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Editorial

The Princess, the Bear, the Computer, and the King of England

Margery Fee

The story begins like this: a Princess goes out picking berries and "oops"—she steps in bear poop (Tate 32). This year, I have started to teach oral story as part of a course that looks at orature and early Indigenous writers. The course is bookended by Thomas King's *The Truth about Stories* and Eden Robinson's *The Sasquatch at Home*. Lee Maracle says in the Preface to her first short story collection, *Sojourner's Truth*, that listeners are expected to reflect on how a story applies to their own particular circumstances (11-13). So the story might apply to me, although I'm not a princess. It could be an allegory for someone putting stories on a course without knowing enough about their cultural context. Or for someone trying to teach oral stories first told in another language. Or for someone looking across disciplinary lines, tempted by those berries over in Anthropology. . . .

For anyone who teaches Indigenous literatures, as I do, the stories are a challenge. King's novel *Green Grass, Running Water* is jammed full of origin stories from a range of Indigenous cultures. Robinson's novel *Monkey Beach* is interwoven with Haisla stories. These novels are written for an audience that likely has no previous knowledge of the stories or their cultural context. King and Robinson aim to educate as well as entertain. Part of the education is showing readers the importance of the stories.

Of course, oral genres have long been part of literary study and have inspired many great literary works. James Joyce's *Ulysses* is just one example. However, the Greek and Roman classics and the Bible and European folk tales generally survive only as written texts, while the Indigenous stories that King and Robinson write down are still alive, being told and retold. In

graduate school, I was forced through Old English, moaning and whining at having to translate *Beowulf* line by line. The great writers in English, I muttered, knew nothing about *Beowulf*, and Old English is really German. And in fact, *Beowulf* and Old English were wheeled into English literary studies in the 1920s around the same time as English literature became a separate university discipline. National literatures were supposed to be grounded in an indigenous oral culture—so the obscure British *Beowulf* became preferable to the famous Greek Homer. Similarly, many major anthologies of Canadian literature begin with some Indigenous oral poems in translation, although they too were unknown to most Canadian writers and so cannot really be said to "ground" the Canadian literary tradition. This retroactive claiming of a formerly ignored Indigenous tradition was fairly harmless in English literary studies. In Canadian literary studies, it is part of a colonial history that takes over Indigenous culture without doing it justice as something more than the beginning of "our" literary history. We should not study oral stories here without keeping the history of colonial appropriation clearly in mind. Nor should we forget that oral stories do not precede written stories, but are contemporary with them. Nor are they a primitive stage to be "outgrown," by the analogy that story is to literature what children are to adults.

Still, English literature does give us an entry into reading oral stories. Everyone who studies English literature reads Homer and Sophocles and ballads and fairy tales as a matter of course. British writers may not have heard of *Beowulf*, but they knew Greek and Roman myth, Arthurian legends, and an array of other variously transcribed, translated, and rewritten oral material. Most writers were immersed in folk culture; they lived when their literacy was the exception rather than the rule. King Lear's "love test" of his three daughters is taken from fairy tale. Wordsworth and other Romantic writers pillaged oral forms and themes. And of course, the Bible, another written compilation of oral material, underlies everything in the history of English literature, at least between *Beowulf* and the secularizing 1960. The English literature curriculum acknowledges its oral foundations, linguistic and literary, even if it does not linger on them. Those of us who teach Indigenous literatures, then, should consider oral stories to be our reaponsibility. But to integrate them properly is a great stretch, given the many nations whose oral cultures are still living in North America and the cultural distance between most of us and the people who know most about the stories and their context.

To add to the difficulty, Lenore Keeshig-Tobias reminds us in "Stop Stealing Native Stories" that not all stories can be used by anyone for any purpose (A.7). Eden Robinson stresses that many stories are the property of nations, clans, or individuals. However, this warning doesn't apply to all stories. So for this course, I have picked stories told and written in English, some produced by Henry Wellington Tate for Franz Boas between 1903 and 1913 and some told by Harry Robinson to Wendy Wickwire in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Certainly, Robinson wanted his stories to reach a wide audience, "white or Indian" (*Living* 89).

Tate's story about the princess and the bear is, in fact, a very widespread and popular story. Catherine McClellan's *The Girl Who Married the Bear* (1970) provides eleven versions of the story she collected from Tagish, Inland Tlingit, and Southern Tuchone men and women living in the Yukon. Tate's story resembles them, but not in all respects, leading to questions about whether the differences relate to his personal experiences and to his Tsimshian culture, whose territories are south of the Yukon. The Yukon stories also differ from one to the other, and McClellan considers how these differences might relate to the individual storytellers.

Tate's story, like the others, reveals how complex human-bear relationships are for a culture that hunts and eats bears. What generates the action is not the slip that spills the Princess' berries, but that she insults the bear by crying out "alas, it very nasty" (Tate 32-33). The consequences of her bad manners are dire for both the Princess and the bear. The Princess has made herself vulnerable. Although he appears to her as a handsome man, still, the bear takes her away from her family. Rather than forming family bonds in a "proper" marriage, she has set her brothers, famous bear hunters, against her own husband. As McClellan says, the conflicting loyalties in the story generate huge psychological tensions (1).

In Tate's version, the Princess wants to save her husband from her brothers. She chooses a den for them high up on a ridge as far as possible from the hunting grounds. But the elder brothers kill so many bears that by the time the youngest goes out hunting, there are scarcely any bears left. The youngest brother has almost given up when his dogs catch her familiar scent and run ahead: then she rolls down a snowball with the imprint of her fingers in it. She clearly wants to go home. At first her brother is reluctant to kill the bear: after all, this is his brother-in-law. But the Princess has just had two babies and knows she has to choose: she wants them to be humans. She tells her brother that he has to kill the bear, and he does. But the bear, who

had a premonition of his death, has taught her how to mourn him and treat his body properly, knowledge she passes on to her brother. This respectful treatment presumably will promote future success in the hunt.

She and her two children go home and her father loves his grandchildren. One day, however, playing roughly, they knock their grandmother down and she calls them "little slaves" (Tate 39). Their mother and her children are ashamed, and the children ask to go back to their father's people. Their sad grandfather misses them. Although Tate begins by describing the village as happy, the story is full of sorrow. However, the hunt goes on and this marriage means that kinship ties have been forged with the bears, whom Tate also calls "myth people" (36).

Tate, whose English is not perfect, uses words that drag a huge array of cultural assumptions with them for Western readers. The Princess is certainly high-ranking, but not in the European fairy-tale tradition of castles, coaches, and tiaras. This Princess is packing a heavy load of berries to be dried for the winter. And in Tate's version, she is accompanied by her slaves. Again the word brings in a huge array of images from history elsewhere. The setting is far from the American South. But the slaves clearly have to help the Princess when she drops her berries, and when it gets dark and they start to worry about wild animals, they have to go on ahead when she tells them to. Situating the social life of Tsimshian people in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century becomes part of teaching the story.

Teaching this story as literature raises other issues. McClellan wanted to collect enough variants of the "same" story to be able to talk about its core as well as the features that individual tellers added. This particular story has many such features, some of which come from Tate's idiosyncratic language. Tate learned to write English while helping William Ridley, the Bishop of Caledonia, to translate the gospels. Thus, when the slaves start to worry about how late it is, they say "let's . . . go right on before night lest the wild beasts come and devour us and we will perish" (33). Surely these words echo the King James Version of the Bible. This phrase varies in style quite a bit from Tate's description of Red and Spots, the youngest brother's "two large beautiful handy dogs" (32). Tate's English, which veers between the biblical and the colloquial, the grammatical and the poetic, and indeed, the literary and the ethnographic, usefully reminds us of the gulf between his social world and ours.

As literature scholars, we usually foreground a story as an individual work of art, while anthropologists front story as part of a large continuum or web

of stories that in turn reveal large belief systems or reflect kinship systems. Indigenous scholars often adapt the stories to contemporary arguments, enacting a continuum that other writers cannot claim. Now we are fortunate to have Indigenous insights, and are perhaps are better able to read stories in multiple ways. Computers make large comparative textual studies possible. Claude Lévi-Strauss' famous article, "The Structural Study of Myth," not only makes a case for taking oral stories seriously, but also calls for the use of computers to enhance their study (443). Ironically, fifty years later, Franco Moretti's *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary History* (2005) makes the case that that quintessential European literary form, the novel, should be read distantly, that is, by computers for quantitative data, as well as by humans.

This move reflects the understanding that many dominant attitudes to fiction have tended to isolate "great" works by "great" male writers at the expense of the nexus from which these works are selected. Much of the last few decades of literary study have been spent showing how works by women and "minority" writers have generally been ignored. Since Indigenous people were deemed not to have writing, and those who were educated were deemed to be assimilated, writers like Tate were ignored, as were his peers. And, as Tate's editor, Ralph Maud, points out, only the stories that suited Western definitions of "myth" were seen as appropriate for collection.

Harry Robinson's stories show, however, that these types of "timeless" story cannot easily be separated out of his repertoire. One of the first stories he tells Wendy Wickwire is an origin story, using classic "earth diver" story form, where the earth that will form the world has to be brought up from beneath the water that covers everything. However, his divers are not animals, but people: the Chinese, the Hindu, the Russians, the Indian and the white. And the Indian and the white are twins, another classic trope in Indigenous stories, and one that Thomas King explores, along with the earth diver story, in *The Truth about Stories*. As Robinson's story proceeds, various expectations are left unfulfilled: the Indian gets the earth that makes the world, not the last and smallest diver, as usual. And the Indian is also Coyote, who later is selected by God to speak to the King of England about settlers' seizing of Okanagan land in the interior of British Columbia. This use of story to make contemporary political points and to document history blows apart most assumptions made by early anthropologists about oral story, as Wickwire points out (Introduction, *Living by Stories*). A computer might be able to pick up the recurrent features—the five earth divers, the twins—but what would it do with the King of England?

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George Elliott Clarke

À *Cristoforo Colombo (II)*

When you got begat,
yo mama shit herself.

Ya confused *Love*
with gold-lust.

Ya came to corrupt *Beauty*
with mirrors.

Equally inhumane and baroque—
like a Renaissance torturer—

seesawed you over th'Atlantic
from a stinking port of bad wine

and unwashed wenches—
to play champion scorpion,

tin-plate swordsman,
cunt-catchin cap'n—

and show an anthropological handsomeness
as you won the fame of monsters,

their untranslatable *Evil*.
Noting yer greasy, bloody surgery

rinsed by mountains of canary wine,
how you crafted an empire

outta Inca and Aztec massacres,
one must feel gold-plated *Bitterness*.

Your statues ought to be
annoying ruins.

[Enfield (Nova Scotia) & Ottawa (Ontario) 26 *septembre* mmxi]

Hannah McGregor

"What Is There to Say?"
Witnessing and Anxiety in Karen Connelly's Burmese Trilogy

Introduction: Witnessing in/to the Voice of the Other

In a 2013 blog post, author Karen Connelly reflected on the differing receptions of her novel *The Lizard Cage* and her memoir *Burmese Lessons: A Love Story*. Both books discuss the Burmese political unrest of the mid-1990s, a time when Connelly herself was living and travelling on the Thai-Burma border. She notes that readers tend to be more critical of the memoir: "*The Lizard Cage* was the better book, I agree, but it's important to remember how different the books are too. A novel; a memoir. A fictional accounting; a record of lived experience, my own lived experience, complete with my failures and my immaturity" ("Is it" n. pag.). Connelly's post explores in microcosmic form what this essay will address more broadly: the affordances and limitations of different genres for bearing witness to the suffering of distant others, and the anxieties that accompany any attempt to ethically represent a culture that is not one's own.

In addition to *The Lizard Cage* (2005) and *Burmese Lessons* (2009), Connelly also published *The Border Surrounds Us* (2000), a collection of lyric travel poetry that includes a dozen poems on Burma. I refer to these books collectively as her "Burmese Trilogy." While they are not explicitly a trilogy in terms of publishing history or marketing, they inscribe the same set of experiences across three genres in a way that rewards such an approach. Reading Connelly's books as a trilogy complicates critical understandings of how her work in particular, and literature in general, bears witness to distant suffering. Multi-genred and intermedial, the Burmese Trilogy constitutes an argument for how different forms bear witness

and a contemplation of these forms' inherent limitations. Witnessing, as it is figured by Connelly in these and other writings, is an act of not only encountering but also representing; it is the translation of experience (the author's or another's) for a larger audience who was not there to share in that experience first-hand. Connelly is particularly concerned with the problem of communicating the political crisis of Burma to a Western readership. The Burmese Trilogy emphasizes these representational anxieties, as it invites a rereading of literature of witness in terms of mediation, circulation, and the ethics of bearing witness.

James Dawes has described the paradox of literary witness: does it intervene ethically in the status quo by revealing the reality of the lives of others, evoking an empathetic response on the part of readers, or does it cater to "voyeurists of terror or bored, purposeless people seeking an 'authentic' moment" (185)? The Burmese Trilogy takes up the ethical burden of having seen, and the impasse of witnessing without exploiting or appropriating, by oscillating between different genres and mediums of representation without fully rejecting or endorsing any of them. While each of the books can be read independently, their relation suggests an anxious back and forth between the impossibility and necessity of representing the experiences of others separated by borders of race, culture, religion, language, and lived experience. *The Border Surrounds Us* is a collection of lyric poems that attend closely to the limits of what language can and cannot say. This collection constitutes Connelly's first sustained attempt to represent her years on the Thai-Burmese border, during which she witnessed vicious beatings at an anti-government protest and the death of a small child in a refugee camp, and listened to various testimonies about torture and imprisonment. In these poems, representation is a struggle that often ends in failure. They draw extensively on the image of borders as a means of signifying both the politically restricted movement of bodies and the limitations of writing about the experiences of others. *The Lizard Cage* on the other hand, crosses these borders to enter into and represent a Burmese prison. This setting—a fictional construct based on the many stories she was told by former prisoners and those with imprisoned family members—is encountered from the perspectives of characters who occupy the prison's world: Teza, a political prisoner sentenced to solitary confinement for writing protest songs; Handsome, the sadistic prison guard who shatters Teza's jaw during a vicious beating; and Nyi Lay, an orphan boy who has been surviving in the prison by killing rats and selling them to

the starving prisoners. The novel thus takes as its subject the same world—claustrophobically confined and subject to the constant surveillance of jailers and warders—that the poems in *The Border Surrounds Us* construct as largely unrepresentable.

While *The Border Surrounds Us* is now out of print, *The Lizard Cage* has been critically and popularly successful: it won Britain's Orange Broadband Prize for New Writers in 2007 and was long-listed for Canada Reads 2014 as one of "5 Books that will change your perspective on the world" ("Get to know" n. pag.). Connelly returned to the same setting five years later in *Burmese Lessons: A Love Story*, an autobiographical account of the experiences that led to the composition of the earlier two books—an account that, as Connelly mentioned on her blog, was not as well-received as her novel ("Is it" n. pag.). In this paper, I refer to the narrator-protagonist of *Burmese Lessons* as "Karen" to emphasize her non-identity with the author-function whose name appears on the book cover. It is important to note, however, that the coincidence of narrator and author names is central to establishing the work as autobiography (Rak 22). *Burmese Lessons* describes Karen's arrival in Burma as a representative of PEN International, her encounters with Burmese writers and political activists, and her subsequent love affair with a Burmese dissident. The memoir can be read as a *Künstlerroman* narrating Karen's journey toward composing her novel, *The Lizard Cage*. It works to authorize her ability to bear witness to the suffering of the Burmese people by describing both her affective connection to the country and the many people who pled with her to "write the book" that will "tell the world what is happening in Burma" (*Burmese Lessons* 19, 98). At the centre of the memoir is the imperative Karen feels to use her freedom as a Canadian author to tell the story of the Burmese people, an act that will justify the degree to which dozens of Burmese people endangered themselves by taking her into their confidence.

The material circulation of different media, including literature, is of primary concern within all three books. In *Burmese Lessons*, Karen notes her feelings of uselessness as a witness to political injustice because she has "no newspaper to write for" (124) that would allow her to represent her experiences to a wide readership. Print's capacity to circulate is also of central concern in *The Lizard Cage*: Teza's "cheroot ceremony," in which he secretly unrolls and reads the scraps of newsprint that line cigarette filters, highlights the dangers and pleasures of the written word in the context of political oppression (50-58). Meanwhile, the illiterate orphan Nyi Lay

amasses books he cannot read, hoarding them as objects that "are full of the world" (262). While *Burmese Lessons* depicts Burmese subjects exhorting Karen to turn her experiences into a novel, *The Lizard Cage* associates novels with the West—what Karen in *Burmese Lessons* calls "the realm of freely circulated ideas and books and newspapers and technologies" (18). Novels may serve as points of entry for Western readers to a world beyond the safety of our own, but within that world, novels become fetishized non-circulating objects. Ironically, the voice of the imprisoned Teza circulates only through written poetry. Reading across the Burmese Trilogy in this way invites questions about the relation between the politics of representation, the ethics of witnessing, and the capacity of different media to circulate images of distant suffering to a readership divorced from the experiences Connelly attempts to recount.

If the Burmese Trilogy is concerned with both the limitations of language and the importance of writing books that will find an international readership, it is because of Connelly's understanding of literary witness. Connelly's article "In the Skin of the Other: Writing *The Lizard Cage*," published in the midst of the novel's eight-year composition, addresses the anxieties and responsibilities evoked by writing about Burma. The article argues that, for a Western public, "our incredible wealth of freedom makes it more, not less, difficult for us to imagine what it is really like for people who live and struggle in countries like Burma" (57). A failure of imagination implies a failure of responsibility in relation to the other; thus, the implication of Connelly's stance is that empathetic imagination is linked to political action.[1] She describes this shift from a subject who empathizes with the other to a subject who acts on behalf of the other as a painful self-transformation that involved both a "long education of trying to be other, and, in all those foreign places, of *being* the other" and a recognition of her own implication in the Burmese struggle, an implication that can only be answered by the politicized action of writing the stories that she has heard in order to educate a larger readership (58). While the article also attempts to justify the novel's border-crossing strategies by insisting that the novel was both requested and explicitly sanctioned by the people she met in Burma, it is the painful process of self-transformation that defines the novel's composition: "The book is coming. It is coming slowly and with great labour out of the prison of my own mind and spirit" (60). Connelly describes the writer as imprisoned, voluntarily bound into the dark places with which her writing engages.

This account of the problem of bearing witness recalls the spatial metaphor deployed by Shoshana Felman in her own description of witnessing. Felman uses the metaphor of inside and outside to account for what she describes as the incommensurability of different acts of seeing; in her work, the gas chamber is the archetypical inside that "*has no voice*" and cannot be the origin of testimony (231). If it is "impossible to testify from the inside" (231), however, the outside is an equally untenable position: "[T]here is a radical, unbreachable and horrifying difference between the two sides of the wall" that separates these "*incomparable* and utterly *irreconcilable*" positions (236). The unbreachability of this wall demands an artist who can "literally *move* the viewers and . . . actually *reach* the addressee," representing the "abyssal *lostness* of the inside, without being either crushed by the abyss or overwhelmed by the pathos, *without losing the outside*" (239). Felman's argument draws upon conditions of witnessing specific to the Holocaust, but the metaphor of an inside and outside separated by an unbreachable wall that is porous to the artist alone is also fundamental to Connelly's work. So is the emphasis on viewers and addressees, the audience toward whom the literature of witness is directed. Connelly's article implies that the journey of the author must be followed by a comparable journey on the part of the reader. It is not enough for the text to be written, however painfully; it must also be read, and read ethically. As Lena Khor makes clear in her reading of *The Lizard Cage*, Connelly's work is available to appropriation by "'the White humanitarian reading classes . . .' [that] consume only certain novels about the Other, ones that tell stories of the Other already familiar to them, ones that synchronize with their own view of themselves and the world" (92). While, as Khor argues, Connelly's novel models alternate approaches to reading about others (94), the Trilogy as a whole is shot through with anxieties, mediations, supplements, and even deliberate failures that do more than model an ethical reading practice. The Trilogy instead presents reading about and witnessing to the other as at once necessary and impossible.

Failure in *The Border Surrounds Us*

The Border Surrounds Us explores the productive limitations and failures of language in the face of atrocity, using the opacity of language to resist the appropriating gaze of the reader. At several points in the collection, the poetic persona emphasizes poetry's uselessness, insisting that, "[a] poem is not an escape path" (34). This concern with uselessness and failure is most emphatic in "The child dead":

> She waits for words to come
> in any dialect.
>
> They forced him to eat pieces
> of his own ears, lips, tongue.
> Then they killed him.
>
> What is there to say?
>
> Her mouth is a hole ringed with teeth.
> Her hands, cutting into the bread,
> picking up a shovel,
> become more useless. (61)

The relation between the lost voice of the unnamed "him" and the useless mouth and hands of "her" operates at various levels. The image of torture is what she, the poet, cannot say "in any dialect"; but her silence also seems to emerge from his. The silenced witness, forced to eat his own tongue, leaves no voice behind that can be communicated by the poet, either through her mouth or, as writing, with her hands. The poet is incapacitated by the voicelessness of the inside (Felman 231).

