Manitoba P $27.95

Sam McKegney
Masculindians: Conversations about Indigenous Manhood. U of Manitoba P $29.95

Reviewed by June Scudeler

Robert Innes' and Sam McKegney's books are path clearing, situating Indigenous ways of knowing at the centre of their methodologies. The personal qualities of both books push the reader, particularly the Indigenous reader, to really think about their place in the world and the responsibilities we carry to others.

Plains Cree scholar Robert Innes ably demonstrates how his reserve, the Cowessess First Nation in Saskatchewan, honours kinship ties outside of academic and governmental strictures. Although Innes did not grow up at Cowessess because of sexist Indian Act provisions, he received his Indian status in 1989 and was welcomed back into his community. Innes' welcoming back into his community highlights how these kinship ties are still in place at Cowessess First Nation. He uses Elder Brother or wîsahkêcâhk stories to highlight how the Cowessess First Nation honours the historical and cultural ties between the Plains Cree, Saulteaux, Assiniboine, and Métis,—the Iron Alliance—by not viewing them as discrete units but as kin. A Cowessess story about wîsahkêcâhk being adopted by wolves and assuming the accepted kinship roles stresses the importance of wâhkôhtowin or good relationship/kinship to Plains Cree and other Indigenous people. As Innes notes, although wîsahkêcâhk is a not a wolf, wîsahkêcâhk is accepted by the wolves as kin because of his positive and helpful behaviour.

Kinship is also extended to those with whom First Nations signed treaties, but this is an obligation the Crown ignores. Moreover, Innes stresses the importance of kinship and group formation at the band level in contrast with the usual scholarly emphasis on the national or tribal level, which obscures relationships amongst the Iron Alliance. For example, nineteenth-century Plains Cree were not a discrete unit as many of the chiefs had mixed ancestry. Little Pine's mother was Blackfoot and his father was Plains Cree, thus they belonged to two peoples who are traditional enemies. Innes argues that for members of the Cowessess First Nation, a person's family name is a more important way of situating oneself than one's perceived national identity. Innes points out the false separation between the Métis and prairie First Nations because scholars tend not to see the kinship ties between them, but rather see Métis in racial rather than in cultural terms.

Masculinity or manhood is a little-theorized area of Indigenous studies. Sam McKegney coined the term masculindians to highlight the constructedness of popular cultural representations of Indigenous men, particularly the settler propensity to view Indigenous men as hyper-masculine stereotypes like the stoic warrior or newer incarnations like the ecological medicine man or the drunken absentee. McKegney conducted twenty-three interviews between October 2010 and August 2013 with Indigenous men and women from North America and Aotearoa, collecting a healthy and much-needed variety of dialogues on the topic. *Masculindians* does not shy away from foregrounding how complex Indigenous manhood can be, which is not detrimental to the book, but rather mirrors most Indigenous understandings of personal autonomy. People can sit together at the same table but still have differing viewpoints. McKegney notes that the emerging field of Indigenous masculinities can be braided together with feminist and queer/Two-Spirit analysis to create healthy

individuals and communities. Tomson Highway (Woods Cree) situates himself as biologically between men and women, and states that his role is to "take care of the spirit of the community, where all the artists are from." On the other hand, Mohawk scholar Taiaiake Alfred takes Indigenous artists to task for not being subversive enough, which shows a decided lack of understanding of works by Indigenous artists.

While McKegney knows or is close friends with many of the interviewees, his questions and his ability to fade into he background during interviews allows the interviewees to be vulnerable. Daniel Heath Justice (Cherokee) shares early discomfiture with being an Indian and with how his parents were supportive in his coming out even while they worried for him. Justice believes the male body is seen only as capable of and a source of violence and encourages men to "fight against shame through love," another story of situating responsibility in Indigenous contexts. McKegney's inclusion of interviews with Indigenous women is much appreciated. As Bonita Lawrence (Mi'kmaw) points out: "empowerment for women means . . . we need to talk about empowering our men." Jessica Danforth (Mohawk) of the Native Youth Sexual Health Network emphasises the importance of Indigenous sexuality to larger Indigenous issues: "to place sexual health over here and land rights over there is very colonial. Environmental justice is over here, reproductive justice is over there." Danforth demonstrates in her interview how reproductive rights, and women's and Two-Spirit rights are fundamental to Indigenous decolonization. Tlicho writer Richard Van Camp's assertion that "what we're not talking about [is] killing us" shows the importance of stories, whether of wîsahkêcâhk's importance to kinship on the Cowessess First Nation or of Indigenous masculinity. These books invite us to the kitchen table to sip tea and to hear such stories.

Citadins et immigrants

Anne-Yvonne Julien (dir.); André Magord (colla.)
Littératures québécoise et acadienne contemporaines au prisme de la ville.
PU de Rennes 33,50 $

Tina Mouneimné
Vers l'imaginaire migrant : la fiction narrative des écrivains immigrants francophones au Québec (1980-2000). Peter Lang 46,95 $

Compte rendu par Molleen Shilliday

Vers l'imaginaire migrant invite le lecteur à découvrir les convergences et les divergences de quelques textes québécois écrits par des écrivains immigrants entre 1980-2000. Dans son introduction, Mouneimné explore le terrain politique et social du Québec, mettant en lumière les lois, les mouvements littéraires et sociaux et les référendums qui marquent l'histoire, la conscience collective et la littérature de cette province. Dans son premier chapitre, Mouneimné explique les multiples termes qui reviennent le plus souvent dans les études critiques : cette écriture qu'on nomme migrante, métisse ou hybride est souvent associée à ce qui est « 'liminaire', 'périphérique', 'émergent', 'postcolonial', 'mineur' ou [. . .] 'de l'exiguïté' ». Dans ce premier chapitre et dans les deux qui suivent, Mouneimné se penche plus précisément sur les œuvres de quelques écrivains immigrants : Marie-Célie Agnant, Ying Chen, Abla Farhoud, Naïm Kattan, Sergio Kokis, Mona Latif-Ghattas, Dany Laferrière, Marco Micone, Émile Ollivier, Régine Robin, et Bianca Zagolin. Ce vaste corpus permet de montrer l'hétérogénéité de leurs œuvres et par extension, la nature contradictoire et inexacte de leur étiquetage comme groupe (quasi) homogène. Cette étude approfondie et synthétique vise à dénouer les fils conducteurs des œuvres critiques qui se sont enchevêtrées au cours des dernières années face à la complexité de

ce sujet littéraire. Mouneimné souligne qu'il faut absolument revenir au véritable sujet, c'est-à-dire, l'écriture même et l'universalité de la différence.

L'ouvrage collectif, *Littératures québécoise et acadienne contemporaines au prisme de la ville*, étudie des textes littéraires franco-canadiens écrits entre 1950-2010 qui traitent explicitement ou implicitement du rôle que joue la ville dans la vie contemporaine. Cet épais volume comprend 36 articles bien organisés en quatre parties également divisées sous les rubriques suivantes : « Montréal en diachronie », « Le rural et l'urbain, nouveau mode d'emploi », « Arythmies urbaines », « Capitales littéraires en rivalité », « Labyrinthes éclatés et lueurs d'apocalypse », « Proliférations des non-lieux », « La banalité réinventée », « Le lieu de mémoire générationnelle », « Voies libres », « Mutations » et « Vers des modulations structurelles et génériques inédites ». Ces rubriques reflètent bien la diversité des articles et l'ampleur du sujet. Alors que l'on est d'abord sceptique de voir se dégager une cohérence au cœur d'un ouvrage aussi ambitieux qui étudie les centres urbains de notre pays, des pays étrangers, des lieux imaginaires et la notion du non-lieu, le prisme en question commence à scintiller au cours de notre lecture. Il prend forme au fur et à mesure que les reflets et les miroitements entre les œuvres qu'abordent les critiques se multiplient. Les articles sont réunis sous la direction d'Anne-Yvonne Julien et c'est sa voix qui guide le lecteur à travers ce vaste terrain critique. Les quatre introductions (une pour chaque partie) et la conclusion rédigées par Julien donnent à l'ouvrage une qualité cartographique. C'est grâce à cette mise au point méticuleuse et régulière que l'on a l'impression de traverser le terrain en survol, comme un oiseau migratoire qui s'arrête aux métropoles pour scruter ses citadins curieux. Qualité rare d'un ouvrage si volumineux, les articles sont tous d'une pertinence égale. Les articles de Gauvin, Hotte, Laforest, Melançon, Viau et Hayward tournent notre attention vers la pluralité de la ville. À propos du quartier de Côte-des-Neiges (Québec), Viau écrit qu'il est « d'une territorialité palimpseste [. . .] qui cherche son identité dans la confrontation et l'accueil, le désir de s'affirmer et celui de se fondre dans une universalité devant être définie ». On apprend que la ville est souvent esthétisée comme un « palimpseste », constamment en voie de construction, déconstruction et reconstruction. . . . Cette qualité de la ville est au fond de notre fascination : elle reflète la nature non seulement éphémère et angoissée, mais aussi idéalisée et unitaire de la condition humaine (Oore). Une liste des différentes perspectives qui suscitent l'intérêt du lecteur serait trop longue. En voici quelques-unes : l'écocritique (Rogers), l'importance de l'espace mémoriel (Crevier-Goulet, Tremblay), les qualités utopiques de la ville (Calle-Gruber), l'exil et la dérive (Parker, Levasseur, Sing) et l'importance de l'hospitalité (Francis), etc. Il faut noter que l'inclusion de plusieurs tableaux qui dépeignent la ville donne à l'ouvrage un bel aspect visuel et poignant. Par ailleurs, la participation de Régine Robin nous offre un coup de nostalgie et nous rappelle à quel point la ville laisse sa trace sur notre vie, à quel point elle nous berce, nous hante. *Au prisme de la ville* cerne toute la richesse qu'offre la ville comme sujet d'étude.

A TransCan Environment

Smaro Kamboureli and Christl Verduyn, eds.
Critical Collaborations: Indigeneity, Diaspora, and Ecology in Canadian Literary Studies. Wilfrid Laurier UP $42.99

Laird Christensen, Mark C. Long, and Fred Waage, eds.
Teaching North American Environmental Literature. MLA $25.00

Reviewed by Tina Northrup

Critical Collaborations: Indigeneity, Diaspora, and Ecology in Canadian Literary Studies is the third collection of essays to emerge from the TransCanada conference series. Following on the heels of *Trans.Can.Lit: Resituating the Study of Canadian Literature* and *Shifting the Ground of Canadian Literary Studies*, it is at once a reflection of the TransCanada project's achievements so far, and a prospect of what is yet to come.

In her preface to *Trans.Can.Lit*, Smaro Kamboureli describes the concerns that brought the TransCanada project to life—namely, concerns that recent and multiplying changes to the discipline of Canadian literary studies seemed "symptomatic," at least in part, "of how the humanities continued to be under siege." Through its communal attention to intersections between Indigenous law and legal studies, decolonizing scholarship and pedagogy, and studies in diaspora, environment, and ecocriticism, *Critical Collaborations* foregrounds the TransCanada project's attention to critical differences between innovation and interdisciplinarity as defined by neoliberal pressures on the one hand, and, on the other hand, innovation, interdisciplinarity, collaboration, transdisciplinarity, and trans-systemics shaped by strategic and politicized "kinship" relations.

Christl Verduyn suggests in her conclusion to the collection that the TransCanada project will prove to be as formative to Canadian literary studies as were watershed gatherings such as the Women and Words conference (1983), Writing Thru Race (1994), and the Third International Women's Book Fair (1988). Reading *Critical Collaborations* alongside its precursors, it is difficult to doubt her. Kamboureli stated explicitly in *Trans.Can.Lit* that the TransCanada project's task would be "to rejuvenate the field through a renewed sense of collective purpose," and I for one found it impossible to read this latest volume with anything less than a sense of excitement and—perhaps not surprisingly—interpellation. This surely has something to do with the fact that the collection's contributors are all prominent members, and in some cases leaders, of their respective disciplines, whose voices carry uncommon weight, and, together, form an impressive and persuasive assembly. Although the book is neither a manifesto nor an edict, like its precursors it attempts to put its finger on the pulse of Canadian literary studies as they exist today, while simultaneously pointing that pulsating body in the direction it ought to go.

Just as *Critical Collaborations* models innovative textual and cultural analyses while also providing introductions, for those who want and need them, to some of the disciplinary "kin" that may shape Canadian literary studies in the years to come, *Teaching North American Environmental Literature* serves as an introduction and guide to the field it surveys, and also as a cache of useful pedagogical ideas and resources. Beginning with chapters that establish pertinent critical contexts, the collection then turns to an expansive selection of essays that describe courses given in colleges, universities, and independent educational programs throughout the continent. A detailed and well-organized list of scholarly resources is provided at the end.