Nonetheless, to gain access to the voices of the inside is the poet's implicit goal. In the poem "Prison Entrance," for example, the poetic persona is entranced by the sounds of men behind prison walls:

> Sometimes their voices, their shouts,
> were so clear. So clear she wondered
> about the secrets behind
> the high grey walls, the worlds
> she could not fathom, with freedom
> wrapped around her like a cape
> she could never pull off. (25)

The repetition of "so clear" invokes a fantasy of representational transparency that is contradicted by the "high grey walls" of the prison and the insurmountable wall of privilege. Despite the seeming immediacy of those clear shouts, the poetic persona is irrevocably divorced from the interiority both of the prison and of those unknown men because of the irreconcilability of inside and outside. In this collection, poetry is capable of brushing up against but not crossing borders. It can gesture to its own silences, and to the silences imposed by torture, but it cannot undo them. While the book's existence belies this consistent emphasis on representational failure, what the poems say most clearly is that representation is a burden as well as a duty; it is a call for the poet to find words that is made more imperative because finding

words that adequately encompass her experience of the border is impossible.

Emphasizing the unendurability of witnessing, the untranslatability of the other's experience, and the incommensurability of inside and outside, *The Border Surrounds Us* is an exploration of representational failure. Failure refers here not to the success of the poems, but to a productive aesthetics that resists literature's production of homogeneous and knowable images of the other. Smaro Kamboureli argues for the need to recognize, in Judith Butler's words, that "the recognition . . . of the Other is always also the failure to know that Other" (qtd. in Kamboureli 130). This failure to know extends into a network of other failures: "to assimilate the Other into cultural and political discourses that appropriate its differences," for example, or "to see the Other as a fully knowable entity" (130). Failure, for Kamboureli, "is a kind of negative capability that both reveals the alterity of the Other and exposes the fallacy that dominant culture is transparent, dominant in and of itself, a community . . . that fully knows itself" (130). The equation between knowability and representational violence is a key formulation of postcolonial and feminist theory (Meffan and Worthington 133). From this perspective, the productive failures and silences of Connelly's poems not only respect the alterity of the Burmese people and culture, but also undermine the very possibility of representational transparency, introducing a deliberate space between text and reality that emphasizes the alterity of both Burma and the poems themselves.[2]

Read in isolation, *The Border Surrounds Us* introduces a productive difficulty into the act of representation, what Doris Sommer has referred to as a "slap of refusal" that "detain[s] [readers] at the boundary between contact and conquest" (201-02). The poems reject the possibility of imaginatively "becoming other," which Sara Ahmed critiques as a Western fantasy that reinstates rather than challenges entrenched cultural and racial hierarchies (125). In describing the problematic of becoming other, Ahmed draws on the metaphor of the prison: "Passing for the stranger turns the stranger's flesh into a prison—it reduces the stranger to flesh that can only be inhabited as a temporary loss of freedom. The stranger becomes known as the prison of flesh through the fantasy . . . that *one can pass through the stranger's body*" (132). While in "Prison Entrance" the prison wall prevents the poet from inhabiting the flesh of the stranger, in *The Lizard Cage* this dynamic is reversed: the author enters into the perspective of imprisoned Burmese subjects, and the stranger's body becomes not only knowable but arguably inhabitable for author and reader.

Mediating the Voice in *The Lizard Cage*

Connelly has suggested that she considers poetry a more intimate and private genre for various reasons, including its more modest circulation. Prose, in comparison, "involve[s] too much exposure" ("'Implicated'" 206). Shameem Black agrees that the novel has a higher degree of circulation and accessibility (9), but she takes issue with the equation of accessibility and hegemony, arguing against the perspective that representations of others necessarily constitute "new forms of representational violence" (3) by examining narrative's capacity to "present the *process* of imagining social difference" (4). *The Lizard Cage* constitutes an argument for and against its own representational ethics, exploiting the novel's capacity to enter the interior worlds of Burmese characters while undermining fiction's ability to bear witness by both valorizing poetry as the genre most closely linked to the body and supplementing the narrative with photographs.

The prison world of *The Lizard Cage* is obsessed with writing: the circulation of pen and paper is the narrative focus of the novel. Throughout, writing is touted as a material manifestation of the silenced voices and destroyed bodies of those within the prison; it is the messenger that, in Felman's metaphor, can traverse the border between the inside and the outside (239). At the same time, however, the novel's emphasis on the materiality of writing makes it impossible to imagine the written word as a point of direct access to the lost voices or bodies of the prisoners. As a mediation of the voice and the hand, the written word instead emphasizes the inaccessibility of those imprisoned through its ability to cross the borders that they cannot.

In contrast to the exploration of poetic failure in *The Border Surrounds Us*, *The Lizard Cage* incorporates poetry as perhaps the most mobile form of communication. In the midst of photographs, novels, songs, and political protest letters, the poem proves the only form capable of escaping the prison walls. Judith Butler has linked the mobility of prison poetry to the genre's ability "to leave a mark, a trace, of a living being" (59) via its connection to breath: "The body breathes, breathes itself into words, and finds some provisional survival there. But once the breath is made into words, the body is given over to another, in the form of an appeal" (61). In *The Lizard Cage*, the body that is given over to the reader is that of Teza, nicknamed "the Songbird," a young man seven years into a twenty-year sentence of solitary confinement for writing political protest songs. Teza's voice, with its capacity to incite political resistance, is dangerous; by extension, so is the body that bears the voice and the words that make up the songs. In

addition to being kept apart from all other prisoners, then, Teza is denied writing materials.

The plot of the novel centres upon Teza gaining access to this dangerous contraband and eventually composing a long poem that is smuggled out of the prison. The novel painstakingly charts the paths of the pen and paper, both originally part of a set-up by the vicious prison guard Handsome who intends to extend Teza's sentence. When Teza anticipates the coming raid, he eats his letter of political protest in a scene that encapsulates the failure of language to circulate within the prison: "Coughing now, trying to cough quietly, fearing he will start choking and not be able to swallow, he pushes the rest of the wet paper into his mouth" (142). The passage of the wadded paper down his throat is easier than its passage out of the cell, blocked by networks of circulation that are only used to trick and trap him.

The pen finds a different fate, retrieved from outside his cell's window by the orphan boy Nyi Lay, who eventually smuggles it back to Teza, now lodged in the prison hospital after Handsome has shattered his jaw. Teza composes a poem of witness and protest in a stained accounting ledger that Nyi Lay smuggles out of the prison and eventually delivers to Teza's brother Aung Min, a guerrilla soldier in the North. When Aung Min first opens the book, he finds "[t]he handwriting . . . as familiar as the voice Aung Min often listened to on a dusty cassette player" (10). Like this audio recording, the poem is only ever a mediation of the voice and a trace of the body, a testament to the very distance of the man who has been left to die behind the prison walls. The words of the poem echo this perception, suggesting how the poem has come to embody Teza's distanced presence:

> As for me I have forsaken
> every weapon but the voice
> singing its last song
> And the hand Dear Brother
> my own hand
> writing it down. (362)

The language of voice and hand echoes Connelly's earlier poem, "The child dead," but reverses its claims. Where the voice was once silenced and the hands useless, they have become the final weapons, inscribed into a text that will remain after the body has been destroyed.

The Lizard Cage evokes a world heavy with materiality, in which information travels with great difficulty, marked by the bodies and environments it encounters. Although the novel seems to value the written

word as the primary vehicle of witness, this faith in writing was undermined by the inclusion of thirty-eight photographs in the 2005 Random House of Canada hardcover edition, of which thirty-two were taken by Connelly during her travels. The photographs supplement the text, linking fictional representations with small black-and-white images that seem to function as tokens of reality. This supplementarity suggests a crisis of faith in the novel as a vehicle for what she has seen and what she feels she must do. Speaking of the photographs in an interview, Connelly described them as a form of evidence for both herself and the implied reader. They were "really important," she explained, because they were able to remind her and demonstrate to the reader "that this was a reality, not just a text"; acknowledging that photographs are their own fictions, she nonetheless maintained that "they were a piece of this reality that became necessary to me" ("'Implicated'" 217). This reinforcement of the veracity of the novel's fictionalized events gestures toward a different representational anxiety from that of *The Border Surrounds Us*. The use of characters and the absence of an authorial avatar seem to threaten the novel with its own fictional status, and the photographs work to reconnect the events narrated in *The Lizard Cage* with the body of the author, whose physical presence in Burma establishes the authenticity and authority of the novel.

As Silke Horstkotte and Nancy Pedri point out, however, the incorporation of photography into fiction "almost automatically challenges accepted distinctions between fiction and nonfiction," substantiating the novel by associating it with the documentary function of the photograph while destabilizing the authority of the photograph such that it becomes fiction itself (8). The images in *The Lizard Cage* are rife with this ambiguity; they evoke characters and scenes from the novel without ever being identical to them, thus both insisting on the novel's basis in reality and emphasizing its incommensurability with the real. Alongside other authorizing paratexts such as Connelly's article "In the Skin of the Other" and *Burmese Lessons* itself, the photographs suggest an authorial anxiety about using a novel to represent lived experience. If *The Lizard Cage* seems to privilege poetry as the medium most capable of remediating the prisoner's voice, and photography as the medium most capable of rooting a text in the lived realities of those being represented, then why write a novel at all?

Connelly's answer to that question emerges in her descriptions of the novel writing process. She situates novels as uniquely able to cross representational borders, satisfying her desire not to "write a book with a white person at the centre" ("'Implicated'" 218). Set within the walls of the prison, *The Lizard*

Cage allows the implied reader to enter into an encounter with characters defined by distance, difference, and a radical experience of unfreedom. In order to describe the impact of this representational decision, as well as her own experience of writing it, Connelly repeatedly returns to the language of restriction, submission, and imprisonment, describing her writing process as "enter[ing] the darkest places in the human world and . . . stay[ing] there for long periods of time" ("In the Skin" 59). It is the novel, she implies, that makes this "terrible, necessary act" possible (59). In this sense, *The Lizard Cage* aligns with Dorothy J. Hale's recent work on "the ethical value of novels" ("Fiction" 189). The literary ethicists that Hale discusses—including J. Hillis Miller, Judith Butler, and Gayatri Spivak—locate the ethical value of the novel in the readerly act of decision-making, specifically making the decision to freely submit oneself to the alterity of the novel (189). In their defence of the novel as the primary ethical genre, these ethicists focus on its capacity to confront readers with the limitations of their own supposedly all-encompassing vision: "The reader experiences the free play of his or her imagination as produced through a power struggle with a social other [the character]. The struggle to bind turns back on the reader, enabling the reader to experience the self as unfree, as in a constitutive relation with the other, who, in turn, binds him or her" ("Aesthetics" 902). Hale's analysis of reading as "voluntary self-restriction" ("Fiction" 195), when extended to *The Lizard Cage*, suggests that the ethical value of the novel lies in its formal and thematic interiority, produced by setting almost the entire novel within the walls of a prison that the implied reader must freely enter, choosing to share the prisoners' experiences of constraint.

These claims for the ethical value of the novel are not only at odds with the aesthetics of failure explored in *The Border Surrounds Us*, but are also internally complicated by the incorporation of supplements like photographs and externally complicated by the publication, five years later, of *Burmese Lessons: A Love Story*. The memoir problematizes the status of the novel as the most ethical way to represent the suffering of others by engaging in its own deliberations on the ethics of various media and forms including novels, poetry, photographs, documentaries, newspapers, and oral testimony. While the photographs were cut from the paperback edition of *The Lizard Cage*, the memoir has stepped into their place as a sign of the novel's relation to a perceived reality. Much as the poems in *The Lizard Cage* gain their value because they serve as stand-ins for the voice and hand of Teza, the novel gains its ethical and political force through its understood status as the

mediation of a material reality. What becomes apparent when the memoir is added into the Burmese Trilogy, however, is that the novel's capacity to represent the Burmese struggle is far from straightforward.

Authority and Anxiety in *Burmese Lessons: A Love Story*

Burmese Lessons is filled with the traces of alternate forms of representation that are by turns validated and critiqued, including writing itself. The result is a memoir characterized by self-conscious generic fluidity, shifting between political commentary, testimony, and love story. This fluidity is the source of the memoir's effectiveness as a self-reflexive engagement with the problems of representing the other, but it may also account for the book's critical unpopularity. In *Boom! Manufacturing Memoir for the Popular Market*, Julie Rak connects the recent surge in mainstream memoirs to the desire to "learn about [political] events through personal stories" (161), demonstrating how the political capital of these memoirs lies in "the link . . . between personal authority and political authority in the intimate public sphere" (162). A comparison of reviews of *The Lizard Cage* and *Burmese Lessons* suggests that reviewers, at least in this case, associate interiority and intimacy with the novel rather than the memoir. Reviews emphasize the capacity of fiction to "show[] us the kind of suffering that newspapers can't communicate and non-fiction rarely reaches" (Taylor n. pag.), praising *The Lizard Cage* for "show[ing] us what autobiography usually veils: the human spirit not at its most defiant and brave, but as it really is and can only be" (Adams n. pag.). Fiction's capacity to generate a reality that exceeds non-fiction is emphasized by critiques of the novel for crossing the line into documentary or journalism. Craig Taylor takes issue with the photographs which, he argues, take away "[t]he pleasure of creation in the reader's mind" (n. pag.), while reviewer Tash Aw finds fault with the "heavy-handedness" of the novel's more didactic passages: "[T]he weight of information she provides obscures rather than heightens the sense of a country in crisis" (n. pag.).

Burmese Lessons, on the other hand, is praised primarily for its ability to point back to the novel. Marian Botsford Fraser frames the memoir as an answer to the question she had after reading *The Lizard Cage*: "[H]ow on earth [was] Connelly . . . able to write such a visceral, subtle, complex book, how could she know specifics about life in prison in Myanmar?" (n. pag.). Paul Gessell reads the memoir as "a non-fiction prequel to *The Lizard Cage*" and argues that, "[i]f nothing else, *Burmese Lessons* will entice you to read or

reread Connelly's novel" (n. pag.). And Lesley Downer's primary concern is the memoir's failure to entice with the same vivid accounts that characterize the "harrowing novel," complaining that Connelly is too "preoccupied with her emotional journey" to provide the specifics of "her meetings with dissidents in the jungle and her interviews with guerrilla fighters" (n. pag.). What readers really want, Downer implies, are intimate details of life in Burma.

This sampling of contemporary reviews from Canada, the US, and the UK suggests how closely Hale's description of the novel's function aligns with some readers' understanding of the genre ("Aesthetics" 902). The novel's ability to enter the prison, and bring readers along, is pivotal to its political and ethical value; critiques of the novel focus on any features that detract from this quality of intense interiority, while praise for the memoir is rooted in its insight into the origins of the novel's verisimilitude. The memoir, then, functions as a prequel that authorizes the novel by rooting it in the author's lived experiences. Supplementary like the photographs, the memoir implies an anxiety that the novel will not be read as fully real. This reinscription of the author's experiences indicates a further anxiety: that the author has engaged in an act of representational violence by eliding herself from the novel. *Burmese Lessons* personalizes the first two books, placing them within an autobiographical register that establishes the entire Trilogy's authority while simultaneously undermining it.

In *Burmese Lessons*, Karen is once more an outsider in relation to the culture of Burma, a "foreigner" as she repeatedly calls herself, but also one of the white Western "experts" that include journalists and NGO workers. She includes herself in her critique of the appropriative practices of experts: "The Westerner knows. We are entitled to knowledge, among other things. That is what makes us experts. Everything becomes territory to us, everything becomes ours" (54). This passage explicitly links the white expert gaze, knowledge production about the foreign other, and colonialism as a means of both evoking and problematizing Connelly's authority. A key example of this problematization occurs on a visit to the Maw Ker refugee camp, where Karen witnesses a small child's death by malaria. Afterward, Karen's guide Tennyson asks why she didn't take photographs: "[W]e need pictures of this," he insists. "This is the truth, this is how our children die" (292). Though Karen promises to "write it down instead," she notes "the promise of the written word makes little impression on him. In the propaganda fields of the world, the image is all-powerful" (292). Later, Tennyson forgives her for failing in her duty as a witness, not because he believes that her writing will do any good, but

because he is not certain anything will: "It doesn't matter," he tells her. "About the photographs. We have too many photographs already" (294).

Tennyson's claim invokes debates over the political efficacy of the image while placing an ethical demand upon literature—both the memoir and the novel that Karen is implicitly promising to write—to do something that photographs cannot. Karen's ongoing resistance toward taking pictures of violence or suffering recalls critiques of photography as a potentially objectifying and racializing medium. Susan Sontag links the proliferation of images of "grievously injured" racialized bodies in contemporary journalistic practices and "the centuries-old practice of exhibiting exotic—that is, colonized, human beings," in which "the other, even when not an enemy, is regarded only as someone to be seen, not someone (like us) who also sees" (72). The relation between viewing and being viewed reinstates power dynamics in which the white gaze is fixed upon and fixes non-white bodies. Karen's discomfort with the role of the white photographer suggests her awareness of this representational history, and her reluctance to spectacularize the suffering of racialized bodies. Readers of the Trilogy know, however, that Connelly did take photographs of Burmese subjects, photographs that she included in her novel as a means of establishing its veracity and, implicitly, her authority as a witness. When Karen retroactively refuses the efficacy of photography, then, she also calls into question Connelly's earlier representational choices, much as the novel's willingness to enter the prison calls into question the poems' insistence on the impossibility of such a move.

Karen's representational authority is also destabilized through the memoir's emphasis on the ethics of oral testimony. As Karen becomes more involved with the Burmese diaspora in Thailand, she begins to privilege interviews over writing: "The most useful thing I do around here is interview people about their experiences in Burma and on the border. Even that is beginning to feel more useful than actually writing a book. . . . To tell his or her own history is one way for a human being to reclaim legitimacy" (*Burmese Lessons* 237). The memoir's emphasis on oral testimony attempts to undermine the privilege of the white expert by giving the story over to the voice of the other. Karen's description of conversation as more useful than writing also conveys her anxiety about producing any representation of Burma at all, an anxiety that is closely linked to her consciousness of herself as a privileged white subject.

Karen's ambivalence about how to best serve the people of Burma and their cause is a recurring trope in the memoir. Sometimes she rejects widely

circulating media because she is concerned about their appropriative or colonizing tendencies; at other times she implies that her act of witnessing would be more meaningful if she herself were a journalist. "Does it matter that I saw what I saw?" she wonders after witnessing a protest: "I have no newspaper to write for, no report to make to anyone who cares" (*Burmese Lessons* 124). Newspapers and reports regain their representational validity despite their complicity with hegemonic knowledge production because of their capacity to circulate. Karen may value her interviews with Burmese subjects, but unless she mediates these encounters so that they can circulate beyond the protests and refugee camps, she cannot meaningfully impact the political oppression against which her interlocutors are objecting and in defiance of which they are risking their safety by speaking with her. These same interlocutors are clearly aware that the possibility for political change is tied to circulation. One friend asks her to "[p]lease write a good book so that it will become a bestseller and bring much attention to my little disaster country" (*Burmese Lessons* 221). Despite Karen's anxieties about her own representational authority, it is seemingly her ability, as a white Western expert, to write a "bestseller" that makes her most useful to the Burmese people.

This ethical conundrum is at the heart of the Burmese Trilogy as a whole. While each text can be read as a reflection on its own genre's efficacy in representing what Connelly witnessed on the Thai-Burma border, the three books together refuse to either valorize or reject any particular genre, form, or medium of witnessing. The writing of *The Lizard Cage* may seem to undermine the aesthetics of failure explored in *The Border Surrounds Us*, but *Burmese Lessons* returns to the ethics of border-crossing by interrogating the narrator-protagonist's right to write her book; ultimately, it presents the composition of *The Lizard Cage* as the only appropriate response to the debt Karen owes all those who shared their stories. As a whole, the Trilogy gestures toward its basis in lived experience while introducing a gap between representation and reality, attempting to establish its status as literature of witness without objectifying or fetishizing the other. The Trilogy thus models an ethical ambivalence that recognizes both the responsibility to bear witness by producing books that will circulate widely and the impossibility of doing so without exploiting the suffering of others or potentially catering to a voyeuristic readership. It rejects the possibility of ethical purity in literature of witness, residing instead in the messy space of failure, anxiety, and perpetual rewriting.

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NOTES

1 Suzanne Keen describes "the contemporary truism that novel reading cultivates empathy that produces good citizens for the world" (xv) as "attractive and consoling" (vii), if not convincing.
2 For more on the aesthetics and politics of textual alterity see Black; Drichel; and Goldman.

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George Elliott Clarke

Anatomy of La III^e^ République

By Alexandre Dumas, fils*

I.

Sit yo black ass down; face white lecturers:
Lap up *Lechery*—

Can-can of cant
(can't):
no can-do—

of *liberté*, *égalité*, *fraternité*—

and no pretense either.

(Even th'Emperor—
Louis-Napoléon—
was a turd,
a piece of human dirt.)

And the dark-pigment pimps of Pigalle preach,
"Pallid men quail,
fearin black snakes."

Meanwhile, thugs mug as bankers;
rapists doll up as pastors.

* Cf. Fanon, always Fanon.

Paris is Pigalle, not the Louvre.

La Sorbonne apes Le Moulin Rouge.

II. *Prélude* (*circa* 1867)

See? Baudelaire pipes drooling poetry—
gamey verses—
cause he wanna screw down Jeanne Duval,
Queen Creole siren
(whose *négligé* shows nappy, silken *négritude*).

He wanna fuck that puffy-nippled, voodoo chile—
that foxy, tropic minx—
inimical to Morality;

he lusts to jet
white blossoms on her pubic sable.

Thus, his sonnets exalt, but don't preserve
Virginity

(though he only got a worm-size prick,
testicles no bigger than a sugar-lump).

He dream of her beauty,
he brag of her beauty;
he adores the ornaments
of this elemental beauty;
and he is tender, ardent,
as his anatomizing eyes
graze upon her every atom;
while she smokes opium
in a saccharine light,
in rosé dusk or dawn;
and he wants to gallop her
gynaecological beauty. . . .

Instead, he jabbers—
rank blabbing of an alexandrine
slid from vers blanc to ink-black—

but a true-blue, blue-gummed gent—
the pigeon-toed, pidgin-tongue nigger—

snags Duval's chocolate-sweet ass

with his elegant sass.

III.

Paris—*Métropole*—cries to its colonies,
"Mo' cocoa, coffee, cocaine";
chides,
"Y'all think a piano
a coffin for a pony";
and damns dark ports and portals
as "vortices of *Crime*."

Frère, Br'er,
go from Martinique to France—
come from Egypt to France—
ya enter a maelstrom,
becoming now a *nigger*—
a bo'n criminal
et un idiot—
even if your soul
is as complicated as Macedonia's
incestuous, but variegated tribes.

Existence tastes like palm wine:
Sour.

IV.

Negro intellectual,
you confront
a crude, nervous race—
souls clipped by *Anguish*—
even as you sip icy wine in infernal August
and count the vermillion, vermin-ridden corpses
of Franco-conquistadors,
who ended up speared in Tahiti. . . .

Entendez

The true French history:

Black Eiffel Tower
penetrating pale Arc de Triomphe.

White muse, black penis.

[Halifax (Nova Scotia) 25 *septembre* mmxi]

Aleksandra Bida

The "complex map" of Home in Liquid Modernity

Re-thinking Mobility and Stability in Nicolas Dickner's *Nikolski*

Originally published in 2005, Nicolas Dickner's debut novel won several awards including the Prix Anne-Hébert in 2006; Lazer Lederhendler's 2008 English translation won the Quebec Writers' Federation Award for Translation as well as the Governor General's Literary Award for Translation. The book, in its English form, garnered further critical and popular acclaim when it became the 2010 Canada Reads winner, championed in a series of televised debates as a standout work of Canadian fiction ("Book Profile" n. pag.). With additional translations, *Nikolski* has become a truly important Québécois, Canadian, and international work because of its intricate overlapping narratives of three highly mobile Canadians as well as its poetic evocations of mobility, loss, and belonging. My focus in this article is on the notion of home, which is the nexus of these three ideas and which Dickner compellingly suggests should be understood as a "complex map" (99). His evocation of the map metaphor is significant because home has long been conceived of in relation to a singular location on the basis of rigid nationalist and capitalist world views—most notably, through the sense that citizenship or ownership can fully legitimize claims of at-homeness and thus easily define home in a materially "home-centred culture" (Morley 26). Dickner incisively illuminates an emergent view that works to interrelate rather than isolate experiences of mobility and readily accommodates the reality of our multiple connections to places and people.

Nikolski is particularly well suited for reconsidering the nuances of home because the novel is international and diverse in its reach, discussing suburbs, decayed urban centres, sparse islands, liminal spaces of transit, the exotic

and the banal, distinct places and those that seem placeless. The geographic scope of Dickner's debut includes much of Canada as well as faraway locations, not for the sake of exoticism but as a testament to the complexity of genealogies, migration histories, and narratives of home spaces. Beginning in 1989, the novel spans a decade during which its protagonists rethink home by travelling but also re-contextualizing their past mobility in relation to that of others. One of the ways in which Dickner investigates mobility and its consequences is by examining the notion of strangers—not only meeting strangers but also the feeling of being a stranger. Yet, rather than highlight alienation and loneliness, Dickner shows the broader potential for family and community amongst strangers through the idea that, unknowingly, strangers may (already) be closely connected. *Nikolski* interweaves the narratives of three protagonists who are unaware of their links: the unnamed narrator of his own chapters, this narrator's half-brother, Noah, and their cousin, Joyce. Linking the three is Jonas Doucet, absentee father to the boys and a maternal uncle that Joyce heard stories about but never met.

The three protagonists are related but exemplify very different experiences of the stability and mobility inherent to home. On one hand, the unnamed narrator is initially as immobilized by the comfort of the familiar as his mother, who was a travel agent but after his birth only ever "travelled" by reading guides (237-38), yet he eventually decides to see the world. On the other hand, for Noah, mobility is the norm because his childhood is spent on the road—"a narrow nowhere" (37)—in a trailer and he desperately seeks to settle in one place, only leaving Montreal when he finds out that he has a son with a former girlfriend. Lastly, Joyce more consistently embraces mobility and avoids her cousins' dramatic shifts. Her childhood is spent in a remote village where travel is not much of an option with the exception of the "seasonal variety of nomadism known as transhumance" (46), with residents moving in summer to the coast for fish. Joyce eventually half-settles in Montreal before fleeing potential prosecution for computer piracy, and she most clearly illustrates a strategic approach to mobility that Dickner shows as increasingly central to understanding not just *where* but *how* the idea of home is "made."

In this article, I examine *Nikolski*'s rich imaginary landscapes in order to explore what I call the process of "home-making," in which gender-neutral "home-makers" quite literally "make" themselves at home. The personalized mapping of home, which Dickner's characters undertake with increasing proficiency, incorporates the self-reflection that Martin Heidegger argues is imperative for *dwelling*, a notion that for Heidegger includes thinking

about as well as constructing and conserving home. Heidegger wrote about dwelling mid-century, but in what Zygmunt Bauman has written about prolifically and called liquid modernity—an era which followed solid modernity around the end of the twentieth century and which is characterized by fluidity, particularly through increased uncertainty, risk, and flows—our means of engaging with or committing to thinking about dwelling are greatly altered. A socio-economic context defined by incessant change and flux would seem antithetical to Heidegger's sense of dwelling, and yet dwelling is shown in *Nikolski* as not only possible but in many ways necessary for these mobile and fluid protagonists as they (re)locate and meaningfully position themselves within a socio-political and material reality. The three main home-makers in *Nikolski* are cartographers of home and the very process of mapping assists them in "ever learn[ing] to dwell" (Heidegger 159) as well as discovering what Gaston Bachelard describes as the house's "powers of integration" (6). Furthermore, the home-makers in *Nikolski* do not simply locate a physical "corner of the world" (Bachelard 4) but map multiple "corners" on different scales in order to construct a more meaningful identity anchor, one that is capable of reflecting the multiplicities and liquid modern contexts of home-making.

My central argument is, first, that the process of mapping home depicted in *Nikolski* importantly highlights strategies of adaptation rather than escape amidst modern flux, and, second, that Dickner's work showcases innovative means of fostering stability, commitment, and community in an age of increasing flows. The novel does this by offering the view of home as a complex map, which I understand as multi-sensory and multi-scalar,[1] and by depicting diverse protagonists who are not simply passive readers of externally identified "homes" but active, lifelong cartographers of their sense of home. Throughout the novel Dickner investigates Yi-Fu Tuan's claim that "[h]ome, for the modern person, is a point of departure rather than the locus of permanent loyalty" (103) and builds on Sara Ahmed's critique of the conventional "assumption that migration is necessarily a movement *away* from home" (16). *Nikolski*, I suggest, contributes to this discourse by examining the multifaceted relations between our "roots" and "routes." Joyce, for instance, views her migrations as moves *towards* home, her pirate heritage, and childhood dreams, which she links to the Caribbean. Noah, meanwhile, expresses contradictory emotions that pull him both forward and back: "I'm feeling kind of rudderless. I could go back to square one. Buy a trailer and head back to Saskatchewan . . ." (190). However, even

as a child Noah possessed a "miniature inner atlas" (36) and over the course of the novel he finds that he can rely on a complex map of home to help him to learn to dwell because, instead of marking "square one" (190) or another location, this mental map offers a palimpsestic, constantly re-charted multi-dimensional grid of home.

The Privilege of Mobility: Tourists and Vagabonds

The protagonists of *Nikolski* can be called nomads, but they are not Bauman's two kinds of liquid modern nomads because they use mobility in order to understand rather than escape ideas of home, settlement, and belonging. In *Globalization*, Bauman argues that the term "nomad" has become overly fashionable and misleading because "it glosses over the profound differences which separate the two types of experience" (87). The two types that he proposes are the tourist, unfettered by allegiances and supplied with endless choice, and the vagabond, denied the agency of choosing where to move and in many ways how to live. Akin to the digital divide, Bauman's point is the veritable global *mobility* divide, but the tourist-vagabond binary should not be read as a condemnation of all travellers or regulations regarding migration, both of which can certainly offer social and economic benefits. Not only is mobility not equally distributed but, as Rosemary Marangoly George points out, home "is not equally available to all" (9). Dickner explores the responses or alternate ideas of home that such a reality can provoke in home-makers who lack a more traditional legacy of geographic belonging. Noah's mother's trailer, the narrator's isolated suburban childhood home, and Joyce's home village—or, more accurately, her grandfather's old house, which goes "adrift" (59) shortly after his death—are all important parts of each character's own complex map, but which cannot define the idea of home for them.

Noah gets a job delivering groceries by bicycle in Montreal and finds himself exploring "a complex map of the area, at once physical and cultural" (99), and the theme of unofficial mapping runs throughout the novel. Noah's epiphany is influenced by his very mobile childhood, during which he idealized home as a decidedly stable location—he considers jumping out the trailer window just to remain in one place (37) and when he finally gets a room in Montreal "he feels unworthy of occupying this place" (82). However, Noah discovers that one address or even two dimensions are not enough to explain his relation to space and his sense of home: "he would need a mobile, a game of Mikado, a matryoshka or even a series of nested scale

models" (99). For me, the dynamic, overlapping, and nested aspects of this description imply the multi-scalar home, an idea that requires multiple geo-cultural scales as well as private and public dimensions to be understood. The shifting perspective in the novel—that "zooms into and out from a local, personal position: Canada, Quebec, Montreal, Little Italy, an apartment, a room, a bed, a thought" (Lederhendler 41)—becomes an integral aspect of the interwoven narratives. It is only after discovering this expansive approach to thinking about home, rather than upon finally moving out of his mother's roving trailer and into an apartment, that "[f]or the first time in his life, Noah is starting to feel at home" (Dickner 99).[2]

For Catherine Bates, "*Nikolski* is a novel with a postcolonial aesthetic that foregrounds the inherent problem with maps" (206), and this problem is met not with a rejection of maps, but with creative solutions to these problems. Bates examines Noah's "palimpsestic mental and embodied map" (206), and she suggests that Joyce's use of a hand-drawn dumpster-diving map made by an archaeology professor shows her role in "developing an alternative cartography of the city, which undermines the planned, official version" (205). In addition to these alternate depictions of space, there is a map of the Caribbean inside the Three-Headed Book, which showcases different relations to mobility. The book has no title but is named for the three very different yet compiled historical narratives that align with each of the characters: information on treasure islands for Noah, the archaeologist; a pirate tale for Joyce; and the story of a castaway for the Montreal Island-trapped narrator (154). All of these unique maps exemplify the evolving possibilities of locating and charting home in liquid modernity, as Joyce and her cousins continue exploring their "roots" through various "routes" and, in this way, they map and assemble home rather than simply pinpointing or rejecting a home space.

In *The Black Atlantic* Paul Gilroy uses the metaphors of roots and routes to elaborate on the "double consciousness" of the African diaspora, and the relation of roots/routes has extensive relevance to the idea of mapping home, particularly as Gilroy points out that it is not only European traditions that are "more interested in the relationship of identity to roots and rootedness than in seeing identity as a process of movement and meditation that is more appropriately approached via the homonym routes" (19). James Clifford draws on Gilroy's work and applies the relation more literally to his own idea of "travelling cultures," arguing that although "roots always precede routes" (3) in previous understandings of dwelling, the two are

actually deeply intertwined through "different patterns of affiliation and displacement" (88). *Nikolski* depicts these very patterns. Dickner has said that the idea for the novel stemmed from the patterned migrations of sperm whales in *Moby-Dick* and from anecdotal stories of running into friends while halfway across the world as though participating in such whale-like patterns ("Nicolas Dickner reveals" n. pag.). The characters in *Nikolski* not only seek out connections by uprooting but also explore old as well as new roots and engage with various communities.[3] Noah initially defines himself through "the paradox of being the descendant of both the reservations and a deportation" (22) on account of his mother's Chipewyan and his father's Acadian heritages, and such "patterns of affiliation and displacement" (Clifford 88) are continued through his own decisions to remain in, leave, and return to his former apartment in Montreal.

Each of Dickner's main characters seeks his or her own mix of stability and mobility, not as hypermobile tourists or mobility-restricted vagabonds but as alternative types that are not only mobile and settled but that, importantly, chose to commit to home spaces in spite of and even because of their (im)mobility in Montreal or a "hemisphere next door" (269). In order to explore Dickner's alternative types, I use as my starting point the idea of "nomadology" that is explored by his characters, particularly Noah, who first envisions a university degree in this strange field.[4] Having to choose a major at university, Noah finds himself "looking for the Diploma in Applied Nomadaology or the B.A. in International Roaming, the only disciplines for which he felt he had some talent, but there was no mention of any such degrees" (39). Nomadology, as a study of nomads or nomadic practices, suggests the need for a deeper analysis of the reasons for as well as means and effects of migration. Noah's notion of "nomadology" highlights emerging mobilities and kinds of commitment that are central to Dickner's novel as well as his idea of home-makers charting their own innovative maps of home.

According to Martin Jay, Bauman's overarching project of liquid modernity suggests that "We are all nomadic extraterritorials, who restlessly transgress the increasingly porous boundaries left by solid modernity. We have learned to value transience over duration, and cope—more or less—with the erosion of even our sense of enduring individual selves" (98). Dickner complicates such an assessment in *Nikolski* when, on one hand, Noah feels that "[h]is family tree was, like everything else, a transient thing that receded with the landscape" (28-29), while, on the other hand, Joyce seeks "to elude the clutches of her family tree" (60). Ultimately, Dickner shows that such

extremes—the tourist's transience or vagabond's entrapment—do not, in fact, undermine the modern relevance of the concept of home. Instead, such experiences work together because mapping incorporates relations to other people, places, and social forces into the already composite idea of home. In fact, Dickner's characters more than "cope" (Jay 98) with the issues that Bauman outlines; they manage to thrive by looking to unconventional examples rather than expectations and norms. Joyce looks to historical and virtual pirates, the narrator eventually escapes "the gravitational pull" (282) of guidebooks and seeks answers *through* travel, and Noah delves into the history of the Garifunas.

The Garifunas offer a particularly salient alternative home-making model. These "great voyagers" are "neither wholly Aboriginal nor entirely descended from the African slaves" (150, 207), and they become a means for Dickner to overtly reframe answers to questions of belonging for his protagonists: the answers do not require a singular location but the creation of a complex map. Noah claims to be staying on Margarita Island (with his son and his girlfriend, Arizna) in order to research the Garifunas for his doctoral project. His interest is not surprising considering his mobile, itinerant background and since "no one, not even the greatest ethnologists, can properly explain the intricate mechanism that allowed these orphans, though uprooted and exiled, to hold on to their identity" (209). People of varied ethnic or geographic ties who etch out their own belonging in the face of an intrusive colonial or bureaucratic order also bring to mind the "second San Pedro" (88) community which begins with immigrating family members from the Dominican Republic but grows to include "stray Guatemalans or some Cubans just passing through" (90) as well as Noah when he lives in Maelo's apartment. Also importantly, Noah's interest in the vibrant history of the Garifunas works to counter his own experiences of "the scientific coldness" of scholarship on Indigenous cultures after being "traumatized by Professor Scott's Indigenous Peoples' Prehistory course" (115) early in his university studies in archaeology or, more broadly, to counter what Heather Macfarlane describes as "[t]he myth of the vanishing Indian [that] has long been used to marginalize Native peoples; it relegates them to museums and anthropological studies as artifacts" (11).

New Kinds of Home-Makers: Passersby and Pirates

The dimension that I see *Nikolski* adding to Bauman's distinct types is the question of agency, and I propose the text's representations of the passerby

and pirate types as incisive explorations of agency and home-making within the socio-economic conditions of liquid modernity.[5] In "From Pilgrim to Tourist—or a Short History of Identity," Bauman discusses the stroller and player figure as two additional examples of what he also calls a modern "life strategy" (24), but he does not return to either in his subsequent writing as they are tangential to the tourist and vagabond. The passerby and pirate types that I theorize through Dickner's novel are part-tourists and part-vagabonds in a way that supplements and enriches Bauman's tourist-vagabond binary. Furthermore, these new "strategies" in *Nikolski* not only expose the breakdown of old home-making practices that the tourists and vagabonds reject but also reveal the emergence of new home-making practices, relations, and commitments. My main contention regarding Bauman's illuminating work on liquid modernity, as well as on its tourists and vagabonds, is that when he refers to commitment, he conjures a static idea which was embraced in solid modernity and is avoided in liquid modernity with an approach best explained with the advice: "do not commit yourself too strongly to people, places, causes—you cannot know how long they will last or how long you will count them worthy of your commitment" ("Pilgrim" 25). I want to suggest that our understanding of commitment as largely permanent or definitive cannot remain the same across these eras because we cannot revive the often predetermined responsibilities expected under solid modernity or the conditions that could foster them in a time so deeply affected by extensive liquidity and flows. In *Nikolski*, Dickner sagaciously illustrates more fluid yet stable approaches to commitment through the decisions of his protagonists to forge and re-establish loyalties and other adaptive but meaningful links.

In examining a sense of liquid modern commitment, Dickner investigates the scope of what John Durham Peters discusses as the dichotomy of being homeless and "home-full" (21). These extremes echo Bauman's homeless vagabond and "home-full" tourist dynamic (even though Bauman's tourists are not traditionally sedentary, they are undoubtedly "home-full" through their access to or potential ownership of multiple home spaces) but Peters eventually settles on diaspora as an alternative to the extreme positions. He views diaspora as existing conceptually between nomadism's "rootless liberty" and nationalism's "organic connection" (38) because it is capable of accommodating various shades of a mobile and yet rooted existence. *Nikolski* touches on the mass and relatively permanent immigration or resettlement of more traditionally conceived diaspora through the

protagonists' Indigenous and Acadian roots, but the diasporic mobility of the various half-Doucets also problematizes supposedly permanent "organic connections" and equally abstract "rootless liberty" (Peters 38). The diverse histories of diaspora and individual migrations in *Nikolski* complicate traditional associations with the term and shed light on new commitments and freedoms of the passerby figures, who are less privileged tourists and not quite "home-full," and the pirate figures, who are more privileged vagabonds and neither physically nor conceptually homeless.

The novel does include characters that represent the tourist and vagabond "life strategies" which Bauman theorizes and this is important in establishing other "strategic" configurations. Yet even Dickner's tourist and vagabond present a twist on Bauman's stock figures. In regard to the former, Noah's girlfriend, Arizna, represents the global elite, but unlike her mogul father, she uses her family's money in activist endeavours including a publishing house with titles on Indigenous studies and alternative economies (187). The other figure is poignantly represented by a Montreal homeless man who serves as a reminder that the tourist's privilege is also denied to individuals in prosperous areas of the world. Additionally, the "vagrant wearing a Maple Leafs hockey tuque" (77) is sporting the logo of a Toronto team in Montreal, which makes his defining attribute more noticeable for being so distinctly out of place. The literally homeless figure also undermines the romanticized view of a nomad's "rootless liberty" (Peters 38) by foregrounding the rigors of a nomadic life.