Teaching has been out for some time now—long enough for Greg Garrard to

have already provided a useful survey of the essential similarities and differences between it and its precursor, Fred Waage's *Teaching Environmental Literature: Materials, Methods, Resources*. In some small ways, the collection is already dated; for instance, an essay by Pamela Banting notes that Glotfelty and Fromm's *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996) includes little Canadian representation, and that "there is, to date, no parallel Canadian text." Ella Soper and Nicholas Bradley's *Greening the Maple: Canadian Ecocriticism in Context* (2013) has since met that need, and indeed that collection might make a useful complement to the essays in *Teaching* that look to Canadian contexts. On the whole, there are far fewer of these than there are essays on American literatures and cultures. That comparative dearth does not diminish the broad usefulness of the collection, nor its pertinence to transnational (not to mention bioregional) studies in environmental literatures; however, it will limit its usefulness for those who are interested in Canadian literary studies and environmental education in Canada specifically. Among the essays that do look to Canada, Alanna F. Bondar's and Bob Henderson's contributions offer accounts of courses in ecofeminist literatures and travel literatures, respectively, while Banting and Catriona Sandilands help to establish foundational critical contexts.

The Persistence of Place and Personality

Eddy Kent
Corporate Character: Representing Imperial Power in British India, 1786-1901. U of Toronto P $55.00

M. G. Vassanji
And Home Was Kariakoo: A Memoir of East Africa. Doubleday $32.95

Reviewed by Dorothy F. Lane

These distinct books—scholarly study and memoir—remarkably share a fascination with place and personality, along with a focus on British imperialism in South Asia and West Africa, and its impact on the construction of boundaries and arbitrary borders within and between communities. Moreover, strikingly, while Eddy Kent's study of imperial policy and practice in British India is theoretically and critically complex, both it and M. G. Vassanji's memoir of his travels through his homeland in East Africa weave historical, personal, literary, and political reflections and texts in constructing a multivalent illustration of their subjects. In fact, the identity of these subjects—ostensibly the corporate character of British India and a personal return to East Africa—shifts from chapter to chapter in ways that are sometimes fascinating, and sometimes disjointed or even disappointing.

Eddy Kent's *Corporate Character* begins in a promising vein, proposing that Britain's self-image as benevolent colonizer needs to be examined in the context of the business of colonialism. The increasing emphasis in British imperialism on "honourable and selfless service" resulted in obedient agents; the particular focus in his study on British India results from the East India Company's unique link to the national interest of Britain; the transition from Company to Crown in the mid-nineteenth century is less significant, to Kent, than the agreement much earlier that "if the national honour was to be salvaged then serious structural

reform was necessary" for the Company. The focus on "corporate culture" in an admittedly anachronistic context—"cultural work and social interaction between individual humans to create the corporate body"—is intriguing, but somehow loses its potency as he draws on "constructivist symbolism" in relating history and fiction. Individual analyses of the impeachment of Warren Hastings and the role of Burke, the educational policies of Macaulay, and the depiction of the British presence through the fiction of writers such as Orwell, Kipling, and Duncan, are less compelling than the seed of corporate culture suggested in the introduction. This book's most significant contribution is its blurring of often-strict lines drawn between approaches of Company and Crown: the relatively smooth shift from the ideal of corporation as a body sharing fellowship, custom, and interest to the institutions, formal laws, and contracts of the mid-to-late nineteenth century.

In *And Home Was Kariakoo*, M. G. Vassanji demonstrates again his skill at drawing connections between seemingly disparate events and people—all while probing the question suggested by the title: "What is home? Is it a concrete, geographical location, or a fictional recreation of the past that can only be glimpsed in the place today?" The book, then, follows his equally complex memoir *A Place Within: Rediscovering India*, and finds its temporal and geographical setting in a variety of locations. It explores what Vassanji has identified in himself as "fractured being" and "in-between-ness"—a feature he probes in many of his writings.

Vassanji interweaves histories of places and peoples in South Asia, East Africa, and Canada as he does in several of his works, most notably in the novel, *The Magic of Saida*, in which the primary character—like Vassanji—returns to East Africa. It is a power of place that comes through most effectively, as he traces his journeys through areas colonized by Britain and Germany, and the impact of colonization. Some chapters tell of journeys—helpfully outlined on a map of the region—and their historical background, while others use historical and personal encounters to unravel the connections between past and present, and between distinct communities. The personal accounts of travel through the area are compelling and evocative, describing bus trips with their circuitous routes and mishaps, searches for accommodation and historical monuments, and delightful meals with old and new friends.

The reader will learn much about the colonization and recurring disputes over boundaries and politics, painful divisions between Asian and African communities, often-tragic repercussions of post-independence conflict and involvement in European and American conflicts such as the Cold War. As Vassanji suggests, "the turning-away from Africa by many Asians was not from bitterness, entirely, but also from pain and grief." Near the end of the book, Vassanji's chapter subtitled "The Culture of Begging" courageously critiques the persistence of foreign aid and its effects on the morale of Africa and its peoples—the condition of perennial petitioning and receiving from benevolent white saviours, and an erosion of self-sufficiency and mutual respect. His discussion of this sensitive subject is both bold and compassionate. As he states, "African countries need aid, yes, just as many parts of the world do. . . . But equally . . . Africa needs to be included in the world community as an equal."

Finally, then, the reader of both these texts will come away with a new—or renewed—appreciation of the complexity of the British imperialist enterprise, and the people and places that are altered irrevocably and often forgotten in the grand narrative. Buildings, families, villages are affected in ways that we often cannot imagine amidst

the construction of roads and railways, establishment of boundaries, transferring of power from one entity to another, and the capital that ultimately drives imperialist initiatives.

On Turtle's Back

Thomas King
The Back of the Turtle. HarperCollins Canada $34.00

Reviewed by Heather Macfarlane

Only Thomas King could inject humour into the direst of situations and get away with it. While most readers know the prolific writer of Cherokee and Greek descent for his landmark novel *Green Grass, Running Water*, and his CBC radio comedy series *Dead Dog Cafe*, he has recently gained notoriety for his darker, hard-hitting non-fiction book, *The Inconvenient Indian*. His latest novel, *The Back of the Turtle*, continues in the latter vein, this time placing environmental apocalypse at the fore. Winner of the 2014 Governor General's Award for Fiction, *The Back of the Turtle* is decidedly dystopian, but somehow the characters manage, in spite of environmental devastation, to live happily ever after. I'm not quite sure how King makes this work, and at times the promise of a happy new beginning for the survivors threatens to undermine the environmental message at the core of the novel. This, however, is the risk a humourist takes when dealing with serious subject matter, and a risk that King manages to overcome with his usual flair for storytelling.

The Back of the Turtle contains the trademark elements that appeal to an academic audience: King's intertexts allude to Shakespeare, *Invictus*, the Bible, and traditional Indigenous teachings, and the writing is highly self-reflexive, pointing to an artist at the peak of his career. The corporate villain signals his disappointment in receiving a *novel* as a gift, but later describes his imagination as "running away from his intellect, turning the ordinary and the mundane into vivid metaphor" which could aptly describe the process of writing. In honour of academic audiences, King even includes a critique of the corporatization of universities when he has the villain, Dorion Asher, endorse a move to "fold English, Sociology, and Psychology" together and "emphasize the benefits of university-corporate co-operation in an increasingly competitive world."

In spite of these inclusions, *The Back of the Turtle* is not quite like King's other books. Not much actually happens, and yet the novel is oddly compelling. It tells the story of a brilliant Anishinaabe scientist named Gabriel who, after one environmental disaster too many, is forced to acknowledge his complicity in the destruction of not only the environment, but also his family. He travels west (mirroring colonial expansion) in order to kill himself. His boss is Dorion Asher, CEO of Domidion who represents the worst in environmental negligence and abuse of corporate power. The book alternates between chapters written from Asher's perspective and chapters written from the perspective of the cast of characters in Smoke River, the West Coast reserve where Gabriel's mother was raised. The nation represented and the mother's people are never named, which is a little difficult to swallow in an era when we promote cultural specificity over generic Indigeneity, though I suppose the reserve is meant to represent every Indigenous nation that Canada deems disposable. It is this tiny community, ruined by the deadly bacterial agent Gabriel helped create, that ultimately and ironically offers Gabriel and the others a "new beginning." I'm not sure that the world will get a second chance, or that the land is as resilient as King suggests, so what is it that makes the novel so compelling? I suspect it has something to do with the characters and the setting, the

latter of which is familiar, and thus makes the disasters eerily real. The story is set on both the West Coast and in Toronto, and we read of Alberta's tar sands, the leakage of run-off into the Athabasca and Mackenzie Rivers, and an abandoned ship carrying barrels of deadly bacteria approaching the St. Lawrence Seaway. The places and the threats are real, and so an eerie kind of recognition and discomfort accompanies the reading: this feels too real to be fiction.

The characters, on the other hand, defy the real, but placed as they are in a landscape we know, they take on a human aspect. Dorion Asher, corporate leader in "agribusiness," is ruled by power and profit, and delights in setting up smokescreens to deflect blame for environmental destruction. "The occasional spill is the price we pay for cheap oil," he tells the press, deflecting blame and hitting a chord with the reader, who creates the demand and is therefore complicit in the destruction. Asher, however, seems oddly harmless: his wife has just left him, and he shops compulsively for Rolex watches and designer suits in moments of crisis. The protagonist Gabriel, named for either the Christian archangel or one of the mythological twins in the creation story of the Woman Who Fell from the Sky, unites Christian and Indigenous mythologies, and though he calls himself "Death, the destroyer of worlds," he redeems himself and earns his nickname Riel—a reference to the Métis warrior. Crisp, the seafaring Christ figure, oversees the community's rebirth and speaks in parables, moving his arm "as though he expect[s] the sea to part" and asking, "Is not my word like fire?" Meanwhile, Crisp's nephew Sonny, who appears to be autistic and gifted with second sight, assembles the salvage he collects and builds a towering beacon to summon the turtles that died in "the Ruin."

When the first of the turtles returns to lay its eggs, it has a "wide indentation in its shell, as though it has been carrying a heavy weight for a long time." This is the turtle of the creation story that is common to many Indigenous peoples, and the weight that it carries on its back is the world. The return of the turtle and later the raven signals the rebirth of the world in general, and the resilience of Indigenous peoples in particular. Though King's happy ending is perhaps exaggerated and maybe too generous, the threat of environmental calamity is always there: Domidion's abandoned ship full of deadly bacteria floats perpetually on the horizon, warning of impending disaster.

Personal Political

Zoë Landale
Einstein's Cat. Wolsak & Wynn $17.00

Madeline Sonik
The Book of Changes. Inanna $18.95

Patricia Young
Night-Eater. Quattro $14.95

Reviewed by Scott Inniss

Landale, Sonik, and Young each write poems that are lyric, narrative, and autobiographical in their orientation. Their recent collections also traverse similar thematic terrain: domesticity, marriage and its (dis) contents, aging, loss, illness and mortality, familial relations, sex and love. This poetry is broadly feminist in that it explores and gives priority to women's lived experience. But it is politically normative to the extent that it neglects to link the personal to the social or to query in any way its other demographic locations (settler, hetero, broadly middle class). To varying degrees, these three texts are successful—at least in the terms they establish for themselves. Each is entirely capable of garnering approval from readers who regard craft, introspection, or attention to the "small moments" of daily existence as the sine qua non of poetic vocation. For this reader,

however, literary categories themselves are always necessarily political categories. From such a perspective, these books register not simply as poetic documents of particular subjective and embodied experiences. They also evidence the socio-aesthetic limitations and complicities particular to contemporary mainstream Canadian (verse) culture.

In *Einstein's Cat*, Landale's language is crisp, her images exact. Landale has a real talent for the tenor-vehicle relation, of which she makes copious use. Impressively, even her most diegetic poems give as much attention to the syllable as to narrative requirements. Still, Landale's vocabulary is often expected, familiar, (work)shopworn. Poetry favourites like "runnel," "arabesque" and "skein" certainly bring an admirable specificity to the object (or object correlative) under consideration. But their overuse also has the effect of turning them into de facto signifiers for the poetic as such. Back jacket blurbs describe *Einstein's Cat* as "dialogical" and "double-voiced." True, the book comprises two long poetic-narrative sequences, the second operating in counterpoint with the first (whose own internal structure is already antiphonal). But these are strictly formal doublings since they never really confront or converse with any actual difference or alterity. Landale's is a poetry in which family members "leave / trails through the house, / meteors flashing and streaking light / behind them." Metaphorical truism or bourgeois metaphysics is for the reader to decide.

Sonik's *The Book of Changes* comprises a single series of short, numbered lyrics, each of which takes its title from the *I Ching*. At their best, Sonik's poems are tough and unsentimental with a slightly gothic demeanour. Importantly, Sonik's writing works to expose gender violence in intimate, familial, and sexual relations. But it also often conceals as much as it reveals (as when it articulates gender and other antagonisms within what the dust jacket calls a "non-causal worldview"). Sonik often begins poems with a concrete object, scenario, or detail, from which she attempts to extrapolate some universal meaning or personal epiphany. Almost always, however, this striving for the absolute in the particular falls flat, unable (among other things) to sustain the pressure of generic (lyric) expectation. As a result, many if not most of Sonik's poems feel incomplete, more like drafts or sketches than fully worked-through material. On occasion, Sonik's treatment of gender (and class) opens onto the political in a manner altogether foreign to Landale's writing. But Sonik's poems frequently struggle to produce a sense of formal, symbolic, or socio-cultural consistency and necessity. As the back jacket tells us, "one doesn't need a copy of the *I Ching* to appreciate these poems." But is this a compliment or an indictment?

In *Night-Eater*, Young offers a reinvigoration of sorts of the domestic lyric, her primary genre. The chief strategies with which she accomplishes this are humour, reiteration, and displacement. Young combines an autobiographical empiricism with a generous helping of soft surrealism. Her book documents such life events as "Daughter at Thirteen," First Date," and "The New Baby." But it does so while giving equal privilege to witticisms-metaphors like "spilled / vegetable blood" and "The night's a loopy salad." Young organizes a number of poems around repeating words and phrases (with differing degrees of variation). The result is a form of estrangement that is still entirely accessible. (Lyn Hejinian's *My Life* at times comes to mind, but without the syntactic fragmentation, to say nothing of the concern for the relation between language-gender-capitalism-the lyric I.) But most compelling is Young's ability at once to evoke and avoid (or at least modulate and defer) the call of epiphanic closure. Young is not at all consistent in this, unfortunately. For this

reader, however, these are the moments where her work is both most enjoyable and (potentially) liberating.

L'Enterrement de la sardine : dernier volet de la sinueuse trilogie lisboète

Patrice Lessard
L'Enterrement de la sardine. Héliotrope 24,95 $

Compte rendu par Liza Bolen

Entrer dans *L'Enterrement de la sardine*, c'est entrer dans un univers disjoncté, où l'on accepte volontiers de se laisser entraîner par une narration fragmentée et essoufflante. Ceux qui connaissent déjà *Le sermon aux poissons* (2011) et *Nina* (2012), les deux volumes précédents de ce que l'on peut désormais appeler « la trilogie lisboète », connaissent déjà les plaisirs de ce jeu. Ceux qui rencontrent pour la première fois cet univers seront étourdis par la chaleur qui émane du texte et, surtout, par l'intelligence secouante de l'auteur Patrice Lessard.

Résumer ce roman n'est pas chose simple. Bien que l'histoire puisse être énoncée de façon assez brève (un jeune écrivain tente d'écrire un roman à Lisbonne), les jeux de narration, le style unique de l'auteur, les personnages à la fois attachants et aliénants qui peuplent ce roman ainsi que les incessants aller-retour entre la réalité et la fiction donnent à *L'Enterrement de la sardine* un caractère unique et insaisissable. En effet, cet univers est celui du désordre, tant à l'intérieur du récit que dans la manière dont celui-ci est présenté sur les pages du roman.

Ainsi, on passe du chapitre 13 au chapitre 7, puis viennent les chapitres 9, 10 et 14. Certains chapitres reviendront plus d'une fois et seront racontés de façon différente, et tous seront entrecoupés par des bribes de *La Vie de Sebastian*, le roman que tente d'écrire le personnage principal. Bien que cette division puisse d'emblée paraître étrange et même perturbante, on réalise bien vite que cette façon de présenter le récit est nécessaire, car elle permet non seulement de raccorder la réalité à la fiction, mais elle permet aussi au lecteur de vivre cette même confusion, ces mêmes sensations de quête et de perte que vivent les curieux personnages de ce roman.

Vacillant entre le lumineux et l'impénétrable, le texte donne souvent au lecteur l'impression de se perdre dans l'opacité de ce labyrinthe littéraire pour se retrouver soudainement dans la chaleur familière des cafés et des bars de Lisbonne. Et c'est précisément cette sensation que vivent, à différents degrés, tous les personnages qui habitent l'univers de Patrice Lessard. Accompagné par l'auteur (ou, plutôt, par *les* auteurs), le lecteur parcourt les rues et les ruelles de Lisbonne en adoptant le regard de quelqu'un qui a connu cette ville, qui l'a aimée, et qui la voit maintenant ternie par de lourdes difficultés économiques. Ce roman témoigne donc de l'incompréhension et de l'impuissance de celui qui, petit à petit, constate la perte de ces points de repère. C'est en effet cette sensation que communique l'auteur à son lecteur à travers les dialogues interrompus et les descriptions fragmentées de *L'Enterrement de la sardine*, et c'est précisément là que se trouve le génie créateur de Patrice Lessard.

Family Romance

Tanis MacDonald
The Daughter's Way: Canadian Women's Paternal Elegies. Wilfrid Laurier UP $63.75

Dan Azoulay
Hearts and Minds: Canadian Romance at the Dawn of the Modern Era, 1900-1930.
U of Calgary P $34.95

Reviewed by Janice Fiamengo

These two books address Canadian family relations, one by analyzing poetic representations of the father-daughter bond

and the other by examining popular ideas about courtship. Tanis MacDonald's *The Daughter's Way* is an investigation of female elegies for dead or dying fathers. Emphasizing that the elegy has traditionally been a homosocial literary form, in which men pay tribute to other men as a way of claiming status as literary successors, MacDonald asks how twentieth-century writers, including Dorothy Livesay, P. K. Page, Jay Macpherson, and Margaret Atwood, rework the genre for their own purposes—both to address a figure of (lost, weakened, or threatening) male power and to explore what it means to be a grieving daughter.

Beginning from the premise that daughters have traditionally claimed identity through expressions of filial obedience and self-sacrifice (which may explain the preference in much feminist scholarship for mother figures), MacDonald asks how female poets transform elegiac conventions. Her poets take up various postures—ranging from the cool melancholia of P. K. Page through the haunted gothic of Jay Macpherson to the bereft fury of Erin Mouré—in relation to dead or dying fathers. The poets are by turns grateful, defiant, abject, and exhilarated. Biblical archetypes, Egyptian mythology, pilgrimage motifs, and imagery of apocalypse and war structure these daughters' elegiac quests. Using Freudian psychoanalytic notions of appropriate mourning vs. unresolved melancholia (to fail to express sufficient grief is to be un-filial; to express excessive grief is to be deviant), MacDonald considers what a feminist engagement with the father's loss can yield.

The chapters are brief, but substantial and authoritative. The opening consideration of Dorothy Livesay's poetic oeuvre, including paternal elegies written over the course of three decades, is an exemplary reading of a much-reworked encounter between a grieving daughter and her absent, yet ever-present, father. MacDonald shows how Livesay's poetic elegies begin with encomia tinged with rebellion and extend to dialogues that claim continued father-daughter intimacy both as an intellectual legacy and as an invitation to questioning and resistance. At the centre of the study is an astute exploration of Margaret Atwood's paternal elegies in *Morning in the Burned House*, a volume that extends an already powerfully elegiac impulse in Atwood's work. Later in the volume, considerations of the experimental poetics of Lola Lemire Tostevin and Erin Mouré analyze their melancholic engagement with the western inheritance.

Throughout, MacDonald provides sensitive readings of individual poems as well as effective discussions of form and interpretative approach. At times, the density of the theoretical framework may limit the book's readership—some of the difficult language might have been pruned without sacrifice of intellectual depth—but nonetheless *The Daughter's Way*, in its originality and insights, makes a long-overdue contribution to Canadian women's poetry.

A different but equally valuable contribution is made by Dan Azoulay's *Hearts and Minds,* a work of bottom-up social history that constructs a portrait of heterosexual courtship practices from 1900-1930. To find out how ordinary Canadians understood their romantic lives, Azoulay drew on two collections of letters from newspaper correspondence columns, about 20,000 printed letters in all, which show what Canadians sought in a mate. The period covered encompasses the transition from Victorian to modern gender norms, including the shattering impact of the First World War. Having discovered a treasure trove of documents, Azoulay aims to let them speak for themselves, allowing us to hear Canadians in their own words talking about the search for love.

In the first two, substantial, chapters, Azoulay outlines what male and female

letter writers said they were looking for in a life partner. These are perhaps the most fascinating chapters, presenting detailed accounts—with substantial quotation—of post-Victorian idealizations of gendered virtue. It seems that both men and women gave serious thought to love matches based on high moral character and shared values. Men sought women who would be good housekeepers as well as ladylike partners, contented in the domestic role, modest, refined, and intelligent. Most revealed that good looks were not at all important in comparison to kindness, loyalty, and morality.

In turn, women wanted hard-working, decent, and clean men who, while not necessarily prosperous, could provide them with a home, did not expect them to be drudges, and, above all, were sincere and trustworthy. Men and women seemed equally committed to an exalted conception of the marital state. As revealed in the third chapter, the rules of courtship were strict, particularly for women—one wrong move could tarnish a reputation permanently—and men chafed under the necessity to make the first move and behave with strictest propriety. Yet most Canadians accepted the rules of romance and sought to live within them. A fourth chapter on the hardships of courtship, especially in the isolated prairie west, where bachelors had to pursue helpmates by long distance, provides fascinating insight into the hopes and heartaches of the frontier era.

The Great War strained (and destroyed) many relationships, and also precipitated a transformation of social mores that in turn shaped 1920s dating culture, in which men and women paid far less attention to character and habits than to leisure activities and automobile ownership. The Modern Girl was athletic and fun-loving; no longer was it necessary for women to be "ladies," and even the advice columnists concurred with the loosening of constraints. Chaperonage and strict rules about physical intimacy were overturned as romantic interactions became far less formal. Canadians were increasingly accepting of premarital sex and less romantic in their tastes, no longer caring so much whether a prospective mate lived up to ideals of morality and chastity. Although small-town and rural areas remained more conservative than cities, many new possibilities for male-female relationships were being established.

Azoulay's study is historically contextualized and clearly written. Historians indebted to feminist and race-based frameworks may not be fully satisfied with his pared-down approach (others will find it an advantage), and some discussion of the limitations of the data—whether the letters are as transparent as the author assumes—would have been helpful. The result, however, is readable and informative, offering rich glimpses into Canadians' romantic expectations and experiences in the early years of the last century.

Kitchens of Wonder

Kyo Maclear; Julie Morstad, illus.
Julia, Child. Tundra $19.99

Monica Kulling; David Parkins, illus.
Spic-and-Span! Lillian Gilbreth's Wonder Kitchen. Tundra $19.99

Reviewed by Erin MacWilliam

In two children's books about the magic of kitchens, a fictionalized young Julia Child and the real efficiency expert Lillian Gilbreth offer alternative possibilities for domestic space. Kyo Maclear's imagined *Julia, Child* cooks up recipes for delight with her best friend Simca, experimenting with dishes and taking cooking classes together. They attempt to transfer their own joyful exuberance and friendship into a community meal for "big, busy people" who need to reclaim their youthful spirit. When their first meal does not go as expected,

they readjust the ingredients and try again, producing *petits gâteaux* and a cookbook about mastering the art of childhood. While the story is lovely, and will entertain adult readers (and cooks!) as well as children six and over, it is the beautiful illustrations by Julie Morstad that energize this tale. Combining black and white line drawings, including a carefully rendered kitchen pegboard with delicate gouache colours, the images evoke the imaginative potential of both cooking and play. Morstad captures the adults' release from being "weighed down with worries" thanks to the work of Julia and Simca by slowly adding colour to the adults' figures. Each page has carefully rendered details that encourage exploration and repeated and immersive viewing. *Julia, Child* is a work that transports.

Monica Kulling's *Spic-and-Span! Lillian Gilbreth's Wonder Kitchen* highlights the innovation of Lillian Moller Gilbreth, the time-motion expert, psychologist, and inventor most notably chronicled in Frank B. Gilbreth Jr., and Ernestine Gilbreth Carey's 1948 *Cheaper by the Dozen*. In contrast to *Cheaper by the Dozen*'s focus on the exploits of Lillian's husband and children, this non-fiction picture book details Lillian Gilbreth's career following her husband's death. The title is poorly chosen, as it suggests Gilbreth's labour in kitchens involved cleaning rather than engineering and design. In her text, however, Kulling emphasizes Gilbreth's independence and perseverance in finding ways to support her eleven children in a 1920s work environment that was unwelcoming towards women. Chronicling her innovations in kitchen layout and appliances, the narrative offers the stories behind each new advance, details that encourage the reader to seek their own creative solutions to make daily life both happier (a goal of Gilbreth) and more efficient. David Parkins' illustrations are rich with period detail, offering important context to young readers unfamiliar with the technology and homes of the 1920s. The appeal of this sixth book in Tundra's Great Ideas series is that it shares Lillian Gilbreth's story of achievement with a new audience and shows the domestic sphere as a place of ingenuity, locating science and engineering in private as well as public space. Although the story prioritizes fact-telling over entertainment value, young readers with an interest in history or educators seeking to share tales of women in science and engineering will enjoy *Spic-and-Span!*

Writing the Body

Andrea MacPherson
Ellipses. Signature $14.95

Diane Tucker
Bonsai Love. Harbour $18.95

Reviewed by Susie DeCoste

The two poetry collections at hand converge on a shared fascination with the roles that our bodies give to us, and the ways that our bodies can reveal things about us. The poems in Andrea MacPherson's *Ellipses* are concerned with motherhood, with focused narrative sequences centring on particular women. Diane Tucker's collection *Bonsai Love* is a miscellany of poems written with compassion and empathy for the human condition, especially the human feature of embodiment.