The pirate and passerby types share characteristics with the more passive stroller and player figures which Bauman initially explored in addition to tourists and vagabonds. However, by filling out the tourist-vagabond spectrum rather than offering equally passive types, the pirate and passerby are able to fruitfully problematize Bauman's notion that those living in liquid modernity typically avoid commitment. For example, *Nikolski*'s narrator is a passerby, or less privileged tourist, and life seems to pass by as he observes instead of fully engaging with his surroundings. Bauman's notion of the stroller similarly includes an emphasis on pleasures without attachments as well as a level of commitment comparable to watching television ("Pilgrim" 28).[6] However, while passersby in *Nikolski* might not seek out permanent attachments, they value deeper engagement and commit in their own ways. The narrator's life suggests an overarching detachment—his school friends have "disappeared, swallowed up by the course of events" (Dickner 14) and "it seemed natural for [him] to dissolve [him]self" (17) in the bookstore

where he works—yet never to the extent of Bauman's commitment-avoiding, novelty-seeking, hypermobile tourist. The narrator's engagement may appear minimal but he is actually quite devoted to the used bookstore as well as its customers and makes an effort to find a worthy replacement once he finally decides to see more of the world and "pass by" on a grander scale. Although he expresses a prejudice when the ad seeking his replacement includes the stipulation, "Nomads need not apply" (280), mobility is not demonized in *Nikolski* beyond this rather practical concern of finding longer term labour in an economy that increasingly favours globally mobile career drifters.[7]

Joyce, meanwhile, represents the pirate figure, one that flourishes because of liquid modernity's flows and economic interconnectedness. Because she has more privilege and agency than a vagabond type, she is able to insert herself into a new landscape, taking or "looting" what she requires. As her computer piracy suggests, the pirate figure need not steal goods but can also copy, borrow, and adapt objects and ideas. The link that the role has to Bauman's additional strategy of the player is less direct than the example of the stroller to the passerby but also worth mentioning in order to reframe stereotypical associations of pirates. The player, Bauman explains, functions through "moves" ("Pilgrim" 31), like in chess or another game, as well as the mobility of literally moving away. The link to the pirate is that players can "'cut their losses' and start from scratch" ("Pilgrim" 32), something that Joyce seems to partially do on several occasions when she leaves the east coast and then Canada. The player has an ambivalent relation to engaging and even winning since there are always other "moves" and new games, but the similarly practical pirate type demonstrates a more active agenda and deeper intent to, in this case, map and claim a home.

One chapter title in *Nikolski* explains that "[p]irates are pragmatists" (180), and this sentiment—strengthened by Joyce's interest in salvaging garbage in her quest to build a computer and become a virtual pirate—sheds light on the agency that the pirate type recovers in order to shift from immobilized vagabond to someone who must fight for and maybe even steal the right to more mobility or any mobility at all. The pirate figure in *Nikolski* is also tied to liberation as someone who works on the margins of a system which upholds the mobility divide that Bauman's tourist-vagabond binary so effectively illustrates. As a young child, Joyce was told stories about "[a]ll kinds" (238) of pirates but her cousins insisted that female pirates did not exist. She realizes that "the more often they said it, the more [she] wanted to prove them wrong" (238) and only the narrator, her exceptionally well-read

acquaintance as well as unknown cousin, gives her childhood goal historical credence (239).

Lastly, Noah draws both of these figures of nomadology together and shows the fluid nature of the strategies: he was a passerby as a child traversing western Canada with his mother, a kind of pirate on Margarita Island, and fluctuated between these two positions when in Montreal. Over the course of his travels, Noah keeps learning to mediate his experiences of mobility with his expectations of stability, never feeling fully rooted or afloat while he continues to understand the "roots" that connect him to people as well as places and the "routes" that are available to him. In one instance, he recalls driving past a schoolyard in his mother's trailer as some of the kids "gazed yearningly at the road" and "the captives envied the nomads" (37). But Noah is familiar with what the romanticized nomadic life can entail and what it misses. His constant mobility does not allow for interpersonal relations or community beyond the enclosed space of his mother's trailer and its ancestral ghosts (22). It is not surprising that, when Noah finally arrives in Montreal, he is not picky about where he settles, just fully focused on settling *somewhere*. Looking at a newspaper he "points arbitrarily" (78) to an ad for a room, but quickly learns of the difficulties of settling as it becomes increasingly clear for him that feeling at home involves more than this act of identifying a single, stable residence.

The tourist and vagabond figures that Bauman outlines offer a paradigm for understanding mobility in the twenty-first century, and this is a paradigm that Dickner's novel develops by exploring new ways of integrating multiple kinds of home spaces and relating to home amidst the flows of liquid modernity. Dickner shows that the passerby and pirate are capable of anchoring themselves—and, moreover, are willing to anchor themselves—in spite of the incessant economic and social fluctuations of this era. I have suggested that "mapping" can more methodically describe the conceptual work of integrating different experiences and expectations of home. In *Nikolski* this integration occurs through Dickner's concept of a "complex map" (99), which I understand as a personal conception of the multi-dimensional idea of home. In fact, I propose that the agency of the pirate and passerby "life strategies" as home-makers stems from their ability to see home not as the tourist's sustained escape or the vagabond's entrapment but as the composite map that Dickner proposes: one that includes personal as well as social dimensions, multiple scales, and is always "at once physical and cultural" (99).

A Multi-Scalar, Multi-Sensory, and Dynamic Mental Map

The framework of the complex map is important because it is able to integrate a home-maker's "roots" and "routes" by offering an immersive, virtual, four-dimensional cartography which grows in detail over time but also adapts to changing conditions and needs. Not merely a clear-cut, flat visual representation, this map includes overlapping geographical and cultural scales as well as a matrix of sensory and landscape memories—from the links contained in material objects to smells and sounds as well as familiar topographies like flatlands or cityscapes and specific streets, buildings, or rooms. Such a map of home is an expression of modern dwelling, and Dickner models emergent home-making practices when his characters explore and re-evaluate the increasing diversity of ideas of home in liquid modernity. Maps trigger many important trajectories in the novel: budding scholar, Noah, "learned to read from road maps" (28); Joyce declares that she wants to be a cartographer in order to mask her desire to be a pirate (62); and a stack of *National Geographic* maps fall on the narrator before the Three-Headed Book's map is returned and he finally embarks on his own travels (149).[8] The conventional as well as alternative maps that the protagonists encounter help each of them learn to map their physical, cultural, and deeply personal sense of home.

Because sounds, sights, and smells play a vital role in the links that each character's complex map of home includes, bodily experiences and sense memories also forge this "synaesthetic" (Bates 207) mental construct. Dickner's narrator, for instance, states, "It's impossible to confuse the subdued murmur of Mallorca with the resonant roll of Greenland's prehistoric pebbles, or the coral melody of the beaches of Belize, or the hollow growl of the Irish coast" (3) and explains that "there's no mistaking the shores of the Aleutian Islands" (4), where the village of Nikolski is located and where Jonas Doucet died. The narrator is a recluse throughout the novel yet these claims offer a glimpse into his desire to travel and learn to dwell by becoming an active home-maker. He asks, "Since when do diesel engines imitate breaking waves?" (4) and eventually calls this sound the "[d]ubious poetry of the suburbs" (4). The wave-like sounds from childhood inform later experiences by connecting them to this former home. Similarly, Noah offers a comparison that is aural as well as visual, when, "Gazing at the sea, he once again experiences the dizziness one feels on the great plains of Saskatchewan. The monotone roar of the waves is reminiscent of the wind in the barley fields" (221). This kind of landscape memory is superimposed

on new places and becomes a part of Noah's complex map of home. In yet another example, for Joyce the smell of fish blood is "so familiar" (71) that when she smells it on her hands after a day of work in the Montreal fish store, "[w]ith her eyes closed she can almost believe she is back in her father's kitchen" (74).

Several scholars have explored the relation of body and home, and Dickner shows that the body, a kind of ultimate and inescapable home, mediates and helps to map the memories and experiences of home. James Krasner focuses on touch and suggests that our physical engagement with home spaces is "interwoven with emotion and memory" (190), while Margaret Morse focuses on sensory associations with home and argues that the idea maintains an abundance of sense memories, such as a "fortuitous and fleeting smell, a spidery touch, a motion, a bitter taste" (63). In *Nikolski*, the feelings of home that memories generate are often recounted in order to explore larger ideological questions about what home means for each character. Noah, for example, investigates the figurative sense of being steady on land and lost at sea. He thinks that he is "stepping onto solid ground" (91) once he leaves his mother and her trailer but, while posting a letter to her through General Delivery, he feels as though "that ground is slipping out from under him," leaving "nothing but rolling waves, choppy seas and dizziness" (91). This unexpected reaction helps Noah realize that home cannot be truly stable, comfortable, or unchanging, whether he lives in his rented room on the Island of Montreal or at Arizna's house on Margarita Island. While Noah does not succumb to a happenstance kind of existence that for Bauman epitomizes liquid modernity, he also eventually stops seeking refuge in a misleading idealization of stabilities, such as families very firmly "rooted" in specific areas, which were the norm in solid modernity.

Bauman warns against "regressive fantasies of which the images of the prenatal womb and the walled-up home are prime inspirations" (*Liquid Modernity* 213-14) and *Nikolski*, instead, offers "fantasies" of home-makers as variously committed explorers and self-reflexive cartographers. In spite of Adrian S. Franklin's salient claim that "[i]n a more mobile, more networked, connected and extra-territorial world, the paradox at the centre of Bauman's work is that the social bonds that can now be created (and even proliferate) are looser, weaker" (344), *Nikolski* depicts ways in which commitment to people and places can flourish. If social bonds are looser, they can also be more flexible—as with Noah's erratic yet stable relationship with Arizna—and if they are more easily broken, they can also be more easily

made—such as Joyce's opportunity to live in the Dominican Republic with the grandmother of Maelo. Likewise, technical innovations that impact the increased accessibility of transport and consumer goods can dilute the once assumed permanence of the idea of home but they also forge new relations that can be incorporated into a more expansive, multi-scalar, and multi-sensory idea.[9] Unlike a single house, address, or region, which in and of itself cannot adequately describe a sense of home for people in a mobile era, the complex map is built *through* modern experiences of physical as well as virtual mobility and the multiplicity of intricate associations, such as Noah's realization that "[n]ever again would he be able to separate a book from a road map, a road map from his family tree, or his family tree from the odour of transmission oil" (30).

Because the mapped, multi-scalar home is based on inclusion and shifts rather than exclusion and rights, it models the possibilities of dwelling and co-inhabiting in more open and equitable ways. I have suggested that Bauman's tourist-vagabond binary can be used to show the social problems that a mobility divide fosters: tourists, people who feel at home anywhere, can be apathetic or complacent, while vagabonds, those who cannot feel at home, are denied agency—a voice in local, regional, national, and global politics—even in regards to the decision of where and how they may live. Dickner's novel illustrates to some extent how the passerby and pirate can engage with their surroundings in potentially problematic ways should they mostly pass over or literally pilfer, but these new types remain productive as distinct agents in the creation of a sense of home. They are active home-makers who understand that mobility increases encounters with strangers and transforms individuals into strangers, and these individuals often cannot simply stumble across or "find" home but must find ways to claim it and make themselves at home. Noah does so at the end of the novel by bringing his son back to his old apartment in Montreal, while Joyce goes to the Dominican Republic in order to further reconnect with her pirate legacy, and the narrator chooses to explore his "own road, [his] own little providence" (282) in spite of his mother's isolated and father's itinerant lifestyles.

Through protagonists who become active home-makers and commit to "learn[ing] to dwell" (Heidegger 159), Dickner implicitly supports the notion that social and political change hangs on the material and metaphysical experiences of being at home. By depicting the compelling experiences of protagonists who avoid the tourist's detachment and work to reclaim

the agency that the vagabond is denied, *Nikolski* not only rejects familiar practices of pinpointing or bureaucratically claiming a static home space, but also offers a model for mapping a vital nexus of belonging. In the final scene of the novel, the narrator tapes back into the Three-Headed Book the missing map that Noah gives him—the map that was "orphaned in his hands" (41) when Noah initially took the book with him to Montreal—and then the narrator leaves the reassembled book in the clearance bin. This ending, "a discovery that clouds the issue rather than clarifying it" (287), is Dickner's invitation for readers to explore the logic of the complex, multi-scalar map of home through *his* "three-headed" novel: a book with no map inside its cover because one is inevitably created in the mind of its reader-cartographer. By presenting a new way of narrativizing and mapping an individual's experience of the stability and mobility inherent to home, Dickner ingeniously demonstrates that the idea of home is not a relic of solid modernity but an even more important identity anchor in a globally mobile era increasingly defined by liquidity and change.

NOTES

1 Alison Blunt and Robyn Dowling describe home as "multi-scalar" or spanning multiple scales and "porous" (27), which *Nikolski* implicitly demonstrates for all three protagonists as they map the geo-cultural scales and permeable boundaries of their sense of home.

2 According to Claudine Fisher, in *Nikolski* "the theme of home clashes with that of the outside world bringing back the constant dichotomy of motionlessness opposed to the desire for freedom," yet Fisher also points out that "Noah is the happiest when both home and freedom are embraced at once" (1196), which suggests the more complex relations of mobility and stability that I examine here.

3 See Emily Johansen's work on "'territorialized cosmopolitan' subjectivities" (48) for an examination of similar issues within the context of a singular urban space.

4 Noah's sense of nomadology is not the conceptual notion coined by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, most notably since the diploma he imagines is in *applied* nomadology. Above all, Noah is concerned with everyday life—his everyday life, especially, which includes a childhood defined by constant mobility—more than abstract philosophical approaches to institutionalized knowledge or social theory. Bauman's focus is similarly on everyday life (as his term "life strategy" indicates), and he remains wary of romanticizing nomads by ignoring the privilege of self-styled, jet-setting nomads.

5 In his analysis of *Nikolski*, Laurence M. Porter notes a trend in contemporary literature that this novel follows by exploring "ancient tactics for ensuring individual and community survival" one of which is "the gleaner and the squatter" (300). To some extent, these terms suggest a passerby and pirate, respectively, but the additions to Bauman's "life strategies" which I explore here are specifically liquid modern strategies or tactics that describe emerging norms within this socio-economic context.

6 The stroller figure that Bauman describes is closely related to the *flâneur*, a figure theorized by Walter Benjamin and taken up by Anne Friedberg in a consumerist context

when she proposes the shopping mall as "a site for flânerie and for a mobilized gaze instrumentalized by consumer culture" (12). Consuming home spaces and objects need not suggest any engagement with or commitment to the idea of home, both of which the passerby exhibits as a more active home-maker.

7 In *Consuming Life*, Bauman refers to Russell Hochschild's term, "drag coefficient" (10), a quality which employers seek to avoid in liquid modernity, with "drag" referring to things or people that tie one to a place.

8 Other navigational items, which become talismans for the protagonists, complement the significance of maps in the novel along with its themes of mobility and stability: the narrator's compass, a gift from his father which "doesn't point exactly north" (12) but to the village of Nikolski; Joyce's grandfather's duffel bag, which might have gone to Jonas had he ever returned (58); and Noah's Book with No Face, also known as the Three-Headed Book, left behind in the trailer by Jonas when he parted ways with Noah's mother (29).

9 See David Morley's *Home Territories* for his analysis of the impact of technology and global media on the expanding "territories" of home.

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Richard Kelly Kemick

Caribou Moss

Growing in hot and cold climates,
as if the earth had no say
in what we can and cannot be.
Its body, a symbiotic weave
of fungi and algae, hardly needs rain
or dirt and knows the modesty
of not living outside yourself;
spreads three millimetres a year.

Touch it. Grow your hand across.
The coil of frosted wire that fits
within your palm lines
has been crawling over tundra
for the longer part of a century.
Even the smallest things seem to be
so much older than we are.

Without a root system
to tunnel away from light,
every part of it can be seen:
the offering of its entire self
into the vast mouth of sky,
its pronged reach growing
into a million small antlers.

Anne Quéma

Dionne Brand's *Ossuaries*
Songs of Necropolitics

In 2003, Achille Mbembe argued that Foucault's concept of biopower as the governance of biology through regulatory mechanisms could not account for contemporary forms of sovereignty. In particular, the colonial occupation of Palestinian territory, or the resistance to power through acts of excess and negation such as suicide bombing, points to a different mode of governance. According to Mbembe, colonial occupation and warfare at the turn of the twenty-first century are characterized by necropower, resting on a "concatenation of biopower, the state of exception, and the state of siege" (22). While most of his analysis is devoted to warfare and colonization, his conclusion provides terms of analysis that allow for a broader conceptualization of necropolitics as an ominous mode of governance instrumentalizing everyday practices. Indeed, Mbembe concludes by referring to the creation of "*death-worlds*, new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of *living dead*" (39-40). Since 2003, writers have expanded on Mbembe's analysis to demonstrate that the object of everyday practices of necropower is not so much the life as the death of the body politic according to a capitalist calculus of loss and benefit. Whether we consider the management of endemics and famine, drone-driven surgical hits, or the measured risk of shipping highly inflammable oil through small towns, we are confronted with a production and regulation of death, which in its relentlessness draws on the logic of the circulation and dispersal of capital aided and abetted by technological diffusion and ubiquity. Randy Martin identifies the political stakes of a death-world where capital operates as a social force: "An empire

of indifference is a specific response to the multifarious discretions and capacities of life that, if not subjugated to the whims of accumulation, can squeeze capital's conditions of possibility" (269). In conceiving necropolitics as an "empire of indifference," Martin echoes Mbembe, who associates the rise of colonial power with the emergence of necropolitical governance in the plantation system where one sees "the first syntheses between massacre and bureaucracy, that incarnation of Western rationality" (23).[1] Common to colonial and warfare practices and the polis is a governance of necrosis spurred by the instrumentalization of death and the parasiting on life processes. Jasbir K. Puar describes this form of governance: "bio-necro collaboration conceptually acknowledges biopower's direct activity in death, while remaining bound to the optimization of life, and necropolitics' nonchalance towards death even as it seeks out killing as a primary aim" (35). It is in this context that I propose an interpretation of Dionne Brand's *Ossuaries* as songs of necropolitics poised between carnage and commemoration.

Ossuaries belongs to a poetic genealogy that includes Kamau Brathwaite's 1973 reflection on the effects of the historical slaughter of the Black people on the capacity to generate and create. In "Eating the Dead," he writes: "But if to live here / is to die / clutching ashes / the fist tight / the skull dry / I will sing songs of the skeleton" (219). The paradox of the two tercets, which derives from the coupling of the lyrical and the mortal, resonates throughout *Ossuaries* as it struggles to make sense of a world engulfed by genocidal violence.[2] The poem throws the reader into a vortex of everyday practices of aggression and destruction and stages the exercise of violence with death as a normalized experience. Juxtaposed to *Thirsty* (2002) and *Inventory* (2006), *Ossuaries* reads like the third piece of a trilogy devoted to a reflection on epochal violence in the early twenty-first century. The long poem consists of fifteen sections, what traditionally might have been called cantos or songs, but what in sepulchral times Brand refers to as ossuaries, or the charnels of poetic and historical meaning. Maintaining the lyrical and the necropolitical in agonistic tension, and shifting from the binary I/she to pluralizing pronouns, the poem contextualizes the necrobiography of Yasmine, the speaker of the poem, and turns it into a lightning-rod for an account of violence revolving around a governance of metrics whereby to measure is to rule—to death. Tanis MacDonald argues, "considering that the memory of the Middle Passage as a legacy of Black Atlantic culture has been mediated and sometimes almost erased by colonial history, Brand also notes the ways in which the trace of such memory is re-experienced in the bodies

of diasporic peoples" (94). I propose to further this interpretation to suggest that if the poem originates in Brand's political reflection on Black historical memory, it also expands the analysis of colonialism to encompass a global politics of death. It is precisely because Brand has an intimate knowledge of colonial necropower that she is in a position to write a sharp critique of a genocidal violence that has become planetary.

While theories of necropolitics tend to totalize the processes and effects of this form of sovereignty, I will argue that *Ossuaries* departs from a discourse of absolute sovereignty by injecting the self-compromising subjectivity of Yasmine into the circuitry of necropolitics. This subjective presence gives voice to a cultural necropolitics of emotion whose configuration constitutes the singularity of Brand's approach, whereby the body politic wrestles with an overwhelming and noxious materiality. The body politic of *Ossuaries* is a sensorial, sexual, and speaking body who struggles to make sense of the sovereign addresses of necropolitical violence. If this violence causes material devastation, it is also constituted as a system of signs through technology, political discourse, and cultural practices. On this basis, I suggest that, eschewing the Manichean binaries of the ruler and the ruled and the neo-liberal belief in an autonomous political consciousness, *Ossuaries* traces the ways in which necropolitical violence courses along the path of desire. To analyze this political torsion of Eros by Thanatos, I expand on Jean Laplanche's post-Freudian concept of the enigmatic signifier and read the poem as an account of the ways in which necropolitical subjects are seduced by and respond to enigmatic signifiers of violence that they do not master. While Laplanche focuses on the family as the source of enigmatic signifiers, I broaden this source to encompass culture.[3] The family is but one source of unconscious formation, and today citizens interact with a broader matrix of formative affects through media.[4] In this context, Laplanche's theory of the formation of the unconscious through a power relation between the psyche and the primacy of the other on which it depends can be deployed to account for the exercise of sovereignty and its production of a political unconscious. In the poem, the sign of the necropolitical unconscious is hysteria, a word that recurs three times in nominal and adjectival forms and functions as a trope of trauma.[5] Operating according to a capitalist logic of circulation, the trope manifests a traumatic violence whose intensity accrues as it circulates among things, bodies, and readers, generating what Sara Ahmed describes as a surplus of affect.[6] Branded by this traumatic encounter with violence, the syntax of the poem operates according to a

poetics of catachrestic rupture through which the necropolitical subject strives to make historical sense. Yasmine's narrative is the medium through which Brand initiates a reflection on the relation between necropolitics and historiography. Acknowledging massacred bodies as "simple relics of an unburied pain, empty, meaningless corporealities" (35), Mbembe responds by conceptualizing the historical origins and evolution of necropolitics. In contrast, Brand is preoccupied with the travail of writing history in the grip of necropolitics. Under the pressure of necropolitical violence, the writing of the past presents itself as an exercise in assemblage from which meaning and telos have absconded. Nevertheless, in its ekphrastic section on Jacob Lawrence's *War Series* and its references to jazz, the poem does offer sensorial and affective reorientation through a recoding of a colonial history of violence and provides signs for a regenerative and commemorative understanding of ossuaries.

The political significance of *Ossuaries* is signalled by a narrative framework resting on the use of pronouns that create a tension between the subject and the multitude. One can first identify the bipartite oscillation between sections that are told by the "I"—"the slippery pronoun, the ambivalent, glistening, / long sheath of the alphabet" (22)—and sections that offer an account of Yasmine's life through the third-person pronoun "she." While the fifteen ossuaries alternate between these two modes of narration, the narrative mode is not confined to this binary; instead, it expands to a collective level through various pronouns such as "we," "they," "someone," or "anyone" in a pattern that disrupts the initial apposition, endowing Brand's reflection on humanity with plurality beyond the microphysics of subject and object. This tension between the multitude and the singular is introduced right from the beginning in the first tercet of Ossuary I, where the narrative shifts from the collective "our" to "mine": "in our narcotic drifting slumbers, / so many dreams of course were full of prisons, / mine were without relief" (10). *Ossuaries* is therefore an account not only of Yasmine's personal history, but also of the ways in which a governance of necropolitics dispossesses political subjects of citizenship and habituates them to violence: "we live like this, / each dawn we wake up, our limbs paralyzed, shake our bones, deliver ourselves / to the sharp instruments for butchering, to appease which rain god, / which government god, which engine god" (123). The power to rule life out—"a sudden unificatory nakedness, bificatory nakedness, / of numbers, of violent fantasms" (16)—operates through an invasive ruling of things, spaces, subjectivities,

and events in the midst of contingency. Violence contaminates everyday practices, propagating through "the vicious telephones, the coarseness of / daylight, the brusque decisions of air, / the casual homicides of dresses" (10). While Yasmine itemizes the world surrounding her, she does not derive any sense of orientation and belonging. The city is "this exact city" (54), regulated by an implacable circuitry of metrics:

> where was she, that again, which city now,
> which city's electric grids of currents,
> which city's calculus of right and left angles
> which city's tendons of streets, identical,
> which city's domestic things,
> newspapers, traffic, poverty
> garbage collections, random murders,
> shoplifting, hedge
> cutting. (55)

Reiteration culminates in a catalogue of lethal nonsense whereby ratio and randomness collide.[7] To this extent, ruling assumes a double meaning, as it refers not only to political governance but also to quantifying and measuring.

In this world of controlled chaos, to rule is to measure and vice versa. Yasmine gives a name to this instrumentalizing power by referring to "anthropometric spectacles" (*Ossuaries* 13), which can be identified as the root principle of the governance of the polis.[8] At stake in what can be called the discourse and practices of anthropometrics is the reduction of subjects to dehumanizing metrics and its necrotizing effects. Caught between the time of anthropometrics and the time of the lyric, the poetic line performs as "a lover's clasp of / violent syntax and the beginning syllabi of verblessness" (20). The anthropometrics of ruling takes on megalomaniac proportions through the syntax of the latter half of Ossuary I, where verbless enumeration signifies a hegemonic principle of governance that causes loss of agency: "I lost verbs, whole, like the hull of almonds" (14). As soon as verbs are abstracted from the syntax of the poem, reiterative deictics emerge by which Yasmine attempts to locate herself in time and space: "this bedding, this mercy, / this stretcher, this solitary perfectable strangeness, / and edge, such cloth this compass" (15). However, an overwhelming process of enumeration seizes upon a poetic line that is subjugated to metrics rationalizing and regimenting bodies, nature, and actions. Through this staging of necropolitical governance, Brand's poem offers a political reflection on the ways in which citizens are confronted with a necrotic system that is profoundly noxious, but whose traumatic signs of violence

they do not always decipher because, seduced by its signs, they actually embrace it. In creating Yasmine as a major antagonist in a toxic narrative of desacralization, Brand is able to foreground the torsion of desire through the seduction of violence as a signal affect of necropolitics.

In his critique of Freud, Jean Laplanche proposes a theory of seduction whereby the ego forms itself in response to sexual addresses that remain fundamentally opaque and enigmatic. The child's encounter with the adult world is governed by the primacy of the other as the determining factor of self-constitution. In this scenario, the child is vulnerable and dependent upon the other. Laplanche uses the term primal seduction "to describe a fundamental situation in which an adult proffers to a child verbal, non-verbal and even behavioural signifiers which are pregnant with unconscious sexual significations" (126). Besieged by the other's process of signification, the child cannot master and therefore cannot symbolize these enigmatic signifiers. While Laplanche focuses on the family (*socius*) and sexual seduction, I propose to expand his analysis to the seduction of violence in necropolitical times. The enigmatic signifier is not limited to the constitution of the sexual unconscious, as it can also be used to refer to the way the child is besieged by violence as the twin enigmatic signifier of sexuality. Violence is something the child cannot encompass or symbolize, and whose trauma is repressed only to reappear in the form of various symptoms. Thus, to some extent, to reflect on the enigmatic signifier of sexuality is also to reflect on the enigmatic signifier of violence. As Laplanche underlines in his analysis of the life and death drives, "*both* types of drives described by Freud *exist within the field of the sexual drive*" (146). Furthermore, the poem signals a major cultural shift whereby the analysis of disciplinary power reproduced in the family cannot solely account for a subjectivity of desire enthralled by a violence that, on a technological and biometric level, hinges on the switch of Eros into Thanatos. While *Ossuaries* stages Yasmine's early familial development by referring to her walking "beyond the broken parts, beyond her mother's / skirt, her brother's preacherly advice, his certain god" (43), it also shifts to a narrative of necropolitical governance through the seduction of cultural and political messages of violence.

On this basis, I suggest that *Ossuaries* stages a governance of necropolitics that besieges subjects with enigmatic signifiers of violence which they do not master.[9] By reanimating the primary process of seduction through the primacy of the other, necropolitical subjects embrace and are seduced by violence through the path of desire. With its attention to the material and the physical,

the poem stages a historical moment when Yasmine responds to necropolitical violence. In Ossuary II, she wakes up to the radio announcement of the 9/11 terrorist attack, and it is as a sentient being that the persona is progressively coming back to wakefulness. What comes to the fore is not an ideological or intellectual response to the significance of the radio message; rather, Yasmine responds to the mediated violence as a sensorial body that is invaded by the violence of the message: "she flew like shrapnel off the bed, / felt her way blind, as fire with slender strands" (25). In this response to a message of violence, which destroys the distance between subject and object, it is as if the body were grafted onto and derived pleasure from violence: "she felt a joy innocent like butter open her, / blinding stratus, ants, tongs, bolts, rust, / the whole ionosphere bounced into her mouth" (25). In effect, Yasmine is invaded through the mouth by the outer atmospheric region, an incongruous vision that conveys the singularity of necropolitical times in which citizens do not master the technologically fuelled violence to which they are exposed. In this governance, the sensorial is the necropolitical.[10]

The analeptic jumps of the narrative convey the sense that Yasmine reflects on the fatal process of adherence through which she shaped her personal and political trajectory, and for which she pays, gnawed by "the lack of self-forgiveness, / aluminium, metallic, artic, blinding" (58). The enigmatic signifier of violence thrives on the desiring body, and it is through desire that Yasmine embraced a radical philosophy of destruction of the capitalist world. Thus, her resistance to sovereignty shares with necropolitics a production of death. This paradox is conveyed in the account of her relationship to the leader of a small radical phalanx. In Ossuary IV, VI, and XII, she repeatedly recalls her response to, and later detachment from, Owusu's doctrine of violent resistance:

> each liquid phrase
> he had uttered, she had drowned,
> in the shell of her ear,
> until his voice seemed to come from her
> all because of attention to the wrong thing,
> the still unknown-unknown she'd been, she'd pinned
> her life to his existence when what she wanted was to be
> at the crossing, when I am in the world (57-58).

Further, the torsion of Eros into Thanatos is captured in the following oxymoron:

> if I have lived, I have not loved,
> and if I have loved, I cannot have lived

it was difficult to live and love at the same time,
you see what I mean,
since to live is to be rapacious as claws. (33-34)

Ossuaries thus offers a complex paradox whereby its lyrical lines maintain the desire for life while at the same time they function as vectors of violence over bare life. The poem threads a threnody of violence that demands to be told yet runs into ossification. Haunted by the unburied pain of necropower and the undifferentiated mass of ossuaries, Brand's poem is at the nexus between the necropolitical and the lyrical, a paradox captured in the following lines: "the presumptive cruelties, / the villages that nursed these since time, / it's always in the lyric . . . the harsh fast threatening gobble, / the clipped sharp knifing, it's always, / in the lyric" (108). If the lyrical is the political, and if the world of politics is chaotic and violent, then the traditional rhetoric of subject and object—the "I" and the "she"—is bound to display the traumatic signs of an enigmatic signifier of violence that it seeks to grasp and recall. It is through this enthralling of violence that the lyrical hinges on the hysterical as the rhetoric of necropolitical trauma.

The Freudian concept of hysteria typically draws the line between the psychoanalytical master and the hysterical body insofar as the latter performs a spectacular and traumatic memory that remains beyond the verbal. *Ossuaries* dismantles this master-slave conception of the hysterical body. In particular, the "I" sections convey Yasmine's struggle to articulate the trauma of violence through language as she is assaulted by "lumens of aches, such aches / the horizontal and the vertical aches of lightning / its acoustics, loud pianos, percussive yet / strings and quartets" (18). Further, the rhetoric of hysteria circulates in the polis through the channels of communication. When Yasmine becomes aware of the 9/11 event, the third-person narrative reports: "some violent drama was as usual surging, / on the airwaves and 'plane' she heard, the usual / supercilious timbres hysterical, a cut larynx" (23). So we are not dealing with a subject somatically enacting a verbally unrepresentable trauma. Instead, we are dealing with the verbalization of a political urgency whereby the trope of hysteria signifies the distress of the body politic in its wrestling with the significance of the blows that befell her. In these necropolitical songs, the somatic furrows through the lyrical in a tenacious desire for a voice in the face of an overwhelmingly genocidal materiality.

In this context, biometrics breathes through the meter, ossifying the lyrical, while the metrical struggles to lyricize beyond ossification. The

arena for this agon is syntax, which etymologically means "putting together." However, syntax is a practice for better times when it is possible to dream of syncretic bodies of beliefs, synthetic bodies of knowledge, and synergies of political aspirations. If the lyrical becomes the hysterical as the trope of necropolitical trauma, then the plenitude that the lyrical evokes is affected by dislocation and rupture. According to Laplanche, "[t]he so-called 'life' sexual drive . . . relates to a totalizing object or to an object that can be totalized. . . . The death drive, on the other hand, corresponds to a part object which is scarcely an object at all, as it is . . . unstable, shapeless and fragmented" (146-47). In the poem, the torsion of Eros by Thanatos manifests itself through this tension between the desire for totality and the relentless experience of fracture. In the following lines, the effect of the reiteration of the word "kisses" is to undermine the very desire that it wishes to name: "I tried love, I did, / the scapulae I kissed, I did, / . . . the jugular notch I ate in kisses, / I devoured in kisses, / teeth-filled kisses, throat-filled kisses, gullet-stuffed kisses" (37). Through an infinite recession of declensions, the promise of love as a totality is pulverized into synecdochic smithereens. Further, Brand appropriates traditional schemes of rhetoric whereby each line, each tercet, each Ossuary undergoes the tension between the pressure of trauma and the mere metonymic push to the next line in search of meaning. Chief among her linguistic schemes is catachresis, which by predilection is the sign of dislocation when the putting together of words ceases to make proper sense. Where Surrealistic writing throve on catachresis to dismantle hegemonic ways of thinking and celebrate anarchy, *Ossuaries* draws on the same scheme to represent a world in which necropolitical traumas operate like Dadaist incongruities without the least sign of transformation.[11] Catachresis can be seen at work in lines yoking bone with desire, as in "the lit cigarette tip of the backbone / [that] leans for its toxic caresses" (124), or in lines such as "the starving boats and lithic frigates, / stingless bees, the canvas shirts, / the bright darkness, the clotted riverbeds" (111) where disarticulations pile upon oxymora and impede the reader's comprehension while demanding attention and deciphering. The effect is to disrupt normative processes of meaning and the sense of place: words are put together, but cracks and gaps appear between these words, derailing the conventions of the metonymic line. This anti-syntax is the phrasis of "ugly, momentous, ravenous times" (33), reinforced by asyndeton whose function is to fragment syntactic flow. In other tercets, this fragmenting effect is exacerbated by the recurrence of caesura, inversion of word order (anastrophe), and interpolation.

In this poetics of rupture, the tercets hurtle with the velocity of what Sara Ahmed describes as a surplus of affect (45). While language is used to upstage the violence of biometrics and its necropolitical effects, it is also caught in the vortex of this political violence whose intensity and power derive from an economy of exchange among bodies, nature, texts, and readers. Manifesting a necropolitical unconscious, hysteria is this surplus of affect swirling across continents and accruing through the body as it hybridizes with that violence and projects it onto nature and its "loose hysterical trills of wood / winds" (*Ossuaries* 43). Soaring on anaphoric reiteration and epistrophe, tercets reach crescendos, as exemplified in the following lines: "like this, in the eye-filled years, the wall-filled years, / the returning years, the formaldehyde years, / the taxidermy years, the dishevelled years" (112). Yasmine is thus the subject striving to make sense of violence while in its traumatic grip. Resisting and obsessive, the lines go the way of "stammament," to borrow from Kamau Brathwaite in "Hereroes" from *Sun Poem*: "& yet there are these stammaments in stone / that smile / are fat or romanesque. athletic like good / traffic cops. piercing or blind to the world / but nvva look. in like us" (282-83).[12] Further, the poem is shadowed by Beckettian solipsism. In various Ossuaries, Yasmine seems to be addressing the reader, or a hypothetical listener, who may also be her own self, as she struggles with her memories and emotions: "if only I had something to tell you, from here, / some good thing that would weather / the atmospheres of the last thirty years" (103). However, her apostrophes also intensify the enigmatic signifier of violence: just as citizens are heckled by violence, she heckles the reader with the violence of her acts, thoughts, emotions, and intrusions. A statement such as "you will discover, as I, / that verbs are a tragedy, a bleeding cliffside, explosions" (14) makes violence a trope of poetic address and hits at the very core of the belief in redemption through poetry. Thus, circulating among the tercets, between the "I" and the "she" sections, bodies and things, and Yasmine and readers, necropolitical violence accumulates surplus.

It is in the context of this poetics of traumatic excess and rupture that Brand reconsiders the writing of history. Governed by and fuelling the compulsoriness of biometrics, citizens are confronted with the absence of telos or any means of making sense of the past. Time is gaping at the beginning and the end and is eviscerated in the middle. There is no finality at the end of each Ossuary, as the last lines are left without full stops and the tercets are sent adrift among commas.[13] Thus, the writing of history

is compromised by the regime of Thanatos and threatened with tropes of permanent catastrophe and disarticulation. Yasmine does seek to create a new genealogy through the braiding of various textual traditions. The epigraph to Ossuary VI and its metaphors of edge-stitching, braiding, and plaiting—"this genealogy she's made by hand, this good silk lace" (52)—convey a careful labour in contrast to the violence of the catachrestic paratax. However, a tension exists between the attempt to create a pattern of meaning and the inability to make it hold and signify: "these names would help / here, but / such, such did not create the world or fix time" (53). The scope of devastation is such that giving an account of necropolitics is threatened with aphonia, as in the one-page Ossuary IX where, repeating the words "what can I say," Yasmine struggles to convey the state of disarray under anthropometric assault. In Ossuary XIII, the tone rises and culminates in a nihilistic injunction: "look for nothing it will say, the cataclasite sacral crest, the gutted thorax, except the schistic rib cages, / the feldspar wrists, the hyoid bone, what's left / the prosthetic self and all the broken bodies, / collapsed chest caves, will appear dressed, clattering / down streets, in all fashions of all years" (113). In fact, the very concept of time is under erasure: "I've got no time, no time, this epistrophe, no time, / wind's coming, no time, one sunrise to the next is too long, no time" (61). Caught between mutism and a voice under duress, the poem cannot offer an ordering of time.

Instead, operating according to the logic of the assemblage, *Ossuaries* juxtaposes the mundane with the monstrous and spawns a chronicle of loss and crisis. From the death of Creeley and the explosion of a bomb in Peshawar to a bank robbery and the habit of biting one's lip, events occupy the same poetic space of the tercets without rhyme or reason. Oscillating between parody and imminence, the account of the robbery in Ossuary X stages the seduction of violence and its theatrical temporality. The verb tense is the present of action; the objective is to rob a bank. Yet this spectacle of purposeful action is undermined by satirical taunts such as "justice pumped through their veins, history will see" (72), which conveys the self-righteousness goading the purpose. In a delirium, the car "coughs its reluctance, its indecisions" and "understands occasion, urgency" (78), while the heist worthy of a Hollywood script is observed from the vantage point of pigeons who "mind their own business, as they should" (78). The account of the anticipated escape proceeds with gusto and ends with the description of the escape car as a Vorticist four-wheeled creature: "the brown dragonfly, rusted wings, / flies along the highway out of town in long leaps,

/ it defies its cratered flanks, its overheated gasket / the earthbound metal of its thorax, / its compound eyes survey each angle of the flight, / for cops, patrols" (79). The event is replete with violence—including the violence of Yasmine's "small talon of her right hand [that] sets to the massacre" (75)—and its meaning is as hollow as the rusty wings of the car. The full import of the event does not appear until Ossuary XII, which refers to the "hysteria" (94) of the radical group and reveals that the time of action is the absurd yet irreducible time of necropolitical violence to which Yasmine and her accomplices have adhered:

> they suddenly see their wounds in him,
> the gashes in their skins, the gouging, scraping
> places left, open raw cavities of their long, long losses
>
> history will enter here, whistling like train wheels,
> boat winches,
> the road will either end or won't, the cops catch up or not.
> (102)

The recurrence of violence is further conveyed by the spectral *revenance* of history. After the bank robbery, Yasmine and her fellow radicals part company. Although the plot is situated in the state of New York, the characters' destinations of Syracuse, Utica, and Corinth recall the ancient history of Rome and North Africa. So the coordinates of the setting are ambiguous if not disorienting: on the one hand, the reader is provided a precise location; on the other, there is a displacement to an earlier historical period when North African cities were embroiled in imperial conflicts. In other words, the events of Ossuary XII are haunted by the colonial past: "and this is how she disappears, this is where, / into an ancient city, since no city here could offer / anything but brutal solitudes, ashen mirrors" (91).[14] What began as a histrionic bank heist plugs into the spectral recurrence of political violence: "fitting, phantom limbs, intermittent hearts, / they'll all return to start this epoch again, / catastrophes will swing their way" (92). If for Yasmine this is a moment of disruption when she estranges herself from the radical group and its leader, it is also a crab-like re-entrance into a broader plot of necropolitical violence that will lead to the catastrophe of 9/11 with which Ossuary II begins.