Ellipses is broken into four sections; the first two, "the other mothers," and "routine," contain narrative poetic sequences that explore and reflect on the lives of May and Gertrude, the author's two grandmothers. The poem "the gaze" in the section about May is a story of May's character as well as the author's own retracing of family history. The poem evokes the speaker's reflection on this important woman in her life: "She'd stepped backwards instead of forwards and then spent the rest of her life trying to retrace those steps: *How did I get here,*

how did I get here?" These lines sum up the curious, reflective, and meandering study of the speaker's grandmother. The following section moves more quickly through the stages of Gertrude's life. The pair "routine, 1951" and "empty, 1977" creates a powerful juxtaposition: the first, a visceral exploration of the physical demands of mothering three small boys, and the second, a picture of a grandmother holding her son's baby during brief and infrequent visits. The fourth section, "directions for sleep," redirects the focus to the speaker's life and her experience of having children as she reflects on her past growing up. Throughout the collection, MacPherson does "reclaim" motherhood, as her book's press release suggests. Her poems make motherhood not merely worthy of "the stuff of poetry," in the words of one of her speakers, but they also make motherhood *the* topic for poetry. Through the crystal clear and incisive imagery of bottles floating in soapy water, a fresh epidural scar, ominous black vans, and heavy bloodstained laundry, MacPherson takes readers into the most difficult problems of motherhood, those ever-puzzling questions of abortion, suicide, child abduction, and the death of a child. She approaches these risks of motherhood with just as much curiosity and compassion as she brings to scenes of tender new motherhood, demonstrating the rich and vast possibilities for poetic exploration of mothers and mothering.

In Tucker's *Bonsai Love,* the insides of our bodies that are usually protected and hidden come to light. Readers find more than blood and organs; they find whole galaxies, painful memories, and the consciousness of Eve as Adam's rib before she is separated from his body. In "low tide" the things left on the beach eerily become parts of the body, exposed and open to hot air as "tides change / turn and return." In "Biology Class," the speaker empathizes with a frog undergoing dissection; she reflects on the frog as a fellow embodied being, which leads her to consider what bodies can reveal about us without our consent. Through the speaker's reflection, dissecting the frog represents an invasion of the most private and regrettable memories. The speaker asks, "what would we, the dissectors, divulge / from our dark body cavities if you got us pinned / to that waxen slab?" She imagines their "larynxes choked with the unsaid and the unrepeatable" as if these words are detectable in the physical body. "Biology Class" makes a good companion to the poem "Coming Down with Something" in which Tucker's speaker believes her burning throat is a metaphor for all the "damnable afterimages / of the things I wish I'd never said."

Neither poetry collection carries any such regret. Both poets prove their skill through these strong and sophisticated compilations. Side by side, they enrich each other through their poetic exploration of what it means to be defined and shaped by roles our bodies hold for us.

Recent Poetic Investigations into the Contemporary Milieu

Donato Mancini
Loitersack. New Star $21.00

Lisa Robertson
Cinema of the Present. Coach House $17.95

derek beaulieu
kern. Les Figues $17.00

Reviewed by Eric Schmaltz

Formally unconventional poetry is often described using nebulous terms such as experimental, avant-garde, post-avant, or even radical. Recent full-length collections from Donato Mancini, Lisa Robertson, and derek beaulieu could be engaged by carefully situating them within these discourses. Collectively, these texts share an affinity for free linguistic play and textual subversion.

However, in this review, I would like to map out the ways by which each of these authors so incisively identifies the pulse of the contemporary milieu and employs strategies to think about how and why literary artifice can assess and intervene into the contemporary moment.

In *Loitersack* (2014), Mancini adopts the oft-neglected genre of the "commonplace book." Now recognized as an antiquated form, the commonplace book can be described as a scrapbook composed from a plethora of informational items such as notes, recipes, formulas, poems, quotations, prayers, and more. Mancini refers to his own text as a "knobbly bag of estrangements [l'autre sac]" which results in a swirling, nine-part textual eddy of poetic fragments and one play. The collection's title points back to the sixteenth century; a "loitersacke," as it was spelled in 1594, denotes a loitering, "inert or lumpish person"; however, Mancini reactivates these antiquations with contemporary finesse. "Introspective Data," for example, is comprised of a long string of questions that are strikingly similar to an absurd and profound (and at times profoundly absurd) series of social media status updates. "Laugh Particles," on the other hand, is a transcription of "all the laughter" in Philip Glenn's *Laughter in Interaction*, and could be said to resemble pages of alien computer code. In these ways, *Loitersack* occupies a space that is simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar and within which we can investigate ongoing issues of poetry, poetics, and culture—one issue being the idea of the poem as a process and a product. Though a completed and published work, *Loitersack* is literally composed of a series of loitering fragments suspended in paratactic bliss. *Loitersack*, then, forces readers to reckon with the notion of the "finished" poem, and complicates the idea of the poem as a commodity.

Like Mancini's "Introspective Data," Lisa Robertson's *Cinema of the Present* seems to draw influence—inadvertently or not—from the prevalence and power of the text-byte. Strategically employing its brevity, Robertson composes a 105-page long poem of non sequiturs in two interrelated voices. Appropriate to the book's invocation of the cinematic, Robertson's language rotates like a shimmering, textual cylinder: passages move at an alarming speed, disappearing and reappearing on the page. In a lengthy dialogue, two voices exchange, repeat, return, and re-engage one another, continuing along the trajectory of Robertson's poetic inquiry into issues of community, identity, and subjectivity, and how these ideas are inflected by information: "*For you there is no information,*" Robertson suggests in one voice, and later, in another, writes that "You are a theatre, not a machinery." This general "you" is frequently addressed, but the subject only grows more vague despite its continual reappearance: "Its pronoun plays a social rupture." Indeed, attempts to identify this "you" only push us further away. Instead it becomes diffuse, spread along the surface of the text in the same way that our own digital identities become spread across multiple media platforms, presenting our presence for other unknown yous. As a voice suggests: "*What we have is a mix of improper disclosures of partial information mixed with inaccurate information and then drawn into unfounded conclusions . . . .*"

Of the three, derek beaulieu has been most vocal about how his work relates to the conditions of the present. Stunning in its visuality, *kern* represents beaulieu's ongoing transition from his earlier disruptive work—perhaps best represented in *Fractal Economies,* which challenged the logic of writing machines—toward a praxis that has become increasingly mimetic of quotidian modes of signification. Employing his characteristic and intentional misuse of dry-transfer lettering, beaulieu's *kern* opens with a series of

minimalist abstractions. Page by page, these texts increase in size until they become quite lavish and baroque. While beaulieu's work has become increasingly "clean" over the years and less seemingly disruptive, the original spirit of beaulieu's work remains: a commitment to the possibilities of linguistic expression and intervention. This new phase of work is not necessarily compliant with modes of signification in its similarities to corporate logos and advertising; rather beaulieu's visually abstract materialism proposes modes of intervention into these conditions. beaulieu is no longer imagining ways by which we can explode the present, but rather ways to cut into it and reimagine it.

La Route ardue de l'Amérique

Jean-Sébastien Ménard
Une certaine Amérique à lire. La Beat Generation et la littérature québécoise. Nota bene 31,95 $

Compte rendu par Michel Nareau

Les écrivains de la Beat Generation (Jack Kerouac, William Burroughs, Allen Ginsberg, entre autres) sont souvent perçus comme des rebelles qui faisaient la fête et écrivaient des romans et des poèmes à toute vitesse. Ils ont beau avoir marqué la littérature états-unienne, ils ne jouissent pas d'une reconnaissance très forte. Au Québec, tant les auteurs *beat* que les écrivains québécois qui les ont suivis dans leur sillage ont été affecté par cette méprise. L'essai *Une certaine Amérique à lire* de Jean-Sébastien Ménard vient rectifier le tir, en prenant au sérieux la démarche esthétique *beat* et en montrant ses répercussions sur la littérature québécoise. Fort d'une connaissance approfondie des œuvres et du contexte d'émergence de la littérature *beat* et grâce à de multiples entretiens qui viennent soutenir son propos, Ménard est en mesure de restituer les étapes de l'appropriation québécoise des œuvres états-uniennes, ce qui lui permet de réfléchir à certaines composantes de l'américanité québécoise par le biais d'une influence *beat*.

Si la voie des influences littéraires a, depuis assez longtemps, perdu de sa force pour expliquer les phénomènes de transferts culturels, les logiques de reprises et la notion d'américanité, c'est qu'elle place un étalon, une source modèle, et des continuateurs, qui viennent dans un temps second, sans l'originalité des premiers. Une telle démarche débouche soit sur l'évaluation des deuxièmes par rapport aux premiers, soit sur une logique de l'analogie, dans un rabattement un peu stérile parce qu'il laisse de côté la signification des reprises, les déplacements opérés, pour se concentrer sur le repérage de traits associés aux productions sources.

C'est dans le troisième chapitre de son essai que Ménard est surtout amené vers ces écueils, et c'est là que s'amorce l'analyse de son corpus québécois. La première section se veut un panorama saisissant l'esthétique *beat*, mais elle se transforme rapidement en biographie de Jack Kerouac, qui devient en quelque sorte l'incarnation du mouvement dans son entier. À travers ses déplacements, ses rencontres, ses publications, le mouvement *beat* est restitué et présenté, sans qu'on atteigne malheureusement à une poétique bien claire des pratiques littéraires du groupe. Néanmoins, les manières d'être du mouvement aident Ménard à présenter les premiers introducteurs de Kerouac dans le milieu littéraire québécois, après avoir insisté sur la découverte de l'écrivain de Lowell au Québec par le billet de son entretien avec Fernand Séguin en 1967. C'est ainsi sous le signe de la contre-culture, irriguée par l'errance *beat*, que Claude Péloquin, Râoul Duguay, Lucien Francoeur et Jean-Paul Daoust sont abordés. Les œuvres sont ainsi moins analysées que rapportées à un parcours culturel marqué par le mouvement, la

révolte, la recherche de modes de vie alternatifs. Ce sont les écrivains, davantage que les œuvres, qui sont placés en position de modèles, même si la démarche de Ménard a le mérite de décrire la dimension littéraire de la contre-culture et ses liens avec la littérature états-unienne.

Le chapitre suivant, consacré à la lecture des appropriations spécifiques de Kerouac par Victor-Lévy Beaulieu, par Gilles Archambault et par Jean-Noël Pontbriand est plus riche, parce qu'il insiste davantage sur les raisons de cette reprise, qui ont surtout à voir selon Ménard avec l'héritage canadien-français de Kerouac qu'avec les thèmes *beat*. Même si le besoin analogique se fait encore sentir, les textes analysés rendent compte d'une intériorisation des pratiques kerouaciennes et d'un travail d'affranchissement vis-à-vis du modèle. La dernière section, où l'enjeu de l'américanité est davantage posé, montre la richesse du recyclage du courant *beat* dans la littérature québécoise contemporaine. De Jacques Poulin à Michel Vézina, c'est une part importante du corpus qui a fait de l'errance, de la métamorphose, de la question identitaire des enjeux qui seront balisés par le recours à Ken Kesey (chez Louis Hamelin), à Lawrence Ferlinghetti (chez Poulin) et à William Burroughs (chez Vézina). Cette dernière section aurait gagné en force si le panorama actuel avait été un peu plus riche, en incorporant les œuvres d'Alain Poissant, de Pierre Gobeil, de David Homel, entre autres. Certes, la Beat Generation incarne un type d'américanité, celui de la route, de la confrontation aux éléments, à la frontière, de la transformation individuelle et de la recherche de nouveaux repères, mais tout est présenté dans l'essai comme si c'était la voie d'accès incontournable et première de l'américanité québécoise, alors même que les recherches récentes tendent à souligner d'autres voies pour comprendre l'insertion continentale du Québec et de sa littérature. Les travaux de Maurice Demers et de Jean Morisset, pour ne nommer que ceux-là, ne sont pas pris en compte, ce qui complique l'appréciation de la place du recours à la Beat Generation dans cette identité hémisphérique du Québec.

Un autre Québec, le même

William S. Messier
Dixie. Marchand de feuilles 25,95 $

Compte rendu par Benoît Melançon

En 1993, un prisonnier américain, « carrure de bacon-and-eggs sept jours sur sept », s'évade de la prison de Cowansville. Un jeune garçon contemplatif découvre un mystérieux banjo; il en jouera pour accompagner le convoi funèbre du prisonnier. Un coyote, qui incarne peut-être le diable (« la Bête »), réapparaît périodiquement dans un espace sillonné par des voleurs de viande, des contrebandiers et des « bums », et il menace le garçon et le prisonnier. Ces brefs éclats de la trame narrative de *Dixie* ne rendent pas justice à ce livre, un des plus importants dans le paysage littéraire québécois récent. Par rapport à lui, le roman de William S. Messier se distingue d'au moins trois façons.

Sa géographie, réelle comme imaginaire, est orientée plein sud. L'action se déroule dans la région de Brome-Missisquoi, près de la frontière : « De l'autre côté, les États. » Dans la toponymie, le rapport au Québec anglophone et aux États-Unis est omniprésent : « Ici, la frontière hante les gens comme un œil tout-puissant. » Un « convoi de moissonneuses-batteuses » dévale le rang Dutch, on échange en douce des ouvriers agricoles sur le chemin d'Eccles Hill, les « guitares gutturales d'AC/DC » planent « dans le paysage de Pigeon Hill », on traverse Frelighsburg et Bedford. C'est dans ces lieux, en direction du Vermont, que circule le « pick-up » avec le cadavre du prisonnier évadé, ce « corbillard country », dans un cadre fantastique (« Il ne fait plus

aucun doute que les esprits bromisquois se sont joints à la parade ») qui emprunte aussi bien à la prose de William Faulkner qu'à la musique de l'Amérique noire. Cette « marche funèbre », ce « charivari moribond », ce « bastringue », ce « tintamarre » a une évidente dimension musicale collective, encore que le choix des instruments puisse étonner : « Il y a même le vieux Melançon qui scande les vers de la chanson en rinçant le moteur de sa chainsaw. » Arrivés à la frontière, ce « miroir sudiste », les participants au « chiard » confieront le cadavre du prisonnier à des centaines de Vermontois, leurs semblables.

La langue romanesque est sensible à la présence de l'anglais dans le français parlé au Québec, comme à diverses tournures populaires. Contrairement à nombre d'écrivains qui, pendant des générations, ont tenu le français québécois à distance — il y en a encore aujourd'hui —, Messier se l'approprie sans ostentation. La langue dans laquelle il écrit est celle dont il a besoin, mêlant les registres avec bonheur : aux « lèvres de la noirceur » (l'orée d'un bois), on boit du « moonshine » (alcool artisanal). Messier n'est pas du genre à multiplier guillemets et italiques ou à hiérarchiser les idiolectes fictifs.

Dixie, enfin, est une réflexion sur les mémoires. Gervais Huot, le personnage central du roman, souffre de cataplexie : « C'est une maladie rare qui lui fait perdre tout tonus musculaire et le paralyse au moindre sursaut émotif. » Il n'y a guère que son banjo pour le protéger de pareilles « crises de tristesse ». Obsédé par le passé familial, vivant dans un temps toujours potentiellement suspendu, cet enfant de sept ans époussette et regarde longuement des photos mettant en scène ceux de sa lignée : « Gervais se reconnaît dans le statisme des clichés familiaux, l'immobilisme plastique des aïeux, typique de la photographie d'époque. » En outre, il vit dans une région qui a son passé propre. Des Noirs s'y sont établis dès le XIX^{e} siècle, venus des États-Unis; plusieurs sont enterrés à Nigger Rock; Léandre Pelletier, dont on imagine qu'il est leur descendant, enseigne le banjo et le blues à Gervais. C'est aussi là qu'une « flopée d'Irlandais rebelles », les Fenians, a voulu envahir le Canada « en 1870 ». Les champs et les bois, eux, « font se superposer les époques ». Ces deux mémoires, la familiale et la régionale (« la mémoire du coin »), ne correspondent guère à la mémoire nationale québécoise ou canadienne telle que la transmettent habituellement l'école, les médias, la culture. Chez Messier, la « porosité identitaire » domine.

Géographie excentrée, langue décomplexée, cadre historique bouleversé : voilà trois raisons, parmi d'autres, de découvrir *Dixie* et de retourner lire *Townships. Récits d'origine* (2009) et *Épique* (2010), les deux premiers livres de William S. Messier.

De la colère en poésie québécoise

Catherine Morency
Poétique de l'émergence et des commencements. Les Premiers Écrits de Miron, Lefrançois, Gauvreau, Giguère et Hébert. Nota bene 23,95 $

Compte rendu par Valérie Mailhot

Thèse de doctorat à l'origine, l'essai de Catherine Morency dépasse largement le cadre de la simple démonstration académique en ce que l'auteure, dès les premières pages de son ouvrage, annonce vouloir « rétablir un "malentendu" poétique ». Irritée par une critique littéraire québécoise qu'elle juge excessivement bienveillante, parce que trop prompte à la célébration de ses « grands » poètes en vue de l'édification d'un « récit national » sans aspérités, Morency vise en effet à relire l'œuvre de cinq écrivains importants dans un « esprit réellement décolonisé », ce qu'elle entreprend de faire en mettant l'accent sur la colère, émotion jusqu'à présent ignorée

par la critique, mais qui apparaît pourtant comme le moteur de l'écriture poétique dans plusieurs œuvres du XX^e siècle québécois. Sans pour autant gommer ce qui distingue une Anne Hébert d'un Claude Gauvreau, par exemple, Morency propose d'envisager ces œuvres — et celles de Miron, de Lefrançois et de Giguère — sous l'angle de la difficile, mais nécessaire, trahison qu'exige l'arrivée en poésie de ces écrivains.

Trahison d'une partie de soi, comme chez un Miron qui ne cessera de s'interroger sur la possibilité de « désentraver l'avenir » en poésie sans toutefois renier une souffrance qui le dépasse, une agonie liée à la situation collective et transmise « de père en fils jusqu'à [lui] ». Trahison sans équivoque cette fois de la société chez Lefrançois et Gauvreau, lesquels empruntent diverses stratégies — la mystification chez Lefrançois (né Steenhout); la mégalomanie et la transgression violente chez Gauvreau — pour faire voler en éclats les normes et les codes de la littérature et de la société québécoises. Enfin, trahison peut-être moins éclatante, mais certainement tout aussi efficace, chez Giguère et Hébert, qui, par le biais d'une plongée dans les retranchements les plus intimes de l'être, s'abreuvant aussi bien aux pulsions de vie qu'aux pulsions mortifères de celui-ci, parviennent à « naître » en poésie, à proposer une véritable *vision* (au sens rimbaldien du terme) du sujet et du monde.

La relecture d'une partie du « canon » de la poésie québécoise que propose Morency à l'aune des idées de la colère et de la trahison, idées qu'elle approfondit en se référant tantôt à la psychanalyse (Anzieu, Jacques), tantôt à la théorie littéraire et à la philosophie (Agamben, Blanchot, Nietzsche), a le mérite de dynamiser une histoire littéraire qui, encore aujourd'hui, demeure somme toute assez consensuelle. En intégrant du « conflit » dans cette histoire littéraire, Morency pose les bases d'un renouvellement du discours critique sur la poésie québécoise; il ne nous reste plus qu'à souhaiter que cet appel au dialogue soit entendu par les jeunes — et moins jeunes — chercheurs et critiques québécois.

Uncommon Lives

Heather O'Neill
The Girl Who Was Saturday Night.
HarperCollins Canada $22.99

Nelly Arcan; David Homel and Jacob Homel, trans.
Hysteric. Anvil $20.00

Ann-Marie MacDonald
Adult Onset. Knopf Canada $22.00

Reviewed by Neil Querengesser

These first-person novels are worth reading together in the order reviewed, as they offer vivid and compelling portrayals of contemporary women of varying ages moving through successive critical stages of their lives. *The Girl Who Was Saturday Night* is told by a teenager coming of age during the second Quebec separation referendum, *Hysteric* is narrated by a deeply tormented Montreal woman on the verge of thirty and suicide, and *Adult Onset* is recounted by a successful yet troubled Toronto mother and writer approaching her fifties. All three novels draw heavily from events in their respective authors' lives to create fully realized successful works of fiction.

The Girl Who Was Saturday Night, Heather O'Neill's second novel, comes eight years after her debut runaway success, *Lullabies for Little Criminals*. It is narrated by the central character Noushka Tremblay, who along with her fraternal twin Nicholas turns twenty during the political and social tumult of Montreal in 1995. The Tremblay twins were born of a one-night stand between their father Étienne, a famous Québécois singer, and an underage girl from Val-des-Loups who soon turned them over to be raised by their paternal grandfather. Noushka and Nicholas have become household names throughout Quebec,

having been shamelessly exploited through the media by their father to further his own career. Noushka is longing to find meaning in her life beyond her current identity as Étienne's daughter and Nicholas' sister. But she soon discovers how difficult it is to break away from these family ties and the expectations of her society. Noushka attracts many men. Among them, she soon discovers her current affluent Anglais boyfriend to have closer ties to her family than hitherto suspected, and moves on to a volatile marriage with the francophone Raphaël, a former teenage figure-skating sensation with a secret traumatic past. As her province moves inexorably towards the conclusion of its referendum, so too does Noushka struggle towards the possibility of her own independence. Although she endures a multitude of tribulations throughout her last year as a teenager, the novel's tone is generally upbeat and often humorous, a quality achieved primarily through an expertly realized narrative voice. The narrator sounds like someone not much older than the self she is describing: sensitive, self-conscious, and still vulnerable and co-dependent, yet also intelligent and self-directed. She navigates the often-tragicomic obstacles that beset her with distinctive charm and élan. Like O'Neill herself, Noushka emerges as more than just a survivor from her troubled teenage years.

Hysteric is a harrowingly realistic account of a former prostitute's attempt to construct a somewhat more *normal* relationship with her boyfriend but finding it a daunting task. The novel has significant autobiographical elements; it is narrated by a woman named Nelly, in much the same voice as Arcan's first novel, *Whore*. Much of the story is an address to Nelly's lover, a hip journalist from France, with whose writing she often compares her own. She iterates with intensity and literary brilliance the passions, jealousies, and conflicts of their cripplingly dysfunctional relationship. She spares few disturbing physical or emotional details of her life in the Montreal nightclub scene, of drug abuse, of her broken sexual relationships, of her complicity in her lover's internet porn addiction, of the distressing hallucinogenic aftermath of her abortion, and of her teenage photo session a decade earlier for *Barely Legal* magazine. Much of the novel, particularly the twenty-nine-year-old narrator's oft-repeated goal to kill herself at age thirty, resonates with literary cries for help, cries made doubly poignant by Nelly Arcan's own suicide at thirty-five, five years after the novel's first publication. It is a disturbing book to read, both for the adept portrayal of its own traumatic events and for its close connections to the life of this talented and promising writer, cut so tragically short.

While psychological trauma also informs Ann-Marie MacDonald's *Adult Onset*, it is contained within a larger and generally supportive family and social network, giving this novel a more redemptive vision. As with the other two novels, the narrator, Mary Rose, "Mister," MacKinnon, has much in common with her author. Both were born in Germany to military families with Nova Scotian roots. Both are successful middle-aged writers living in Toronto, married to younger women with careers in theatre. Both are raising two children and a dog. While Mary Rose may have other things in common with her author, the novel's success does not necessarily depend on that. Each of the seven chapters is devoted to a day of Mary Rose's life in the first week of April 2013, with several flashbacks to her earlier years. Throughout the week this otherwise prolific author wrestles with how to respond to her elderly father's first-ever e-mail, in which he has expressed his and her mother's belated pride in and acceptance of her lesbianism, ironically misspelling in his subject line a reference to the popular LGBTQ video "It Gets Better."

The novel indeed has much to do with

"getting better," in many senses of the term. But before better can be achieved, worse needs to be acknowledged and confronted. In her childhood Mary Rose suffered from painful bone cysts and resultant operations. As a middle-aged woman she begins to contemplate, indeed virtually obsess over, the extent of her parent's complicity in this disease, wondering if they helped cause it through their neglect or through unintentional physical abuse. Her aching arm becomes a central trope for the many problems that currently beset her: her absent spouse Hilary working on a theatre project out west; conflicts between her pit-bull and the letter carrier; aging and forgetful parents; the influence of siblings dead and living; a willful toddler for whom the house can never be sufficiently child-proofed; and other, younger, mothers against whom she is constantly measuring herself. From the outside, her week moves through the banal episodes of many a middle-class mother; from the inside it is a battleground, a site of tremendous struggles within herself to find enlightenment and balance, and, if possible, an understanding truce with her past. *Adult Onset* begins well and gets even better, as does MacDonald's literary career.

Reinterpretations

Michael Penny
Outside, Inside. McGill-Queen's UP $16.95

Eleonore Schönmaier
Wavelengths of Your Song. McGill-Queen's UP $16.95

Ricardo Sternberg
Some Dance. McGill-Queen's UP $16.95

Reviewed by Maude Lapierre

While these three collections vary greatly in form, they share a concern for the manner in which current perceptions force reinterpretations of memories, relationships, and language. Eleonore Schönmaier's *Wavelengths of Your Song* explores the tensions between past and present in a world in constant flux. Memories of the past shape not only the understanding of the self, but also the manner in which the present can be perceived. The speaker is anxious to establish relations between what she has learned from her father, his environmentalism and love for the frozen landscape, and her own travels throughout the world. Despite its constant meandering, this collection does not move freely between times and places as it remains forever aware of death and of the political complexities that constrain movements, of "the danger inherent in travel." Its dialogue between places, the past, and the present is also mirrored in the form her poems often take, as her constant use of the colon illustrates conversations between speakers, opens up her poems, and muddles their meaning. Schönmaier's poems also create connections between different forms of art, such as music, literature, and painting, because stories generate identities. As the speaker states, "Admiring the surfaces, we forget / we're also the stories we never share." Through intertextual references to Greek mythology and works by Goethe, Kafka, and Celan among others, *Wavelengths of Your Song* strives to generate new ways to interpret relationships between people, artists, and art forms. Yet, these new relationships are fragile since "you tell people the truth knowing / full well they won't believe you."