The absence of an apocalyptic moment that would generate a new beginning means that the experience of time translates into an excruciating sense of confinement.[15] Forever drifting across borders from one continent to another, from one city to another, Yasmine is haunted by the absence of an

exit from the world of violence, hemmed in by "the chain-link fences [that] glittered like jewellery, / expensive jewellery, portable jewellery" (14). Escaping once again, Yasmine crosses the Canadian border in April, using a forged passport. If "April is the cruelest month" (Eliot 1), it is because Yasmine's flight is cut short by the horror of necrotic practices whereby the slaughter of birds at the Maple Leaf factory has become industrial routine, enacted by knowledgeable and knowing hands (Ossuary XIV). Even Havana, where she experiences a soothing nature, remains a place of exile. In *Ossuaries*, to write the past is to know a history of violence and to witness helplessly its future recurrence. In *Fugitive Pieces*, Anne Michaels' main character Jakob Beer, a poet, states: "It's not the unknown past we're doomed to repeat, but the past we know. Every recorded event is a brick of potential, of precedent, thrown into the future. . . . This is the duplicity of history: an idea recorded will become an idea resurrected" (161). This statement goes against the belief that knowing history prevents one from repeating it. This belief is contradicted by a complex passage where, in Ossuary XIII, Yasmine imagines herself sending a letter to the past to warn the addressees of the dangers of the future so that they can perhaps prepare for the worst. However, she refers to the message as if it were made of metal glyphs that would have been corroded by the violence of history, and whose effect on the addressees she describes as "rust blooding" (104). Short of regurgitating the same old narrative patterns, Yasmine as historiographer sounds like Alice in Wasteland.

The poem ends with neither a bang, nor a whimper. The lasting image is sepulchral, fractal, and collective—"here we lie in folds, collected stones / in the museum of spectacles, / our limbs displayed, fract and soluble" (124)—while Yasmine concludes with yet another catachrestic statement: "I can hardly hold their sincere explosions" (124). However, two displacements occur that seek to counter necropolitical violence and that hinge on references to jazz and to six paintings from Jacob Lawrence's World War II series. It is not so much that the poem escapes from the history of violence through an aesthetizing sleight of hand; rather, Yasmine is able to achieve momentary peace by translating to another time and another place, a process that allows for a sentient and affective reorientation from Thanatos to Eros.[16] The process occurs through the well-established form of ekphrasis and through what could be called "jazzphrasis." Seeking a new phrasis that is not hacked by the enigmatic signifiers of necropolitical violence, Yasmine engages in a historiographical project through an affective, meditative, and regenerative interaction with the signs of music and painting.

As the source of lyricism, jazz imparts to Brand's lines the rhythm of Eros when meter and prosody are not necrotized by the anthropometrics of violence. Music generates prosodic patterns deriving from phonetic and alphabetic permutations in lines such as "right or fully, not **live r**ight, / the **liver**ied skin" (111; emphasis added) and "**lea**py calves, **lea***den* breath, sod*den* / **lea***den* sickliness, baked songs" (112; emphasis added). The time of music transcends the grotesque dislocations introduced in the first Ossuary, as it ushers a reassembled, sentient body in tune with time, space, and the other:

> the body skids where the light pools,
> each bone has its lost dialect now,
> untranslatable though I had so many languages
> in the rooms above, / the hours spin their bangles,
> supine, we listen. (50)

In Ossuary IV, Monk's "Crepuscule with Nellie" and "its deliberate / and loving notes scoring her back" (41) shelter Yasmine from Osuwu's verbal assault and sexual objectification. Jazzphrasis also allows for a rephrasing of the "momentous, ravenous, ugly times" (33), particularly with Yasmine's reflection on Mingus' "Pithecanthropus Erectus," a musical piece inspired by the anthropological discovery of the earliest traces of humans in East Africa, and to which she listened as a three-year-old. She quotes Mingus' statement that "the last movement / suggests the 'frantic burst of a dying organism'" (43). Thus, the major themes of death, genealogy, and meaning-making are reshuffled through the invocation of an ancestor whose archaeological discovery reinjects for a brief moment the sacred significance of an ossuary. Further, jazz is associated with the dream of freedom through the recurring paronomasia "Bird," which refers to Charlie Parker and entails repeated puns as in "Miles kept living, till life was rancid, Bird flew off" (45). A sign of Black history, jazz simultaneously offers the promise of a regenerative time.

Ossuary XI revolves around an ekphrastic reflection on Jacob Lawrence's paintings and reads like a humble moment of poise. In a mythopoetic gesture, Yasmine attributes the origins of Lawrence's art to Venus, planet of love: "he lifts these paintings from their ultraviolet vats, / from the Venusian winds that blow only west" (81).[17] Again, the ekphrastic rephrasing is performative to the extent that the paintings offer not so much an exit from the history of violence as a re-encoding of the violence that Black people have endured. The difference, which is conveyed by the fluidity and calm of the tercets, lies in a treatment of violence that does not operate as an enigmatic signifier of seduction, but as the occasion for a history of affect that creates a sense of

commemoration and a soft hope for release from gravity. This hope is the reason why stammering as the sign of necropolitical trauma recedes. The poem displays only three repetitions: "the fragile, fragile promise of humanity" (83); "that crucifix, that crucifix" (84); and "'reported missing' again, missing again, / missing, again missing" (86). In all cases, the repetitions convey vulnerability, trauma, and non-being, the three signifiers of violence in Black history, which Yasmine retraces in Lawrence's six paintings. In "Victory," Yasmine deciphers defeat; in "Shipping Out," she identifies the Middle Passage and the "mass graves" (81) of the slave ships; in "Another Patrol," she stares at "the steep gradient / of nothing" (83); in "Beachhead," she witnesses the "sacrificial work" (84) of the bayonets and sees in the central figure of the painting the crucified, the scarecrow, and the skeleton all at once, "the wind whiffing through / ribs" (84); in "Going Home," she mourns the assault on bare life; and in "Reported Missing," she pauses on disappearances, this ontology of necropolitical governance. Yet, stitched to these tableaux of destruction runs a tenuous thread of regeneration, as in Lawrence's knowledge of "the rimlessness of any hopes, / the limitless vicinities" (83). Above all, Eros makes a re-entrance when, empathizing with the "tender anatomies" of the returning soldiers, Yasmine exclaims: "love should meet them, nothing short, / these broken heads and propitiatory arms, / clean love should meet them" (85). Reanimating a poetics of commemorative history, Ossuary XI is suspended beyond the time of necropolitical trauma and the space of gravity: "here we morph as twig and ice and bark / and butterfly, weed and spider, vespids, hoping against predators / convergent mimesis, all means, / stand still and hope it passes, the diatonic, / ragged plumage of our disappearances" (89). This is the mythopoeic time for reprieve beyond predation and anthropometrics when, thwarting catastrophe, survivors of the Middle Passage join in mimetic camouflage.

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NOTES

1 For the spectral presence of slavery and capitalist ideologies in *Inventory*, see Brydon, 996.
2 See Nathaniel Mackey's analysis of skeletonality, 736.
3 See Jean Wyatt's use of the familial model in the transmission of enigmatic signifiers to interpret Bush as the fumbling parental figure to whom Americans respond in supporting the Iraq invasion.

4 In *Thirsty*, Brand depicts the cop who killed Allen as an obscene coupling of seduction and lethal power, a necropolitical and mediatized subject in action. Emerging from the courthouse, he walks towards TV cameras: "A showy stride / with the sexy swagger of a male model / all muscle and grace, his virility in hand / his striking the match like a gunslinger, / this élan, law and outlaw, SWAT and midnight rider, / history and modernity kissing here" (48). On the subject's response to the bombarding of cultural messages as enigmatic signifiers, see Allyson Stack, 67-68.

5 The trope of hysteria first appears in *Inventory*: "the underground subways are hysterical with gurneys" (42) and later, in reference to a bomb explosion, "how is it there, only hysteria" (50).

6 Drawing on Marx's theory that surplus value accrues from the movement of commodities, Ahmed proposes a theory of passion "not as the drive to accumulate (whether it be value, power or meaning), but as that which is accumulated over time. Affect does not reside in an object or sign, but is an effect of the circulation between objects and signs . . . the more signs circulate, the more affective they become" (45).

7 See Sophia Forster on Brand's cataloguing technique in *Inventory*.

8 Anthropometry refers to "the measurement of the human body with a view to determine its average dimensions, and the proportion of its parts, at different ages and in different races or classes" ("Anthropometry" n. pag.).

9 For an analysis of vulnerability in *Thirsty*, see Heike Härting.

10 On a Barthesian and Deleuzian reading of language, pleasure, and violence in *Thirsty*, see Jordana Greenblatt.

11 For another instance of catachresis, see Heather Smyth's analysis of Tuyen's *lubaio* in *What We All Long For* (2005) as an exercise in Surrealist *cadavre exquis*.

12 See Mackey's analysis of stammament, 734.

13 Brand's strategic use of periods coincides with dogmatic assertions in Ossuary IV, 41; Ossuary IV, 42; Ossuary X, 72 and 73; and Ossuary XII, 93.

14 For an analysis of "hauntology" in Brand's writing, see Jody Mason; Franca Bernabei.

15 In cataloguing five pages of bomb explosions on various continents, Section III of *Inventory* conveys this obsessive experience of time.

16 For a critique of the pursuit of aesthetics as a political strategy, see Marlene Goldman.

17 See Omisẹẹke Natasha Tinsley on the Black Atlantic as a diasporic site of queer love and resistance to colonial violence.

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Gerald Hill

Why We Don't Know

Trams slow
tracks curve or taxis
block the rails. Maybe we're the ones

curving. Get to the end
we hop off. All day
we don't know and it rains we walk

with canes for umbrellas. Maybe it's
the wine we're about to drink two euros
a bottle. Mornings we catch

BBC World Service. Pakistan will never know
Kashmir again. We lay out our streets in
a grid after earthquakes. The trams

move slow or topple. We start a page
and down the hill turn it filling
the square like birds

hopping on tables. Meet
the quake of '14 though
nothing yet has fallen.

Lisbon, Jan.28, 2014

Nicholas Milne

Mariposa Moves On
Leacock's Darkening "Sequel" to *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town*

Although *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (1912) is just one of the dozens of collections of humorous writing Stephen Leacock released throughout his career, it has come to dominate critical and popular understandings. Virtually all academic writing on Leacock and his works takes *Sunshine Sketches* as its focus, while major critics and authors have hailed it variously as "the first work to establish a Canadian voice" (Richler xiii), and as one that conveys "the genius of irony, the subtler art, the deeper wisdom" (Ross ix). This focus on *Sunshine Sketches*—and to a far lesser extent on *Arcadian Adventures with the Idle Rich* (1914)—reflects a broader critical consensus that there is very little in Leacock's middle and late career as a humorist that warrants significant attention.

In *Happy Stories, Just to Laugh At* (1943), however—the final collection of Leacock's humour published during his life—there is a cycle of short stories that sheds unexpected and intriguing light upon *Sunshine Sketches*, and which has nevertheless suffered from near total critical neglect. In "Mariposa Moves On," Leacock returns to find Mariposa in "the shadow of war" (*Happy Stories* 203)—a Mariposa where the sunshine has only continued to dim. While the original sketches generated the warmth of humour from luminous circumstances with shadows dancing behind them, as with Judge Pepperleigh's abiding grief for his dead son or Dean Drone's visions of his late wife, in this cycle Leacock uses the pretext of a Second World War Victory Loan drive to re-examine the town's character and explore the idea that all dreams must end and even happy memories must fade. Gerald Lynch has recently reasserted the importance of answering "the

much vexed question of Leacock's true view of Mariposa" ("From" 98); if the stories in "Mariposa Moves On" do not necessarily provide a comprehensive answer, they do nevertheless offer a fascinating counterpoint to the dappled sunshine of the original cycle. Much that was significant in that cycle's final chapter is brought back into focus: the implicit and long-delayed return to Mariposa after "thirty years" to see "if things had changed much since your day" (*Sunshine Sketches* 189) finally takes place, and both the reader and the narrator are forced to acknowledge that the town is no longer what it once was. Thus, the Mariposa that might perhaps endure unchanged in memory has been radically altered in reality by the passage of time, and especially by the ravages of war.

Why should a story cycle that constitutes such a critical coda to Leacock's most famous work be so neglected? The relative inaccessibility of this cycle may well have contributed to its obscurity—despite having run through eight editions, the work has not been in print since 1945 (Spadoni 358) and was not included in the *New Canadian Library* (NCL) reprint series of Leacock's works. Further, the general critical and popular consensus has been that Leacock's humorous works, after the initial successes of *Literary Lapses* (1910), *Nonsense Novels* (1911), *Sunshine Sketches* and *Arcadian Adventures*,[1] never rose to the level of his initial triumphs, being instead viewed as "repetitive," "of poor quality" and self-plagiarizing (Bowker, "Preface" 11). Robertson Davies attributed this apparent decline to Leacock's lack of growth as a writer, which, Davies argues, stemmed from Leacock's conviction that he had mastered the art of the comic sketch. This conviction led to the "mechanical joke-smithing" that made his subsequent works such "wearisome reading" (10). Mastered or not, his exercise of this art was prodigious; though Leacock put out a book of humour more or less annually from 1910 until his death in 1944, the latest of them to receive much critical attention—*Arcadian Adventures*—was published in 1914, and is most often considered simply as a counterpart to *Sunshine Sketches*. No other late-career collection of Leacock's humour apart from a 2010 reissue of *My Remarkable Uncle and Other Sketches* (1942) remains in print today.

Even among those critics who have acknowledged *Happy Stories*, "Mariposa Moves On" has not received much attention. Some, like David M. Legate and David Staines, note only that the cycle exists (Legate 242; Staines and Nimmo 395). Ralph L. Curry mentions the stories in his 1959 study, but says of them only that Leacock's awareness that "the little town could not live again" accounts for their modern setting and that they showed signs of

"hasty composition" (254). Albert and Theresa Moritz, in what is otherwise the most thorough of the biographies, echo Curry's assessment in dismissing the stories as "hastily written propaganda pieces" (404). Gerald Lynch offers a sentence describing "Mariposa Moves On" as an expression of Leacock's already well-known disdain for petty partisan politics (*Stephen* 10). Even Carl Spadoni, who acknowledges in his extensive introduction to the Broadview edition of *Sunshine Sketches* (2002) that the latter-day stories "offer a Leacockian perspective on the evolution of Mariposa and its people," refers to them as "dated," and "essentially pieces of propaganda for the war effort," lacking "the charm and timeless quality found in *Sunshine Sketches*" (xxxiii). While they are certainly propaganda pieces, and admittedly "dated" by their overt situation within the context of familiar historical events, the consensus that they lack some of the sunshine of the original sketches offers an important starting point for analysis.

Much of the output of Stephen Leacock's final years is marked by what has been called "an underlying autumnal mood" (MacKendrick 193), and it is within this context that "Mariposa Moves On" must be considered. The last ten years of Leacock's life were marked by a gradual decline and a series of losses,[2] and his literary output during this time reflects the darker tone of his life at large. *Too Much College* (1939) carries a number of more than usually cynical reflections on the nature of the academy, while Leacock admits in his preface to *Model Memoirs and Other Sketches from Simple to Serious* (1938) that the volume is "offensively serious," but defends himself by citing his advancing years (v). Many of the pieces included in *My Remarkable Uncle*, the most famous of his late-career collections, strike a notably sombre tone, with the heart-wrenching essay "Three Score and Ten: The Business of Growing Old" offering a particularly vivid and pathos-laden description of the quality that marks the end of a person's days. Leacock writes of "an increasing feeling of isolation, of being alone. We seem so far apart. . . . This must be near the end" (219). This and other works—like the darkly rueful "Looking Back from Retirement," from *Here Are My Lectures and Stories* (1937)—offer what Alan Bowker has called "an honest expression of the fear and anger of a man who recognizes that he has lost paradise and that the end is approaching" ("Introduction" 38). Such works were joined by suggestively titled books like *Last Leaves* (1945) and *While There Is Time: The Case against Social Catastrophe* (1945), both of which were still in preparation at the time of Leacock's death. Throughout this final stage, Leacock rightly considered himself "a very sick man" (Staines and Nimmo 528), and was putting his

affairs in order, as he looked ahead to the mist that swirled before him. He had been in serious pain since an operation for prostate cancer in 1938; he began arranging his final dispositions in the fall of 1943. That winter he was diagnosed with throat cancer; by March of 1944 he would be dead. When he began *Happy Stories* in 1943, however, the tide of events had dropped a yet darker veil on Leacock and his world: the Second World War. This war and the catastrophe it threatened would provide the backdrop for Leacock's return to Mariposa.

"Mariposa Moves On" is a series of eight stories, all very short, which initially appeared in the *Montreal Gazette* in the spring of 1943. A letter from Leacock during their preparation describes them affectionately as "great stuff . . . little stories of Mariposa, laid in the Barber Shop" (Staines and Nimmo 509) and gives no hint of any troubling contents. "Mariposa Moves On" fills the last forty pages or so of *Happy Stories*. Leacock's strangely ambivalent preface strikes a note at odds with the volume's title, declaring,

> All the stories in this book have, or are meant to have, one element in common. They are not true to life. The people in them laugh too much; they cry too easily; they lie too hard. The light is all false, it's too bright, and the manners and customs are all wrong. The times and places are confused. There is no need, therefore, to give the usual assurance that none of the characters in the book are real persons. Of course not; this is not real life. It is better. (v)

With a false light, hard lies, and the confusion of times and places proliferating, it is perhaps not surprising to see Leacock return to the little town that had seemed, at least in memory, so resistant to such dissolution. The surprise of "Mariposa Moves On" for the reader of *Sunshine Sketches*, however, is that, in stark contrast to the redemptive and nostalgic conclusion that most critics find in the original collection's final "Envoi," it is very hard to read this final cycle—or Mariposa itself—as having a happy ending.

Even before the darkness of Leacock's final years, there were creeping notes of ambivalence to be found in some of his works that revealed his evolving opinion of his early masterpiece and the place that small towns held in his esteem. As much of a success as *Sunshine Sketches* was, it was not for Leacock a wholly satisfactory work. Writing a sustained narrative of that sort (even one sutured together from related vignettes) was a taxing process, and one which he would never seriously attempt again at any comparable length after *Arcadian Adventures*. The characters were not fully fleshed out and convincing, but instead pastiches and types. Peter McArthur records one of Leacock's complaints about his own work:

> I wrote [*Sunshine Sketches*] with considerable difficulty. I can invent characters quite easily, but I have no notion as to how to make things happen to them. Indeed I see no reason why anything should. I could write awfully good short stories if it were only permissible merely to introduce some extremely original character, and at the end of two pages announce that at this point a brick fell on his head and killed him. . . . Such feeble plots as there are in [*Sunshine Sketches*] were invented by brute force, after the characters had been introduced. Hence the atrocious clumsiness of the construction all through. (136)

"Considerable difficulty," "feeble plots," "atrocious clumsiness": in spite of the typically humorous patter that surrounds them, these are criticisms of the sort one might expect to read in a particularly negative review, not coming from the author's own pen. They are nevertheless in keeping with a broader ambivalence towards this small-town atmosphere, as towards much else, that begins to be in evidence in the later stages of Leacock's career.

A remarkable example of this ambivalence can also be found in an otherwise uncharacteristic short story in *The Dry Pickwick and Other Incongruities* (1932). First published in *The Milwaukee Sentinel* on July 14, 1929, "Come and See Our Town: How the Visitor Feels When Shown Around" begins in a fashion virtually identical to that of *Sunshine Sketches*—with a newcomer arriving by train in a little town in the sunshine and one of the town's proud citizens taking him around to show it off. The tone of light-hearted pomp, the careless exaggeration, the wounded pride at any suggestion of the town's smallness, all are present in this story—but the sense of affection is not. Whereas in *Sunshine Sketches* the visitor is implicitly the reader, and consequently silent within the body of the text, in "Come and See Our Town" the visitor has a great deal to say about the experience indeed, though he only responds to the guide in parenthetical asides: "if you ask me my private opinion of your town," he thinks to himself, "I should say it looks about the dingiest, meanest place I was ever in." In *Sunshine Sketches*, the voice of local pride was uncontradicted; in "Come and See Our Town," however, the visitor comments, "in these monologues with the local patriot you never get the chance to speak out: at best you can only murmur. He does all the broadcasting" (242). These encounters seem to be losing some of their shine, and it is thus not wholly surprising that our next—and last—encounter with Mariposa after so many decades finds it shrouded in "the shadow of war" (*Happy Stories* 203).

Leacock wrote the new Mariposa stories in connection with the Fourth Victory Loan appeal, hoping to encourage his fellow Canadians to give generously to the war effort in that time of need, and the people of Mariposa

consequently tackle the problem with gusto. This open focus on fundraising stands in stark contrast to the original publication of the collected *Sketches*, which Leacock insisted be kept cheap so that the book would be accessible to the young and the poor: "those who are most willing to buy it," he wrote to John Lane in June of 1912, "are young people with lots of life and fun in them and, as a rule, not too much money. Rich people buy stuff with a gorgeous cover and fine paper, and never read it" (Staines and Nimmo 77). It is difficult to imagine the directors of the Fourth Victory Loan spurning the money of the idle rich.