Ricardo Sternberg and Michael Penny's collections are similarly constructed around the themes of identity construction and memories, and also weave Greek mythology within their works. Penny's interlinked suite of poems in *Outside, Inside* is mostly concerned with words and their meaning, and how his poems write "an entire world into existence / . . . a spelling error / could annihilate / a needed life form." These poems betray a certain anxiety of place and time, as the speaker fears he might be lost,

in an unknown location, or running out of time "because / I am captive and master / in all my own words." Penny's poems both assert and undermine the speaker's identity, initially claiming to "know where I am" but later stating that "there is no here." In this quest for self-discovery, maps cannot be trusted "because they fold," so the speaker remains simultaneously lost and not lost, here but not here. Written through the lyric "I," readers of *Outside, Inside* are guided by the perspective of the speaker, who mainly focuses on establishing his identity and his place in the world. While never claiming to be an all-encompassing and universal "I," the speaker's voice can be overbearing and alienating at times, especially in passages that constantly assert what *he* knows, what *he* owns, and what *he* sees. Yet, the speaker never establishes himself too authoritatively, as the nature of writing entails a certain loss of control: "words vandalize / chipping away meaning."

Sternberg's *Some Dance* is also interested in the meaning of words and the power of literature to force readers to consider competing perspectives, but his poems blend humour with an emphasis on strong contrasts in order to explore how the interplay between opposites creates meaning. Much like Schönmaier, Sternberg relies heavily on intertextuality, as the relationship between memory and stories greatly shapes experiences. In the first section, readers follow an unnamed protagonist as he moves from a commune, a medical clinic of dubious legality, to a bench by the sea. The protagonist's experiences cannot be trusted, as memories and perceptions have blurred due to the influence of time, literary fiction, and soap operas. The second part is not as closely interlinked, as the poems draw from other works of literature in order to explore how individuals relate to stories to reinterpret their meaning. In "Morals," the speaker reflects that the moral of La Fontaine's fable of the ant and the grasshopper was lost on him, because the tale made him pray at night that one ant "slipped the hidden crumb / to the dazed, half-dead grasshopper." The speaker also reflects on the manner in which meaning shifts, as with the expression "no love lost" which seems to signify intimacy ("so close were we at one time that in our traffic / there was no love lost between us") but which also signifies the opposite. Through this emphasis on contrasts, the poems indicate that meaning is in constant flux and must always be reinterpreted.

Drawing the Curtain

Stan Persky
Post-Communist Stories: About Cities, Politics, Desires. Cormorant $24.95

Mark Bryant
World War I in Cartoons. Fitzhenry & Whiteside $24.95

Mark Bryant
World War II in Cartoons. Fitzhenry & Whiteside $24.95

Reviewed by Niall McArdle

The Iron Curtain had a formative influence on Stan Persky. As a child in Chicago after World War II, Persky's image of that physical division between East and West "was my initiating encounter—the idea, however crude, that there was a flow of events *out there* that affected our lives *here*." Because the Cold War was a dominant fact in so many people's lives, Persky writes that he "couldn't conceive of a world in which the Iron Curtain didn't demarcate its unalterable boundaries." Persky's students grew up in a world without it, and when they think about it, it is only as a strange historical fact far removed from their digital-age concerns and globalized outlook, things that Persky still finds baffling.

Post-Communist Stories is a thoughtful, warm, and often wryly funny examination of a topic usually given a sober treatment:

the state of the former Eastern Bloc after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Perhaps because in his day job Perksy is a philosopher, his tone is one of gentle but insistent inquiry and his approach is that of a curious traveller instead of an academic with a historical axe to grind. He has written a collection of essays charting his encounters in places such as Budapest, Berlin, Sofia, and Vilnius in the early 1990s.

Persky has chosen a distinctive style of writing: the literary travel memoir. While living in Berlin in 1991, he was reading Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, which got him pondering a trip to Albania (perhaps only a philosopher could find a connection between the inscrutabilities of the Belgian Congo and an Eastern Bloc country so unassuming and with such a boring reputation that Persky was embarrassed to admit to his friends that he wanted to go there). In Tirana he meets two translators, Simoni and Qesku, men who had translated Communist tracts for the Party, but had also translated works by Dickens, Conrad, and Orwell, and had found a pragmatic way to deal with the absurdity of working with words they didn't believe. They made dictionaries, looking always for the most neutral way to define something. "Working with words saved us from the situation in which we lived, sort of."

Words are important to Persky, particularly those of his literary and philosophical forebears. In the book's outstanding chapter, "Berlin and the Angel of History," Perksy uses Walter Benjamin as the first of his many guides to the city. Much as Benjamin wished to chart his life's experiences on paper in a series of signs making up a map of his life, Persky's idea of the city "is equally built on such personal sites, routes, routines. My private map of the city isn't wholly constructed from the historical events of the past quarter-century. . . . Rather, it is a labyrinth of the city's different ways—like the "ways" in Proust's *Swann's Way*—to walk from my apartment near Charlottenburg Castle, say, to Savignyplatz, just north of Michael Morris' former studio on Mommsenstrasse."

Berlin has a special hold on Persky—he has lived there part-time since 1991—and it is in this essay that the book's subtitle *About Cities, Politics, Desires* is most exemplified. He recalls first visiting Fuggerstrasse in the city's gay district.

> I sensed the countless stories that its bars, restaurants, and buildings held, stories of love affairs, disasters of the heart, even the casual encounters that merely raised the participants' heart-rates for a few moments. This was a history other and older than Communism, its consequences and its end.

Persky relates an epiphany he had while sitting on a stool in a crowded bar:

> At that moment, absorbing the flow of information circulating through the bar and at the same time the specificity of the person against whom I was pressed, I had the sense of being 'inside' . . . a brief instant in which I felt free of a persistent sense of alienation from the world.

The political events of the Cold War were of course supported by propaganda on both sides, and there is perhaps no greater propaganda tool in the modern age—and no greater satirical force—than the political cartoon. Mark Bryant's collections of cartoons from the First and Second World War are invaluable for the historian and casual reader alike. Lavishly illustrated with sketches, comic strips, recruitment posters, and editorial cartoons, both books provide a lively, extensive look at both conflicts. There are cartoons from all sides; propaganda posters and pacifist cartoons; thoughtful comic strips and barbaric, racist jokes. As well as famous examples, both of Bryant's "graphic scrapbooks" contain an array of pictures from some lesser-known, overlooked, or forgotten sources.

In the Speculative Mode

B. W. Powe
Marshall McLuhan and Northrop Frye: Apocalypse and Alchemy. U of Toronto P $32.95

Brett Josef Grubisic, Gisèle M. Baxter, and Tara Lee, eds.
Blast, Corrupt, Dismantle, Erase: Contemporary North American Dystopian Literature.
Wilfrid Laurier UP $48.99

Reviewed by Krzysztof Majer

These two publications are bound up in investigating the relationship between the increasingly complex, globalized present and imagined, radically uncertain futurities. They probe the extent to which the latter—figured as part of various critical and literary agendas—contain the seeds of the former, or else constitute a radical break in cognitive, technological, social, and political terms.

In *Apocalypse and Alchemy*, B. W. Powe offers a critical double homage that continually strives to overcome or reinterpret its doubleness. Having studied under both Frye and McLuhan, whose uneasy coexistence within the critical field helped define the "Toronto School of Communication Theory," Powe seems ideally suited to the task. And the task is a daunting one: to yoke together (alchemize?) the sprawling, scattered teachings of two thinkers whose contrary positions once seemed entrenched: the "typographic man" versus the "prophet of the digital age," or "the seer" versus "the hearer." Yet Powe's intuition, grounded in comprehensive (re)readings, is to conceive of Frye and McLuhan as "each other's horizons," the initiators of "a visionary-apocalyptic tradition in Canadian letters."

Employing a strategy that he recognizes as distinctly Canadian, Powe interprets their rivalry as a productive, necessary agon—an enactment of the Blakean dictum that "Without Contraries is no progression." Powe works through the differences towards an array of rewarding convergences. Besides their determinedly literary points of reference (e.g., *Finnegans Wake*), Powe notices a shared "impulse towards revelation," deeply rooted in Frye's Methodist training and McLuhan's Catholic devotion. According to Powe, the two are united in their belief that the cosmos—Nature or Super-Nature—is coded yet legible. The "apocalypse" is therefore to be taken in its epiphanic, revelatory sense, as an ushering in of a utopian, global era of new understanding: a philosophical position which sits uncomfortably alongside the diverse inheritance of the hermeneutics of suspicion.

Powe's assertion that Frye and McLuhan are inescapable Canadian influences is nowhere more evident than in his own text: grappling with their legacy is rendered through a fittingly Biblical, pluralized metaphor of wrestling for intellectual independence with a "Janus-like" angel. Stuart Hall once remarked that a theory for which one must "wrestl[e] with the angels" is ultimately the only one worth maintaining; and yet, a reader may wonder if Powe is not somewhat overpowered. His masters' apocalyptic, even "Pentecostal" tone certainly informs his critical evaluation. The lasting significance of their common achievement is continually restated, and yet the study rarely queries their influence on particular writers or critics. The excellent section on representative critiques of Frye's political escapism (Jameson) and McLuhan's humanization of the media (Eco, Baudrillard) sadly occupies only ten pages, while meriting an entire chapter.

The authors whose work has been collected in *Blast, Corrupt, Dismantle, Erase* operate, for the most part, within a very different idiom. Here, utopian futures are more readily critiqued than established, the raised concerns at once more local and pressing. The intensely political nature of this inquiry into dystopian narratives is already evident in its timeframe: the "notably volatile period" from January 1, 1994 (NAFTA's coming into

effect), to September 11, 2011 (the tenth anniversary of 9/11). Concomitant with this choice is the geopolitical reach, i.e., the combined territories of NAFTA's members—the US, Canada, and Mexico. The essays range across a number of frequently hybridized literary genres, e.g., science fiction, young adult fiction, comic book / graphic novel, or urban fantasy.

Consequently, the volume allows for refreshing critical juxtapositions. Whether concerned with imagining alternatives to dysfunctional systems (e.g., Tobeck, Miller), analyzing relations between technology, economy, and the social order (Lapointe, DeGraw), reinscribing erased subjectivities into collective histories (Canivell, Rivera), or rewriting the boundaries of dystopia (Tally, Staveley, Konstantinou), these twenty-five essays invariably offer stimulating criticism, productively positioned along a number of significant boundaries. Notably, several authors (especially Stubblefield and Percy) struggle with and ultimately reject Margaret Atwood's contentious declaration that the qualities of utopia and dystopia are always commingled and should be theorized collectively as "ustopia." Where Powe strives to present Frye's and McLuhan's attempts to "comfort and inspire" and "to let us soar," Grubisic, Baxter, and Lee seem intent on disrupting our comfort and reminding us that no transformation is possible without our involvement.

Lire les chaînons manquants

Chantal Savoie

Les Femmes de lettres canadiennes-françaises au tournant du XX^e^ siècle. Nota bene 25,95 $

Compte rendu par Marie-Hélène Constant

À la suite des travaux précédents de la chercheure, cet essai s'inscrit du côté des approches sociales de la littérature et des études culturelles, tout en « réfléchiss[ant] aux gestes posés par l'historien de la littérature », à partir d'études de cas. Il s'agit de retourner directement aux œuvres pour interroger le contexte, les trajectoires et les pratiques des femmes de lettres de l'époque. Cette « histoire des chaînons manquants » met en lumière le succès des écrits féminins, dans l'espace médiatique et littéraire, et montre comment ces auteures sont marginales « surtout dans le discours qui en rend compte, celui des histoires, des anthologies, des manuels de littérature ». Ce sont les rapports entre la « position occupée dans le champ et les stratégies utilisées par une personne pour faire valoir sa compétence », son autorité et sa reconnaissance qui sous-tendent tout l'ouvrage.

Du général au particulier, les quatre parties qui composent l'essai font le point sur les connaissances de l'époque en dévoilant des informations nouvelles, pour ensuite mieux en déployer les réseaux et les pratiques. Dans un premier temps, il s'agit de montrer l'évolution des pratiques et des trajectoires de trois générations d'auteures. Savoie montre les quatre « facteurs qui déterminent les carrières d'écrivaines » : l'éducation, l'accès à la sphère publique, l'insertion dans des réseaux et l'état civil. À la suite de cet imposant chapitre, la mise à jour des réseaux et des regroupements des femmes de lettres permettent de replacer le contexte national dans celui plus large des préoccupations féminines et féministes à l'échelle internationale. Les pratiques associatives — la Fédération nationale Saint-Jean-Baptiste — et les échanges entre la France et le Québec notamment autour de l'Exposition universelle de Paris de 1900 permettent de tracer des trajectoires jusqu'aux périodiques féminins, dans un « double mouvement d'accès à la sphère publique et de spécialisation des intérêts pour les activités lettrées et intellectuelles ». Poursuivant la réflexion, le troisième chapitre investit ce discours public au féminin par le biais de trois femmes, dans le

« double contexte d'une certaine prospérité économique, [et] d'un champ littéraire en début d'autonomisation » : Madeleine, Françoise et Gaétane de Montreuil. Savoie souligne en quoi les « espaces féminins des journaux au tournant du XX^{e} siècle peuvent être [envisagés] comme un avatar moderne, populaire et public du salon littéraire », inscrivant ainsi ces écrits au centre d'un autre héritage culturel au féminin. Le dernier chapitre est consacré aux auteures des chroniques dans les grands quotidiens dans la foulée de la publication de deux recueils signés par des femmes, Françoise et Joséphine Marchand. Cette partie s'intéresse aux enjeux formels qui caractérisent la « pratique de la chronique et du billet », et s'inscrit dans l'élaboration d'une histoire littéraire des femmes, mais aussi dans « une histoire littéraire qui veut considérer les marges, celles qui jouxtent les pratiques jugées dignes de faire date et de nourrir la mémoire collective ».

La démarche de Savoie est généreuse; le dialogue revendiqué avec les thèses et travaux des groupes de recherche pose l'ouvrage au centre d'un réseau. Plus que la monstration de simples conclusions de recherche, l'essai se donne à lire comme un point d'ancrage pour les travaux à venir.

Plural Singularities

Asma Sayed, ed.
M. G. Vassanji: Essays on His Works.
Guernica $20.00

Reviewed by Sneja Gunew

As Kevin Hart points out in his contribution to this collection, a scholarly scrutiny of M. G. Vassanji's contribution to "the global literary scene" is long overdue. It is cause for celebration that this volume, the first in Canada to engage with M. G. Vassanji's many and important writings, should appear. Noteworthy as well is the fact that it is published by Guernica, an imprint that for numerous years has been a pioneer in publishing writers and critical debates that could be characterized as productively supplementary to the mainstream. The collection includes an illuminating introduction from Vassanji and an interview with the editor, Asma Sayed, who is an exceedingly well-informed guide and interlocutor concerning the cultural and historical contexts of Vassanji's work. She provides as well a very useful bibliography of works by and about Vassanji although his most recent book, *And Home was Kariakoo: A Memoir of East Africa* (2014), is not included, which is testament to his astonishing productivity.

While Vassanji has been given numerous prizes (notably the Giller—twice), he has not been adequately studied in Canadian letters and it is surprising, for example, that he is shelved under African rather than Canadian literature at UBC. He has too often been essentialized (and dismissed) as embodying the "in-between" existence of the quintessentially rootless immigrant and this has served to paralyze rather than animate further analysis. It would be more accurate to suggest that he is a master of capturing the syncretic elements in global cultures and the complex loyalties and intertwining affiliations of the many whose travels take them across the world and who represent as well worlds within themselves. Moving among Africa, India, and Canada, Vassanji is an erudite commentator on the parochial legacies of colonialism that still govern settler colonies such as Canada. This is particularly visible now when we have the "bookends" of his memoirs of travelling in India (*A Place Within*) as well as Africa (*And Home was Kariakoo).* With his sense that the creative writer must "bear witness; to give his or her place of life, a humanity, a status in the world . . . to go to a village and make a universe out of it," Vassanji has undertaken this mission not only through his own work but as well in setting up TSAR

(*The Toronto South Asian Review* now *The Toronto Review of Contemporary Writing*) to support the writers who slip through the inescapable institutional gatekeeping associated with national literatures.

In the collection, Jonathan Rollins traces Vassanji's counterpoint to a Canadian visuality based on the iconic legacy of a specious *tabula rasa* and *terra nullius* consolidated by the Group of Seven. Annie Cottier examines Vassanji's literary cosmopolitanism in *The Assassin's Song*, the first of his novels to be set in India. Amin Malak looks at Vassanji's record as a postcolonial writer who draws attention to the legacies of German colonialism in Africa as well as to the Indian community's complicity with slavery in Africa. In addition to the interview, a number of writers focus on Vassanji's links with the syncretic Gujarati Khoja community that mixes Hindu and Muslim traditions. Such minglings are a much-needed antidote to the increasingly congealing binaries associated with belief systems in the world today. One hopes that this collection will be a catalyst for producing the overdue sustained scholarly research that Vassanji's work deserves.

Carving Texts

Diane Schoemperlen
By the Book: Stories and Pictures.
Biblioasis $28.95

Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas
Red: A Haida Manga. Douglas & McIntyre $19.95

Reviewed by Mike Borkent

Diane Schoemperlen's and Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas' books explore the material and mediating conditions of textuality and storytelling by carving up texts. Schoemperlen dissects a range of public domain books and images from the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries to develop *By the Book: Stories and Pictures,* a work of found texts and collages. Inspired by the experimental, avant-garde tradition, the book includes an understated manifesto that discusses the creative potential of the "fragment" and collage to produce "something new and unexpected."

Schoemperlen draws her textual content from sources that focus on topics including natural and cultural history, geography, and public hygiene, with one or two sources contributing to each chapter. Each source is fragmented and collated to produce narrative and poetic effects. For instance, in her opening story, Schoemperlen informs an Italian immigration narrative with language from a nineteenth century Italian-American guidebook: the protagonist duplicates phrases and lists in attempts to communicate with those around him. The source text becomes at various points author, narrator, and character to create an anachronistic pastiche that enriches the story's ending. Other chapters simply collate long series of loosely inter-related statements that reveal racist, sexist, anthropocentric, nationalist, Romantic, and other normative and idealistic ideologies. The focus on just one or two sources for each section preserves their archaic, stale, and patronizing tone, which is at times quirky and humorous and at others tiresome and trite. These exhaustive collections need further trimming to better highlight their findings. The visual collages, which consist of creative combinations of extra-textual images and select phrases and words from the sources, are more successful. Many collages are revelatory and witty, although their similar visual style starts to feel formulaic over time. While the book offers several intriguing sections (especially the first and last chapters), it needs further carving to achieve real freshness and innovation.

Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas' graphic novel *Red: A Haida Manga*, on the other hand, is a stimulating re-visioning of the comics medium. He illustrates the visual culture of the Haida, including carvings and

face paintings, and adapts a Haida parable about revenge. The protagonist, Red, is an orphan boy whose sister is stolen away by a raiding party. Over many years, he becomes a leader who is driven to develop weapons, including a fantastical wooden whale submarine, in order to find his sister and avenge her kidnapping. In the meantime, his sister has built a new, happy life with a husband and son. As the story unfolds, we see how the trauma of separation has driven Red with a singular, vengeful purpose. I find it troubling that the story seems to romanticize the kidnapping of women between Indigenous tribes and nations. However, the focus on Red, rather than his sister, may excuse this to some extent. The story does speak to a range of contemporary issues surrounding community, security, and retaliation, and offers a message of peace, adaptation, and forgiveness.

The story is beautifully depicted (albeit with a few hiccups in sequences where the panels pinch together), and clearly blends Japanese manga and Haida storytelling traditions. Yahgulanaas successfully adapts typical comics paneling to Haida visual style. The structure of the story, not just the content, is informed by the arts of carving and painting and their intimate connection to Haida cultural practices. On the final pages (and inside the slipcover of the original 2009 hardcover edition), an illustration of all of the panels combined together reveals a composite Haida painting or carving, much like those found on bent boxes and building panels. In a note, Yahgulanaas encourages readers to "destroy the book" and "reconstruct this work of art." He invites readers to become participants in the processes of story-making, to carve up the narrative and experience an alternate reality: the living visual tradition of Haida art.

In this way, Yahgulanaas encourages the reader to connect to the Haida storytelling and visual art tradition, in which stories are embedded in communities and are informed by audience participation (a quality presumably inherited and adapted from Haida orature). Similarly to Schoemperlen's found texts and collages, Yahgulanaas' contemporary expression of Haida storytelling employs the malleability of texts to draw attention to their mediation and complex cultural integration.

Littérature de contact

Sherry Simon; Pierrot Lambert (trad.)
Villes en traduction. Calcutta, Trieste, Barcelone et Montréal. PUM 34,95 $

Compte rendu par Claudia Bouliane

Avec *Villes en traduction*, Sherry Simon propose une étude comparatiste de quatre *moments* urbains privilégiés de la modernité, qu'elle saisit par le biais d'une conception inusitée de la traduction envisagée en tant qu'action performative, mais aussi comme sous-culture et, éventuellement, comme mode d'écriture. Si la mise sur le même plan de cités et de périodes historiques fort différentes peut surprendre à l'abord, l'argumentaire que déroule habilement l'auteure convainc amplement de la pertinence de tels choix, d'autant plus que des figures (Hermès, Kafka) et des images (le pont, le passage, la tour de Babel) traversent le livre de part en part comme autant de balises dans cette audacieuse aventure intellectuelle. Prenant le parti herméneutique original de suivre le parcours de traducteurs, plutôt que d'écrivains ou d'œuvres, Simon en fait les points de rencontre entre des cultures hétérogènes, sans pour autant verser dans le biographisme ou se risquer sur les terres de l'histoire culturelle, qui lui sont moins familières; le texte se trouve au cœur de l'entreprise, qui débouche sur des analyses thématiques et topiques éclairantes.

Elle explore ainsi les interstices, les « tiers espaces » de ce qu'elle nomme les « villes

doubles », palimpsestes burinés par le passage de colonisateurs, de réfugiés ou de migrants, pour nommer quelques-uns des types d'itinéraires qui retiennent son attention. Phares au milieu de ces emplacements nodaux, les traducteurs facilitent la médiation entre ces êtres souvent en conflit par le truchement de stratégies de « négociation culturelle ». Celles-ci imprègnent jusqu'au texte même de l'ouvrage, où pullulent des néologismes doubles, souvent bien courants déjà dans la langue française moderne, lesquels constituent eux-mêmes des lieux de croisements entre divers noumènes : « autotraduction », « intercirculation », « interzone », « plurilinguisme », « polycentrique », « transmigration », « eurorégion transfrontalière », etc. Ils participent des deux « formes d'engagement » traductionnel qu'identifie Simon : la *distanciation* et le *dépassement*, qu'elle illustre au moyen d'exemples révélateurs.

En raison de son ton personnel, renforcé par l'usage de la première personne du singulier, l'ouvrage relève davantage de l'essai que du traité académique, ce qui, en plus de rendre sa lecture agréable, convient on ne peut mieux à son objectif d'amorce de dialogue : le « je » de Simon « ouvr[e] une discussion » avec d'autres « je » d'auteurs ou de théoriciens, mais également avec celui du lecteur, qu'interpellent directement les situations sociolinguistiques qu'elle étudie et les questions laissées volontairement en suspens par une analyste consciente de leur complexité. Dans cette mesure, plutôt que de mettre un point final à un débat ou une signature sur un concept, *Villes en traduction* agit comme un ouvroir à de nouveaux projets de recherche en traductologie, comme en sociologie urbaine ou bien en littérature.

Le seul aspect qui prête le flanc à la critique est l'absence totale de considération pour l'apport de l'univers numérique, lequel modifie considérablement le rapport des citadins à leur ville et aux langues qui l'habitent depuis plusieurs années, des trajets dirigés par Google Maps aux évaluations de commerces proposées par Yelp!, en passant par les applications de traduction instantanée qui prolifèrent sur le marché. Il aurait été intéressant, pour l'auteure qui débute son étude par une citation extraite du poème « La Toile » de Borges, d'examiner les relations intertextuelles, les « points d'intersection », pour reprendre une notion au cœur de son propos, entre les deux types d'organisation réseautée où les langues comme les êtres se croisent et échangent : la ville et le web.

Il n'en demeure pas moins que Simon offre avec *Villes en traduction* une réflexion d'actualité brûlante alors que des questionnements identitaires se font jour ou ressurgissent partout sur notre planète bon gré mal gré « mondialisée ». L'ouvrage se clôt sur une défense de la pluralité babélique des villes contre leur uniformisation linguistique comme façon de redéfinir l'espace civique et de redynamiser le plein déploiement de l'imagination.