The need for such money was dire in 1943. The Nazi occupation of Europe was then at its height, and it was apparent that a great burst of international effort—likely in the form of an Allied invasion of France, Italy, or both—would be required to dislodge Hitler's armies from their redoubts. The shocking failure of the raid on Dieppe in August of 1942 was still fresh in Canadian minds, and the conviction that a larger assault would soon be mounted gave rise to the Fourth loan's slogan, "Back the Attack!" (Ker and Goodman 49).

The Department of Finance consequently oversaw a program of borrowing from Canadian citizens—exhorted to action by an army of artists, clergy, statesmen, journalists, and public intellectuals—and throughout the course of the war raised some four billion through a series of public loans taken from the savings of Canadians at minimal interest rates.[3] The Third Victory Loan, in the fall of 1942, had brought in an unprecedented $991 million, and it was hoped that its successor would exceed the stated goal of $1.1 billion. The Fourth Loan initially seemed to hit an almost Leacockian snag when it became a cause of popular protest: the King government had dramatically reduced the availability of beer and spirits, owing to wartime shortages, but many Canadians refused to purchase the bonds until these restrictions were loosened. "No beer, no bonds" was the shout (Slater 90). Nevertheless, much like the great drive in Mariposa, the Fourth Loan was a success: $1.3 billion was raised in the first half of 1943 alone, and "Mariposa Moves On" paints a picture of this success in the making even as it aimed to help it along. It was intended that this particular Loan's overriding tone be "not a happy, relaxed, bell-ringing note of victory that could produce complacency, but an aggressive, hard-biting, all-out smashing-through" (Ker and Goodman 49), and the increasingly dire tone of the new sketches reflects this.

The stories that comprise "Mariposa Moves On" are very short when compared to the original *Sketches*—none more than a couple of pages long—and mostly focus upon the sometimes receptive, sometimes hostile ways in which the citizens of Mariposa respond to being asked by the government

for money. Much has changed in Mariposa since the time of *Sunshine Sketches*, even as much also remains the same; of Josh Smith, his hotel and his late parliamentary candidacy there is nary a mention, except perhaps for an oblique reference to "some of the skunks we've succeeded in electing in Mariposa in past years" (239), but Jefferson Thorpe's barbershop—directly across the street from the hotel in *Sunshine Sketches*—continues under his steady hand and still serves as "a sort of centre of town talk and public information" (206). The narrator specifically notes in the second of the new sketches that he has "spoken of [the barber shop] before" (206), thus creating an explicit link between himself and the narrator of the original *Sketches*. No other major characters carry over from the one work to the next, though the former postmaster, Trelawney, makes a brief appearance as the now much-aged Colonel Trelawney, who is nominated as the Conservative Candidate for Mariposa because his only son was killed in the first year of the war (238-39).

The governing concept of "Mariposa Moves On" is that the town has been given a quota to fill: they have committed to raising one million dollars for the Victory Loan. Their achievement during the last Loan drive was $640,000—an impressive feat for a town of twelve thousand citizens, though that number, given the famous jealousy of the census-takers, is declared again to be too low (210)—but nobody in town seriously believes they will be able to beat it. "You know Mariposa," the narrator confides, no longer bothering to maintain any pretence; "it was just vain glory and civic pride" (222). The stories describe the various ways in which Mariposa luminaries are cajoled, persuaded, shamed, tricked, or even outright threatened into subscribing to the Loan. Eventually the quota is met, and the drive really does raise the desired million. The consequences of this are catastrophic, however, and hearken back to the complications suggested by *Sunshine Sketches*' final chapter.

That chapter, the "Envoi," sees both narrator and reader "returning" to Mariposa by train—returning to the town that "has lain waiting . . . there for thirty years" (*Sunshine Sketches* 189). The "Envoi" concludes with a startling moment of literal self-reflection: the reader is enjoined not to "bother [looking] at the reflection of your face in the window-pane shadowed by the night outside. Nobody could tell you after all these years. Your face has changed" (191). The train then arrives in Mariposa—but the reader is returned immediately to "the leather chairs of the Mausoleum Club," back in the big city, where there is only "[talk] of the little Town in the Sunshine that once we knew" (191). This lack of self-recognition underscores the

untraversable distance between the Mariposa of memory and the Mariposa of reality, and the moment at which this is realized has been a complex preoccupation of Leacock scholarship for decades—a fitting focus for what Ina Ferris has described as "the central event of *Sunshine Sketches*" (78).[4]

This forestalled self-recognition and the impossibility of a return to Mariposa as it *was* are undoubtedly important features of the "Envoi," but little has yet been made of the narrator's emphasis on a specific timeframe for the imagined return. It is hoped that the town will be "just as it used to be thirty years ago" (191), but the moment at which this might be proven either way is forestalled by the abstraction of the return. While there is nothing to prove that Leacock intended in 1912 to write about a return to Mariposa along this very timeframe, it is nevertheless the case that he did describe such a return—and with precisely the results the "Envoi" implies.

Much of the original collection's appeal lies in the kindly and enduring caricature of small-town life that can be found in Leacock's presentation of Mariposa. The inspiration for the book, as Leacock's preface makes clear, is "a land of hope and sunshine where little towns spread their square streets and their trim maple trees beside placid lakes almost within echo of the primeval forest" (xi)—a world of harmony and harmlessness, of respectability and respect. Mariposa is a crystallized memory, seemingly impervious to the cares and troubles of the outside world, and the ideal that it represents waits to redeem the visitor if only he or she will remember the town as it was. Nevertheless, as Lynch has argued, this return to Mariposa *must* be abstract and imaginative if it is to be therapeutic. To actually return in person would be to discover that both the visitor and the town are so different as to be all but unrecognizable—and maybe that they always were (*Stephen* 114-20). This distance and abstract impermanence evoke a darkness that resides very near to the *Sketches*' enduring light. Despite its accessibility through an imaginative train ride or through reading "such a book as [*Sunshine Sketches*]" (*Sunshine Sketches* 185), for Mariposa to be authentically human in Leacock's view its sunshine must have a dappled quality. While Margaret Atwood has suggested that Mariposa is "a place where pathos is possible but nothing really tragic is allowed to happen" (187), the contours of Leacock's humour insist on the possibility of something darker creeping in; it is found in "the contrast between what we might be and what we are, between the petty cares and anxieties of today and the nothingness to which they fade to-morrow, between the fever and the fret of life and the final calm of death" (*Humour* 125). With this in mind, Leacock's coda to *Sunshine*

Sketches demonstrates that the return to Mariposa forestalled in the work's meditative "Envoi" is impossible not only because the traveller is no longer really Mariposan, but also because, to an extent, neither is Mariposa.

The town *has* changed, in "Mariposa Moves On," and not for the better; there are signs of decay even before the story sequence's dramatic conclusion. In the first story, "The Happy Warrior," the narrator laments that fishing in the Mariposa area is no longer what it once was. "Nowadays," he says, "if you go trout fishing on the streams you've got to carry soda. You can't any longer drink the water in the creeks" (205). What's worse, "the fish are disappearing in the older settled parts of Ontario," and one has to go far north to find any (205)—a far cry indeed from the quality of fishing in Mariposa that could have been spoken of so expansively in the "Envoi" that "not even the long dull evening in this club would be long enough for the telling of it" (*Sunshine Sketches* 187).

It is not only the natural surroundings of Mariposa that are suffering, however; though the town has seen some improvements in the thirty years since the days of *Sunshine Sketches*—including a "park with an historic monument"[5]—the ones the narrator goes out of his way to mention are, incredibly, a "Municipal Abattoir and an Asylum for the feeble-minded" (*Happy Stories* 223). The barber Jeff Thorpe, when he suddenly came into a fortune in *Sunshine Sketches*, was frustrated in his attempts to build homes for the blind and the incurable by the fact that no such people could be found in Mariposa (*Sunshine Sketches* 43); now, however, it seems that an asylum for the "feeble-minded" can thrive. These and other features are especially disturbing in light of Mariposa's status as Canada's symbolic small town. Leacock's claim in the preface to the original *Sketches* that Mariposa "is not a real town" but rather "about seventy or eighty of them" (x-xi) has expanded considerably in the introduction to "Mariposa Moves On" to encompass "at least several hundred in Canada and in the adjacent States" (203). As Lynch has vividly expressed it, "Mariposa *is* Canada" in *Sunshine Sketches* ("From" 106); if it still is in "Mariposa Moves On," it has strayed very far from the inspiring vision of Canada that one might expect from a patriotic appeal.

There are yet sadder touches. In "Going, Going, Gone!" the narrator is transported back sixty-five years to a heartbreaking farm-auction, in which all of the sad, little elements of a poor family's life are put up for sale and dispersed—if they are lucky (229-230). He notes that this "tragedy" was not confined to the distant past; a mere five years would suffice—"those stricken,

hungry days when our ten million people had no one to kill and no one to feed but themselves" (230). He notes the bitter twist of the knife that was seeing the Depression end only because another world war had started: "the tragedy of our economic life that knows no stimulus but death" (231). They discuss this matter in Jeff's barbershop, and the talk turns to the subject of economic paradoxes and the rolling back of non-essential industries and resources in a time of war;[6] the narrator, who (like Leacock) identifies himself as an economist, tries to give explanations for this, but they come out sounding limp and full of cant. Jeff finishes shaving his customer, looks across at the narrator and says, simply, "you're next" (234). For Leacock, this was all too true.

An additional and poignant feature of "Mariposa Moves On" is the abstractly apocalyptic quality of its conclusion. It is in the final story in the cycle—"A New Heaven and a New Earth"—that this quality becomes most evident. The title sets the tone well; in the story the phrase is only a snippet of a patriotic speech that the narrator hears wafting on the evening wind (hears, that is, and detests), but the phrase comes from the Book of Revelation:

> And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away . . . and I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven . . . and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. (Rev. 21.1-4)

These may be cheering words in their original context, but, taken as the text for Leacock's short valedictory "sermon" on Mariposa, they carry a more ominous note.

While jubilation reigns in the town over the meeting of the quota and the raising of the million dollars, this jubilation is unlike previous outbursts of community celebration in *Sunshine Sketches*. The narrator claims that the drive had been "beginning to have a queer effect on the town, disrupting its social life" (*Happy Stories* 235). Whereas before Mariposa had been a town built along strictly segregated political and religious lines, even if everybody belonged to every club and association in town as a matter of principle, it is now slowly adopting a sort of ideological monism, in which the Mariposans no longer care about Liberal or Conservative, Catholic or Protestant, Teetotaller or Drunk, Slave or Free. "You felt somehow," he writes wryly, "as if society was breaking away from its moorings, as if we never would get back again to where we used to be. And if you said that to any of the people, they said, 'Why should we?'" (236).

Also worrying is the effect of the money itself. "It seems that the Loan," he continues, "—the realization that they could raise a million dollars in a little town like ours—has gone to their heads" (236). The "whirlwind fund-raising campaign" of the original *Sketches* ended up as a failure on a financial level, so the consequences of such a windfall were forestalled, but this time there is nothing to stand in the way of progress; "everybody has suddenly decided that Main Street is too cramped and narrow; they want to knock down one side of it and throw it into the lake" (237). What a change from the opening paragraphs of *Sunshine Sketches*, in which Main Street is favourably compared to Wall Street and Broadway for its grandiose width—you could "roll Jeff Thorpe's barber shop over on its face and it wouldn't reach halfway across" (*Sunshine Sketches* 2). This widening project also poses imminent danger to two of Mariposa's most significant commercial and cultural landmarks in *Sunshine Sketches*: Josh Smith's hotel and Jeff Thorpe's barbershop face each other across that very street. Which will be destroyed? The narrator does not speculate.

As the sequence nears its conclusion, the narrator retires to the barbershop to sit and chat, and is informed by Jeff that a famous speaker has come up from the City to preach patriotism and victory. Jeff insists, "you don't want to miss it"; "I did," the narrator confides, "but I didn't say so" (239). He leaves the barbershop, significantly, just as the sun sets; the citizens of Mariposa are in the streets, heading to a public meeting, all talking and laughing and smiling at one another. "It seems so different from what is used to be," he laments, "but for the price paid for it, it would seem a wonderful world" (240). This communal good feeling and unity have been brought about by a war that had destroyed much of the world and would have much yet left to destroy, and the narrator's unease reflects the fashion in which the victory speech and the Mariposans' exultations constitute the very "happy, relaxed, bell-ringing note of victory" that the Fourth Victory Loan's architects explicitly condemned (Ker and Goodman 49). Nevertheless, there remains some ambiguity as to just what the narrator laments—the war, the "victory" of the loan, or the changes that both have brought about.

A snippet of the speech drifts in through Jeff's window—"a new heaven and a new earth"—and a customer asks him what is going on. "It's nothing," says Jeff, "it's just a religious revival." "Oh," says the customer, "nothing real" (240). This weary misconstruing and dismissal of the victory rally hearkens back to the pitch-black critique of modern religion offered in the original *Sketches*, which saw Mariposa's Dean Drone as "at best a simpleton and at worst corrupt,"

and "communal Mariposa [having] engaged materialistic, individualistic Josh Smith to burn down its bankrupt Church of England for the salvific insurance money" (Lynch, "From" 106). While Drone's narrative arc in *Sunshine Sketches* concludes on a sympathetic note and the sequence moves on to the redemptive romance of Peter Pupkin and Zena Pepperleigh, "A New Heaven and a New Earth" ends before any such redemption is possible. The final realization of the Mariposans' worst instincts is complete. The story concludes with the descent of a twilit pathos:

> A new heaven and a new earth—the words seemed to echo still as I walked away from the town and beside the lake towards my home. The evening was closing in around me—as it is every evening at my age—and from the lighted town behind me, and in the evening breeze gathering off the lake, the sound still came—"a new heaven and a new earth." (240)[7]

The position of the narrator's home, left unspecified in *Sunshine Sketches*, identifies that narrator with Leacock himself more thoroughly than ever; indeed, the house is specifically situated on "Old Brewery Bay," where Leacock did in fact have his Orillia home, in one of the sequence's earlier stories. More crucially, though, the evening is closing in around him, and the sunshine that has previously been the distinguishing feature of Mariposa—and the note upon which *Sunshine Sketches* concluded—is gone. Mariposa is now, instead, a "lighted" town, shining under its own power. The former things have passed away, and the new city has descended: "[B]ut for the price paid for it, it would seem a wonderful world" (240).

The sketches that constitute "Mariposa Moves On" have remained out of print for almost seventy years. They are short and inconsequential compared to *Sunshine Sketches*, and lack their depth, charm, and sense of angry exuberance. Whatever the reasons for the neglect of the sketches in "Mariposa Moves On," however, they constitute an unusual late-career re-engagement on Leacock's part with the little town in the sunshine that helped cement his reputation as one of Canada's most important literary voices. Through his re-situation of Mariposa in a modern context and against the backdrop of international war, Leacock complicates still further the originally redemptive qualities of the town that awaited the reader-visitor. The implicit warning offered in *Sunshine Sketches*' "Envoi" about what an actual return to Mariposa would be like is borne out, and the reader is left at last with the vision of a town that, far from being able to save his or her soul, cannot even save its own.

NOTES

1 In spite of its positioning among Leacock's early career successes and its generally consistent quality of humour, *Behind the Beyond, and Other Contributions to Human Knowledge* (1913) has likewise received virtually no critical attention.

2 The most profoundly felt of these losses were on the personal level: the deaths of his friend, McGill principal Sir Arthur Currie in 1933, and his much-beloved mother in 1934 left Leacock feeling more alone than he had in years. The company of his troubled son, Stevie, proved little consolation. Leacock's wife, Beatrix Hamilton, had died in 1925 of breast cancer. Stevie was their only child, and his ongoing health problems (such as the lack of a growth hormone that saw him only ever attain a full height of four feet) caused considerable tensions between father and son. Much of the sadness in each of their lives revolved around the other. Stevie's graduation from McGill University in 1940 should have been a happy occasion for Leacock, given his professorship there, and his conviction of his son's brilliance, but the day of the graduation instead found Leacock drinking alone in the University Club, unwilling to attend the ceremony (MacMillan 143). Professional concerns mixed with the personal; in 1936, in the wake of Currie's death and the installation of McGill's new president, A. E. Morgan, a new regulation was adopted that mandated retirement for professors at the age of 65 unless sufficient reason for an exception could be found. No such exception was, in Leacock's case, and he was forced to depart.

3 See Slater for an in-depth analysis of the Victory Loan program and its successes.

4 See also Mantz; MacLulich; Zichy; Lynch ("From").

5 One possible implication of this otherwise vague reference is that the "historic monument" is one of the countless memorials to the dead and missing of the First World War that became such a regular feature of Canadian municipal centres during the 1920s and 1930s. Its rhetorical positioning against a slaughterhouse and a home for the mentally ill makes the possibility all the more suggestive.

6 A recurring subject in Leacock's war writing. His First World War propaganda pamphlet on the curbing of unnecessary luxury spending, *National Organization for War* (1916), proved immensely popular; the Canadian government distributed some 250,000 copies, and it was reprinted in Britain by Lord Northcliffe's Press.

7 The story as it appears in the *Montreal Gazette* carries a different title—"Leacock's Mariposa Out of Joint As Loan Drive Cuts Social Lines"—and a slightly expanded conclusion. The final paragraph is the same but for an additional three words at the very end: "Please God, yes" (23).

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kerry rawlinson

The Language of Jasper

Lake linked to lake
lick the crotches of stunning rock:
great monosyllabic gigantica

looped by aqua pools: lapis lazuli, turquoise
and baby-powdered blue suck on
denuded stone.

Icy tongues lap the mountain bones,

tongues of ancient glaciers, silver-grey wolves,
lap the remains of some gods'
calamitous feud;

fractured kames and moraines and
deranged slate utter menace that we have
no code to translate.

Come test your tenuous moment of bliss

in tectonic jumbles of eroded teeth
spat out in a punch-up of geologic insanity
and try to decipher its speech.

Go clamber kidlike over the granite flanks;
scramble over random ranks of bleak and jagged
peaks; trip over extinguished language

in ignorance and ego.

Wander at your leisure—but heed the
tilted slabs of its expression.
Let innocent glee not misread

the tumbled curses once torn
from the throat of an incoherent earth
and hurled back at an absent heaven:

Jasper speaks.

Jeffrey Aaron Weingarten

Careers and Explorations
A Conversation with Phyllis Webb

Phyllis Webb is one of Canada's most respected poets, political voices, radio broadcasters, and visual artists. She published her first poetry collection, *Trio*, in 1954 with Gael Turnbull and Eli Mandel. Her latest volume, *Hanging Fire*, was published in 1990. Talonbooks has kept *The Vision Tree: Selected Poems*, for which Webb won the 1982 Governor General's Award for Poetry, in print. In addition to her work as a poet, Webb has published two volumes of critical prose: *Talking* (1982) and *Nothing but Brush Strokes* (1995). These collections include articles on Webb's drive to revolutionize the poetic line, her CBC broadcasts, essays on her left-leaning political views, a small sampling of reviews and correspondence, and several essays on her intensely visual approach to poetry. In 2014, Talonbooks published Webb's *Peacock Blue: Collected Poems*, edited by John Hulcoop; Hulcoop is also the author of *Phyllis Webb and Her Works* (ECW 1990). Announcing the release of Webb's *Collected Poems*, the Vancouver Writers Fest hosted "A Celebration of Phyllis Webb," which brought together writers on whom Webb had a major influence, including George Bowering, Sharon Thesen, and Daphne Marlatt. The *Collected Poems* offers a retrospective on nearly fifty years of her writing. It includes published, unpublished, and uncollected works that demonstrate her profound impact and achievement as a major Canadian poet of the twentieth century.

This interview was conducted by Jeffrey Weingarten over the phone during December 2010 and January 2011.

Jeffrey Aaron Weingarten (JW): I was rereading some of your essays recently, and I noticed you often think about where poems (yours and others') come from.

I think that is a suitable place to start. Since writing those essays, have you thought more about where your poetry comes from?

Phyllis Webb (PW): Do you ask that because they don't come about anymore? [laughs] They used to arrive usually with words and phrases and sentences that were given, that I heard. They simply arrived. That was usually the beginning of the poem. They arrived with an initial rhythm and a kind of impulse. But I also worked quite consciously, too; I wrote down words and phrases and rhymes and so on. Little notes that I would make in free association.

JW: I've always found that those fragments lead to poems that offer very strong, empowered voices. Is that how you perceive your own poetic voice?

PW: I'm not sure. I can't really characterize my own voice. It developed over time. I guess when I look at my early poems, apart from being embarrassed, I feel there is this young person, and of course there was. A kind of naiveté is there.

JW: Why do you say that?

PW: Because many of the poems are very subjective. Not all of them, but many. When I very recently read through old collections, I actually found myself sort of surprised that most of the poems aren't naive. But the ones that are . . . they are simply too uninhibited. My love poems, or my drastic expression about this love affair or despair or any of that. It is so open. Having become a more formal writer, I wouldn't be so revealing in my writing now, nor was I in my later writing. In my later poetry, there is still the "I" roaming around, but there I remain much more outside the poem, more distant, less subjective. The early poems are not so: "And In Our Time" and "Sprouts the Bitter Grain" and "Lament" are good examples of the naive poems. In a good poem, the persona protects one from self-indulgence, it establishes the poet as a real maker.