À la première personne

Patricia Smart

De Marie de l'Incarnation à Nelly Arcan. Se dire, se faire par l'écriture intime. Boréal 29,95 $

Compte rendu par Jane Everett

Nous devons à Patricia Smart des études marquantes sur, entre autres, l'œuvre d'Hubert Aquin (*Hubert Aquin, agent double*, 1973), l'« émergence du féminin dans la tradition littéraire du Québec » (c'est le sous-titre de son magistral *Écrire dans la maison du père*, 1988/1990) et *Les Femmes du Refus global* (1998). Son livre le plus récent (2014), sur lequel porte ce compte rendu, propose une autre étude importante, cette fois sur la pratique féminine des genres de l'intime au Québec. À l'origine de ce projet, « un constat désolant » : « . . . il y a non seulement relativement peu d'autobiographies de

femmes dans la tradition québécoise, mais encore celles qui existent témoignent souvent d'une fragilité identitaire tout à fait à l'opposé de la robuste conscience de soi que l'on associe habituellement au genre ». Si cela est vrai pour les écrits de type autobiographique, il reste que les Québécoises ont pratiqué d'autres formes de l'écriture de l'intime (« . . . les annales des communautés religieuses et . . . les correspondances et les journaux intimes . . . »), qui s'ajoutent au corpus à l'étude. Tous ces textes évoquent, à leur manière, les raisons de l'absence relative constatée : les contraintes sociales, religieuses, matérielles, familiales qui pèsent sur la vie des jeunes filles et des femmes, rendant difficile l'accès à la subjectivité et (à) l'expression de celle-ci.

Patricia Smart nous propose une étude scientifique qui se lit comme un récit, allant et venant entre les vies individuelles telles qu'elles se donnent à lire à travers les abondants extraits et l'évocation de leurs contextes. Sont également convoquées, selon les besoins de la démonstration, les perspectives de critiques littéraires, de théoriciens et théoriciennes des genres et du *gender*, et de spécialistes de l'histoire (littéraire, culturelle, sociale, etc.). La bibliographie exhaustive dans laquelle Smart a puisé est à cet égard exemplaire.

Le livre est divisé en quatre grandes parties composées de deux à quatre chapitres. L'ordre est essentiellement chronologique, avec quelques recoupements : La Nouvelle-France (les écrits des fondatrices); de 1748 à 1862 (la correspondance); de 1843 à 1964 (le journal intime); de 1965 à 2012 (« L'âge de l'autobiographie »). Les chapitres se concentrent sur une ou quelques figures, mais au fil de son texte, Smart souligne les échos, les filiations, les ressemblances et les différences entre les individus, les époques, les pratiques. Les constantes sont le rapport entre l'accès à l'écriture et à la subjectivité, la conscience des contraintes, l'importance de la mère.

Les auteures étudiées sont religieuses, mères de famille, couventines, journalistes, littéraires — catégories qui ne sont pas toujours étanches — et bon nombre d'entre elles nous sont connues, soit parce que leurs écrits intimes (correspondances, journaux, autobiographies, fictions à caractère autobiographique, autofictions) le sont, soit parce qu'elles ont (eu) une présence « publique », parfois les deux. Mais qu'elles soient bien connues de l'histoire de la littérature québécoise, ou moins bien connues, leurs écrits constituent des témoignages précieux sous maints aspects. L'auteure en résume bien l'intérêt particulier, à la fin de son livre : « C'est peut-être dans les récits de soi que nous nous approchons le plus du point insaisissable où le personnel et le collectif se rencontrent, et où le singulier rejoint l'universel. »

Unanswered Questions

Ella Soper and Nicholas Bradley, eds. *Greening the Maple: Canadian Ecocriticism in Context.* U of Calgary P $44.95

Reviewed by Graham Huggan

Greening the Maple is a long overdue anthology of Canadian ecocriticism, both a welcome and necessary addition to a rapidly expanding and intellectually exciting research field. The anthology aims, in its editors' words, to "trace a genealogy of ecocritical approaches to Canadian literature," with "genealogy" being a well-chosen term for a compilation that is more likely to challenge the developmental orthodoxies of literary history than to confirm them, and in which attempts to find a consolidated national tradition—a distinctly *Canadian* ecocriticism—are as likely to be frustrated as fulfilled. That said, several contributors to the volume seem worried that it's easier said than done to discover what *is* different about Canadian ecocriticism, with the editors claiming rather unconvincingly that

"environmental approaches to Canadian literature represent not merely a branch of the American or British tree, but instead, to shift metaphors, a different but related species." Related *how*? Different *how*? These are set up as some of the volume's central questions, but—and this is as much a strength as a weakness—these questions remain largely unanswered, with several contributors freely admitting that Canadian ecocriticism, like environmental criticism more generally, often tends to operate locally and regionally rather than nationally, and that it has become increasingly global in scope.

Other big questions go similarly unanswered in the volume, not least those relating to ecocriticism itself. What *is* ecocriticism? Clearly, early text-based definitions, which stress the two-way relationship between literature and environment, have been placed under increasing pressure as the field has gravitated towards more cross-disciplinary, theoretically complex understandings of the transverse connections between human and non-human worlds. These understandings are "ecological" up to a point, but which point? And what do ecocritics understand anyway by "ecology"? The editors are no more certain about this than the contributors, so—as is often the case in the volume—the questions begin to multiply: "Is the ecology of ecocriticism a metaphor? A biological concept? A statement of political orientation?" (To which perhaps the best—and the most suitably cryptic—response would be either none of these or all of them; either something else entirely or all of the above.) Ecocriticism, in short, is a highly self-reflexive field which is given increasingly to question its own conceptual vocabulary and investigative methods; and as one might expect from such a field, it is as much a platform for theory as a mode of textual analysis, though as the best material in this anthology demonstrates—exhilaratingly in some cases—it usually contains elements of both.

It is interesting to see in the pages of the anthology how this conceptual vocabulary changes: from gendered cultural-nationalist attempts to link environmentally oriented writing to "a Canadian sensibility" and "myths of national development," to putatively "ecological" modes of criticism which paradoxically see the natural world as a testing ground for human moral integrity, to the more theoretically and politically dispersed work of the present day, which imaginatively explores a variety of cross-cultural and cross-species perspectives, which frequently combines social activism and environmental advocacy, and which draws on densely cross-hatched scientific and philosophical approaches—such as biosemiotics, new materialism, phenomenology—that either see human beings as indistinguishable from nature or, in their more radical inflections, as inhabiting to what to all intents and purposes is a "post-natural" world.

It is also illuminating to see how critical confidence builds, with some of the better essays setting aside old-chestnut anxieties about national identity to address such disparate issues as Canadian/US bioregionalism, the ecological fallout of global-capitalist development, or the botanical characteristics of some of Canada's national parks. Perhaps the biggest disappointment, then, is that the anthology ends with a coda on the environmental online newsletter *The Goose* that reasserts its Canadian credentials. If it's true, as this coda playfully suggests, that Canadian ecocriticism has taken flight, maybe it has done so in ways other than—at least by implication—the anthology intends. This sympathetic British reader is left wondering, for example, whether the increasingly scattered community of Canadian ecocritics still has to be based in Canada, whether Canadian nationality is a prerequisite (there is not a single non-Canadian contributor here), and whether the anthology's laudable

ambitions to celebrate nationally inflected forms of heterogeneity and pluralism as the basis for global environmental awareness have really been served.

These too are unanswered questions, but to its credit *Greening the Maple* is well aware of its own absences and insufficiencies, and the anthology stakes no more claim to being representative than it does to speak on behalf of those—Aboriginal Canadians most obviously—who are unavailable to represent themselves. For the uninitiated reader, the anthology might present unfamiliar material in familiar ways, and certainly there is a tired ring to some of the earlier work, which tends to fall back on dated assertions of Canadian "irony" and "ambivalence"; but at its best this is a stirring introduction to a field that, despite the bargain-basement moralism to which it sometimes remains prone, is far more sophisticated than it is given credit for—and that represents one version among others of the future of humanities scholarship, both in Canada and elsewhere.

Contributors

Articles

Veronica **Austen** is an Assistant Professor, specializing in Canadian and postcolonial literatures, at St. Jerome's University in the University of Waterloo in Ontario. Her research interests include visual experimentation in Caribbean and Canadian poetry and the portrayal of the visual arts in contemporary Canadian literature.

Ranbir K. **Banwait** completed her PhD in English from Simon Fraser University. Her areas of specialization are in Asian Canadian literary studies and postcolonial studies. Her doctoral research draws on feminist theory, affect theory, and biopolitics to argue for the need to historicize the body through feeling in contemporary Asian Canadian literature.

Andrea **Beverley** is an Assistant Professor in the English department and the Canadian Studies program at Mount Allison University in Sackville, New Brunswick. She is currently working on a research project on the 1983 Vancouver Women and Words conference. She has published articles in *University of Toronto Quarterly* and *Journal of Canadian Studies*.

Paul **Huebener** is an Assistant Professor of English in the Centre for Humanities at Athabasca University. His work investigates the cultural politics of time in Canada, asking how time functions socially as a tool of power, and how literature and other imaginative responses can help us gain and promote critical temporal literacy. He is a co-editor for *The Goose: A Journal of Arts, Environment, and Culture in Canada*.

Recipient of two awards for excellence in teaching, Kerry **Lappin-Fortin** is Associate Professor of French at St. Jerome's University in the University of Waterloo. She has published articles on second language acquisition and on translation, and is author of a coursebook in translation, *Traduire? Avec plaisir!* (CSPI, 2010).

Lisa **Marchi** holds a PhD in Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies from the University of Trento, Italy. She has conducted research at UCLA, McGill University, and the JFK Institute at the Free University in Berlin. Her research interests include contemporary Arab diasporic literature (both poetry and prose), gender studies, critical theory, philosophy, ethics, and interculturality.

Poems

Lisa **Arsenault** and Natasha **Gold** live in Toronto, Nicholas **Bradley** teaches at the University of Victoria, Andrew **McEwan** lives in Vancouver, Michael **Nardone** lives in Montreal, and Alex **Porco** lives in Wilmington, North Carolina.

Reviews

Dan **Adleman**, Joel **Martineau**, Natalie **Thompson**, and Christina **Turner** live in Vancouver. Liza **Bolen**, Mike **Borkent**, Sneja **Gunew**, Scott **Inniss**, Erin **MacWilliam**, Cameron **Paul**, and June **Scudeler** teach at University of British Columbia. François-Emmanuël **Boucher** and Michel **Nareau** teach at Collège militaire royal du Canada. Claudia **Bouliane** and Jane **Everett** teach at McGill University. Marie-Hélène **Constant**, Sarah **Henzi**, Maude **Lapierre**, and Valérie **Mailhot** live in Montreal. Susie **DeCoste** lives in Windsor. Alicia **Fahey** lives in Peterborough, Ontario. Janice **Fiamengo** teaches at the University of Ottawa. Alana J. **Fletcher** lives in Kingston, Ontario. Coral Ann **Howells** teaches at the University of Reading in England. Graham **Huggan** teaches at the University of Leeds in England. Crystal **Hurdle** teaches at Capilano University. Dorothy F. **Lane** teaches at the University of Regina. Francis **Langevin** teaches at the University of British Columbia Okanagan. Jan **Lermitte** lives in Richmond. Denyse **Lynde** teaches at Memorial University. Heather **Macfarlane** teaches at Queen's University. Krzysztof **Majer** teaches at the University of Lodz, Poland. Anne-Claire **Marpeau** lives in Whistler. Niall **McArdle** lives in Eganville, Ontario. Hannah **McGregor** teaches at the University of Alberta. Benoît **Melançon** teaches at the Université de Montréal. Linda **Morra** teaches at Bishop's University. Tina **Northrup** lives in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Owen **Percy** lives in Stouffville, Ontario. Neil **Querengesser** teaches at the Concordia University College of Alberta. Adrien **Rannaud** lives in Quebec. Eric **Schmaltz** lives in Toronto. Molleen **Shilliday** lives in Surrey, British Columbia. Tina **Trigg** teaches at The King's University in Edmonton. Nathalie **Warren** lives in Rimouski, Quebec. Lorraine **York** teaches at McMaster University.

2014 *Canadian Literature* Best Essay Prize Winner

The 2014 *Canadian Literature* Best Essay Prize goes to Sam McKegney, for his article "'pain, pleasure, shame. Shame': Masculine Embodiment, Kinship, and Indigenous Reterritorialization" in *Canadian Literature* #216.

In focusing "on the coerced alienation of Indigenous men from their own bodies by colonial technologies such as residential schooling," Sam McKegney makes an eloquent case for seeing how this work "served and serves the goal of colonial dispossession." McKegney raises vital questions about reintegration and deterritorialization as well as about the ways in which settler scholarship may engage with and honour the testimony of residential school survivors.

Honourable mention goes to David Williams, for his article "Spectres of Time: Seeing Ghosts in Will Bird's Memoirs and Abel Gance's *J'accuse*" in *Canadian Literature* #219. "Spectres of Time" is about ghosts in machines. By comparing Will Bird's First World War memoir, *How We Go On* (1930), with Abel Gance's silent film, *J'Accuse* (1919), it traces a series of psychological and artistic inversions.

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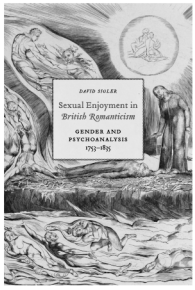

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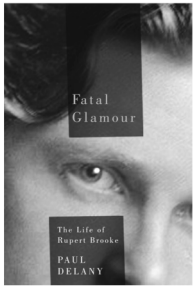

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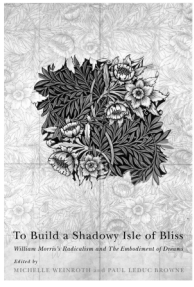

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