JW: Are you a better "maker" in the later writing?

PW: I suppose so. The content and especially the sound in my later poems are so much more beautiful. I think my ears opened somehow after those first early works. I became much more attuned to the language I was using. I really feel I developed as a poet. I don't mind saying that. I look at the beginning to the end: I am quite amazed at times at what I did. How did I do that? I sometimes wonder. I'm surprised that I could do things that looked so adept and accomplished in my later career. I have some admiration for myself, but mostly for the later work. It is there in some of the earlier ones, too, but not as often.

JW: Are there certain criteria that come to mind when you think about what makes a poem "likeable"?

PW: I'm not sure! I'm not a critic. I so often just read things and put them away. I can't tell you much about them. Critics can say what is likeable.

JW: One of the most likeable things about your poetry, I think, is its iconoclasm.

PW: That is there, certainly. In the later work, the breaking and shattering becomes much more political for me. The earlier work is psychological: the idea of breaking down, that fragile sense of being. I think later work strikes me as quite revolutionary in its iconoclasm.

JW: Are you thinking of *Naked Poems* [1965]?

PW: No, even later than that: *Hanging Fire* [1990], which I think of as a very angry kind of book. I seem more liberated in that work. My anger was set free, and it comes out in a very strong voice.

JW: What made you such an angry poet?

PW: My feminism, in part. But also my sense of the social or political world as one that I am incapable of changing. There is some residual anger about the horrors of the world and the stupidity. I guess the anger is also more personal, it just comes out of a place in me which I didn't access until late in my career. I think I expressed it best in my last poetry book [*Hanging Fire*], better than anywhere else.

JW: The anger seems germane to your work, but so does your attention to many poetic antecedents. I often hear Emily Dickinson, for example, in your writing. You seem in dialogue.

PW: With regard to dialogue broadly, yes, I think that's true. I am often in dialogue with some "other" or another, like in "For Fyodor," which is from the point of view of a beetle in the cabbage soup. It became a dramatic monologue and I didn't deliberately set out to write one, but it ended up that way. That kind of poem is me in dialogue with some other voice: the voice of the beetle! I am very fond of that poem, I think it was one of my best, because of that sense of exchange. But Dickinson? I am not sure there is much of her in my work.

JW: I suppose I hear an echo, because I have always understood her as a poet struggling in her own way against the patriarchal line and conventions. I see that same struggle in something like "Poetics Against the Angel of the Death."

PW: Ah, yes. I see what you mean. She never talks about metre the way I do, I suppose. But she is definitely breaking, or at least trying to break, the regularity and expectedness and the repetitiveness of poetry. It comes out

of her passion as a poet. She had a need to break through the accepted way of doing things, but she did that without totally smashing the system. I suppose I've said things like that before in my work. I oscillate between my anarchism and my timidity. I'm not totally timid, but, especially as I've grown older, I've become increasingly reluctant to act out my political beliefs. Just lazy, really. When I think about my relationship to Dickinson, when I throw her into parts of *Nothing but Brush Strokes* [1995], it is because she does what she does with respectable restraint. I suppose I can be that way, too. But then again, I never think of myself as being consciously influenced by Dickinson.

JW: Who were your major influences then?

PW: Gerard Manley Hopkins always comes to mind. Of course, Marvell. In his writing, I was won over by the cosmological and geographic aspects. I'm dealing with such things in "Marvell's Garden." The thinking aspect of those seventeenth-century poets, their ability to *think in* the poem, it just made me want to write that poem. I just recently reread "Marvell's Garden," and I don't think there is that much thinking going on there. But in it, I've incorporated Marvell's work, played with it, internalized his lines and images. And I identify with these things, of course; his garden is my garden, too.

Donne, too, was important to me. I suppose the seventeenth-century poets in general were very important to me. I think that comes across in my work clearly. I was fascinated by the intellectual content of the period, the way they worked it into the poetry. It became part of the intensity of the poem. It made an intellectual demand of the reader. Donne, for example, is always tussling with ideas. He struggled with ideas as though they were parts of his soul; they weren't just rational or intellectual struggles. He was up against a system, too, which I suppose made it another struggle I identified with. I equate my general intensity of thinking with his. But many of those poets dealt with such content in an amazing way.

JW: What about more contemporary poets?

PW: Louis Dudek and Frank Scott were major influences on me. Auden, and Spender, and all those folk from England. William Carlos Williams was very important to me. Dudek introduced me to his work. And, of course, Marianne Moore had a major impact on my writing. Another Dudek influence! He introduced me to her writing. He really got me into the American poets in a way that no one else had, because he had so much personal contact with them. Dudek was a mature man, very well-connected, by the time I was writing; he knew Pound, he knew many of them.

Then when I was in Montreal, I felt as though I discovered a light coming onto the page. Discovering all of these American poets felt like that. The objectivity, the plainspeaking, the spareness of their work. If only because he showed me them, Dudek had a huge effect on my writing. The time I spent in Montreal during the fifties was very educational.

Someone like Irving Layton, though, didn't have much of an influence on my writing. I understood him as a person (I think), but, at the time, I didn't understand his poetry; I was young and somewhat unsophisticated about poetry. It was complicated stuff in the fifties, but now not so much. But they were new poems, obscure and difficult in their era for me. Then you go and look at Williams: you understand it right away. Robert Creeley, the same thing. They're very lucid, they're clear. Very musical, I think. Very plain music, a plain song. I include Moore in there, of course.

JW: Did you know Moore?

PW: Not really. I went to New York in the sixties when I was working for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation [CBC], and her publisher or someone had given me her phone number. I was going to call her for an interview, but someone had apparently made a terrible faux pas, and it did not go well. I *assumed* I could call her. It was one of those calls I made all the time at the CBC. But I can't remember who I talked to, but it was clear I never should have had the number in the first place! I felt very embarrassed, because I would never have done it if I had known it wasn't right to do. That was as close as I ever came to meeting her.

Louis Dudek showed her my poem, "Standing." I dedicated that poem to Earle Birney, because it was about him. The title was a joke, you see: he had been in a cast for months after falling out of a tree, and I was in a body cast when I wrote it. So I wrote it for Birney and then Dudek showed it to Marianne Moore.

JW: What did she say?

PW: I don't think she was that thrilled. Actually, I shouldn't say that. I don't think she was *that* impressed by it, but I don't think she was appalled either. But Moore was a powerful influence for me. It was her intellectualism, like Donne's, that attracted me to her. It was also the wit. I liked her humour.

JW: You mentioned the American "spareness" earlier, which makes me think of Moore's continual shortening of "Poetry" until it was only three lines long. Is that the kind of precise, imagistic style that you had in mind when you wrote collections such as *Naked Poems*? I ask, in part, because you allude to Moore in that poem.

PW: I would say that Creeley had more of an influence on *Naked Poems* than did Moore. He was at UBC when I wrote those poems and we were good friends. But it was, of course, my exposure to Japanese and Chinese poetry, and to Sappho, that partly inspired *Naked Poems*. Moore didn't play so big a role. Apart from the reference you mention, I wouldn't say she inspired much of the collection.

JW: Speaking a bit more broadly, though, your poetry does often seem to have a lingering imagism in it. Was there a conscious interest in that literary style?

PW: It has been so long since I've thought about it. I think it was the fact that Moore went off on her own, did her own thing; I liked that. I have been looking at H.D. again recently, and I think she probably did a lot for my work, too. For me, imagism and little tiny poems go together; that's inevitable. I guess I had reactions similar to those of the people who were originally influenced by the imagist movement, such as H.D. and Moore, in that I wanted to clean up my work, make it brisker, and more substantial in terms of objects and such. I think I understood it at the time, even if I don't understand it now. All I remember is that it led to a kind of clearing out, a clarification in the poetry, and moved me away from Romantic indulgence. I think. I think!

JW: Imagism, and especially as it evolved in Canadian literature out of the Group of Seven influence, is obviously very concerned with the visual image. Poetic images and literal images seem so closely related in our writing. It's true of your work, isn't it? I find it difficult to separate your career as a poet from your career as a visual artist.

PW: I don't think of it as a career. I don't think of anything I've done as a career! My poetry was a calling. My painting was an exploration.

JW: How did the exploration come about?

PW: My brother was the painter in the family, and in his early years he painted quite a lot. He was very passionate about Emily Carr, so in my teens I knew about her, who, of course, lived in Victoria as well. She was so famous in the city. I began there. Then when I was at UBC I met Jack Shadbolt, a famous British Columbian artist, an icon here, and various other artists who were around. There were quite a few artists around who mingled with students.

And then, when I was in Montreal, I knew Marian Scott, but I didn't know too many more than her. Her work was very familiar, though. I knew others, of course: Betty Sutherland (or Betty Layton), Morton Rosengarten, and Stanley (Buddy) Rozynski. In fact, Rosengarten I knew well. I have something by him. I don't remember why he gave it to me, but it is a nude.

Not me, though! But I still have it; I've kept it. Betty Layton was my very dear friend during the fifties. She was certainly another living artist I was very close to. Though, I never totally understood her painting. I never watched her paint, but I saw the pictures as they developed. She also did the cover for *Trio* [Contact Press, 1954]. Eli Mandel's name is misspelled on that cover! She might have been responsible for that typo. Maybe not. But she did design that cover. She was a lovely, lovely person. She was sweet. Well, not sweet. That's the wrong word for Betty Layton. She was beautiful.

JW: What about the art scene in Toronto? You spent time there in the fifties and sixties.

PW: Oh yes, I was there. William Ronald, Greg Curnoe, Michael Snow; I knew all of those. I went to many of the openings and the galleries. Dorothy Cameron had a gallery in Toronto. She was a "gallerist"—a new word I've discovered that is apparently used by everyone these days! I was *au courant* with all of that stuff. I was very excited by their work. Ronald actually freelanced at the CBC and did art programming, so I might have even worked with him a bit.

JW: Did you paint during those years?

PW: Art was more about viewing for me during that period. I spent a lot of time at the museums in Montreal. I used to spend my weekends, a lot of my time, just looking at pictures. I loved the El Grecos that they had there. I think it would be fair to say that art has kind of travelled with me through my life, quite closely. When I lived in London during the fifties, for example, I spent lots of time at the galleries there. Same thing in Paris when I lived there for a year and a half, also in the fifties. I went to Paris and met Joe Plaskett, an artist from BC. It was in those cities, Paris, London, and Montreal, that I became fairly passionate about art. I just enjoyed observing.

And then many years later, in 1993, I had had some dreams. I started having visual dreams full of colour, like explosions almost. And I thought, "either I am going crazy or telling myself I should try to do something with colour." So a friend of mine gave me a late birthday present: paper and watercolour paints and brushes. And that was the beginning. I started doing just little funny things, and then gradually (though quite quickly) began actually painting. I started with watercolours, collages, and mixing the two. I would get up in the middle of the night and start painting. It overtook me. I moved on to acrylics, and I live now in this living room surrounded by my paintings. They are stacked up everywhere!

JW: Your description makes the process sound very automatic. Michele Rackham Hall recently completed a doctoral thesis at McGill University in which

she suggests that Montreal poets were interested in automatism in the early 1950s. Those dates line up with your time in Montreal. Did you encounter the work of Pierre Gauvreau, Fernand Leduc, and Rita Letendre, *Les Automatistes*?

PW: I knew Pierre Gauvreau. When I was working as a secretary at MacDonald College, I organized an art show of paintings by Marian Scott and Gauvreau (who seems to still be around! I can't believe he is, but, then again, I am, too). But I didn't know Leduc or Letendre's work very well, but I knew they were there. I suppose it was in part the English/French divide. But Frank and Marian knew their work well. I had a wonderful arty life there.

As influences? I'm not sure. I went from watercolours, to collage, to acrylics and canvas. I suppose some of this background in automatism and Abstract Expressionism was there in my painting, but it is just how I work and I never considered myself an *Automatiste*. It isn't conscious, even unconscious, but perhaps it informed my painting a little. I have various styles, but I'm mainly an Abstract Expressionist painter, if I can even call myself a painter. Abstract Expressionism was very big for me, long before I painted I was very interested in that school, the New York school. It was a wonderful discovery for myself, albeit a late one. But at this point, I haven't painted for a year at least. I might never go back to it, because I am not ready yet to stand around and paint at this age. It is the same with my poetry, I suppose. It is likely not just a break this time in either case.

JW: It seems you have often taken breaks between publications, though. How do you understand the long gaps between your poetry volumes?

PW: I don't understand the gaps. I never did. I was never a very prolific poet, except in little phases, when I produced a lot of work in short periods of time. Then I would go quiet. But I think there was a particularly long gap between *Naked Poems* and *Wilson's Bowl*. I tried to explain the silence in my introduction to the latter collection. I suffered a critical wound after Frank Davey published John Bentley Mays' article in *Open Letter*. And that attack single-handedly explains my silence. It was very hurtful. George Woodcock told me to sue Mays! [laughs] But it really did undermine me so badly. It was so appalling, and I was reacting very personally to it. So many people were upset by it, and I had a lot of support. It went beyond criticism, didn't it? It was personal. He was attacking me as a person, not as a writer.

JW: Even still, though, it seems those gaps had little effect on your status. Does it surprise you to know that many scholars of a younger generation study your poetry and visual art?

PW: They are? Oh yes, that amazes me! [laughs] Amazing to think: you tell me about this work being done on me, I know I'm taught at Simon Fraser University and elsewhere, and my selected poems [*The Vision Tree*] keeps selling after all these years. I actually get royalties! Talonbooks keeps it in print. I see all these books written about me, based on a very small output on my part. To think it generated so much commentary. I haven't written a word for years, I might as well be dead! [laughs] It is gratifying, though, you know, to hear that work is happening.

JW: I think perhaps the attraction to your work is its diversity. You change so much and work in so many media. I imagine the time away from writing has given you a lot of time to reflect on such things. What do so many accomplishments, callings, explorations, and decades look like in retrospect?

PW: It looks to me that I haven't done much in the last twenty years. [laughs] I feel distanced from it all. You see, you as a scholar have to put up with me, this ignorant person I am; you are immersed in this world and I have been removed from it for so long. But when I think back, I am quite satisfied with the things I've done with my life, except the last few years, when I feel I've been too lazy. The paintings, I don't show them to many people. I keep them all around me, it's a narcissistic thing. I also don't have as much energy as I used to, and my health hasn't been that good. You slow down a bit at 83! In some ways, I feel I've stalled at the moment. And whether or not I will recover enough to get back to writing or painting, I don't know. But it has made me think about what is important. Many years ago, I set up an Amnesty International group on Salt Spring Island. Then I got out of it, because I am not a meetings person! We had a good group, but I also felt burned out; seeing so much of the world through that lens can be exhausting. But it was something useful I felt I had done. I feel like now I appreciate people who do good work, or good works. The people who are socially useful. Perhaps that is the most important thing any of us can be.

Hendrik Slegtenhorst

In the Lobby

In the latitude of the oil sands,
Syncrude proverbs on the Internet are pronounced
        Like unfunded infrastructure,
Red ale served cold in the bar and grill.

Into the Clearwater valley
        Clamber caterpillar fauna,
        Monster tires caked in bitumen;
And *in situ* lounges spill meaningless music
Over reception carpets bordered by
        The car rental booth—
Mannered mayors from throughout the province
Hedging a sharp meanness that ambles among
        Predictions of success—
        Drilling down
        Into the Canadian west
        Like hot water entering
        The pores puncturing our skin.

Eric Schmaltz

"to forget in a body"

Mosaical Consciousness and Materialist Avant-Gardism in bill bissett and Milton Acorn's Unpublished *I Want to Tell You Love*[1]

In 1965 poet and painter bill bissett collaborated with staunch labour-oriented people's poet Milton Acorn. Together they completed a dynamic one hundred and nine-page literary collaboration entitled *I Want to Tell You Love*. The typescript consists of sixty-five poems (forty by Acorn and twenty-five by bissett) as well as ten hand-drawn images by bissett. The two first became acquainted at a meeting for the League of Socialist Action held in the Vanguard Bookstore at 1208 Granville Street in Vancouver. Ruth Bollock, a long time activist and the owner of the radical Marxist hangout, introduced them to each other, and there they bonded over a shared interest in poetry and current socio-political issues. There is nothing, according to bissett, that the two disagreed on. This surprising compatibility led to the creation of their unpublished collaboration.

By the time *I Want to Tell You Love* was completed Acorn had already published several poetry collections, establishing himself as a hard-edged modernist. Al Purdy defines Acorn's writing as "confident, even-paced and active" and explains that, "nothing is more noticeable in his poetry than its directness and an unfaltering certainty of opinion" (xii). In contrast, *I Want to Tell You Love* was created at the beginning of bissett's career, and documents the development of his voice into what would later be distinguished in criticism by its "excess and libidinal flow," unique orthography, and semiotic eruptions (McCaffery 93). Noticing these differences in 1966, J. A. Rankin, trade books editor for McClelland & Stewart, rejected the typescript because "[the] two styles seem to oppose rather than complement each other" (n. pag.). The typescript, bissett recalls

in an *Open Letter* interview on his collaboration with Acorn, was often rejected for this reason: "it was continualee being turnd down bcoz it was sd our styles wer 2 dissimilar" ("I want" 58).[2] Eventually bissett and Acorn gave up on their efforts to find a publisher, and since then the manuscript has been largely overlooked.[3]

Despite Acorn and bissett's resignation, their collaboration remains an important document for their careers and literary reputations. The typescript is not only evidence of an unlikely friendship and collaboration, but it offers a look at the development of bissett's poetic voice and a glimpse at Acorn's contributions to Vancouver's emergent countercultural and experimental literary communities. Many of the poems included in *I Want to Tell You Love* appeared later in other volumes. While they are important works on their own—effectively representing their separate aesthetic and political orientations—the poems dynamically perform within a collaborative context. Gregory Betts recognizes the significance of their collaboration when he notes the alliance between the aesthetic and radical political branches of the avant-garde within the work; he writes, "[bissett and Acorn] recognized a parallel in Acorn's radical politics and bissett's radical formal experiments" (68). Indeed, there are various modes of composition in the typescript including impure imagism, formal experimentation, and social realism (some of which will be explored in the following pages), but it is the authors' shared interest in radicalism that provides a provisionary rationale for the collaboration's creation. Building on Betts' insight and theorizations of radical writing, I note key points that distinguish Acorn's radical political verse from bissett's radical formal experiments: Acorn uses poetry to support social and political ideology and bissett writes in the belief that liberating form possesses the power to change and influence society. Some literary critics have de-emphasized verse by Acorn that supports social change and radical political ideologies such as Marxism and Communism. However, James Doyle identifies "Acorn's political radicalism as an important element in his life" (74); this element can be seen clearly in his explorations of social realist modes of writing. On the other hand, bissett's radical formal experiments have been identified as a distinguishing aesthetic feature of his work. His unique orthography and resistance to the standardization of syntax, grammar, and punctuation are aesthetic principles designed to resist what Steve McCaffery calls repressive "classical discourse" (94). The two positions parallel each other in a most fundamental sense: radicalism is a devotion to change with a belief in revolutionary possibility, and this is a commitment that both authors share.

In terms of aesthetics, the poems appear distinct; however, that is the point of their collaboration. It is in this seeming incongruity that an alternative socio-political vision becomes realized.

In this paper I will identify the alliance of the seemingly discordant voices of bissett and Acorn as a radical marriage that effectively rediscovers materialist avant-gardism—that is, a realization of the oft-theorized alliance of the radical political and aesthetic branches of the avant-garde which theorist Renato Poggioli has identified as distinct and discrete (1-15). Expanding upon Poggioli's critique, Matei Calinescu usefully describes materialist avant-gardists—Arthur Rimbaud, for example—as "advanced writers and artists who transferred the spirit of critique of social forms to the domain of *artistic forms*." These writers and artists sought "to overthrow all the binding formal traditions of art and to enjoy the exhilarating freedom of exploring completely new, previously forbidden, horizons of creativity. For they believed that to revolutionize art was the same as to revolutionize life" (112). bissett's aesthetic experiments and Acorn's political verse are married in this spirit. That said, materialist avant-gardism is not necessarily an end in itself; radical artistic action requires a program. Explaining the specific socio-political impetus that led to this alliance, bissett states that they were writing in response to the "manee taboos against aborsyun gay love sheltrs 4 homeless peopul repressive laws against marijuana whn alcohol was sew encouragd taboos against peopul wanting 2 n protesting against th war in Vietnam politikul writing all these n mor" ("I want" 61). The problems identified by bissett intersect with Fredric Jameson's characterization of a "modernity which is that of a worldwide capitalism itself" and its project of standardization (12). Indeed, *I Want to Tell You Love* is troubled by conditions of capitalist modernity: inequity, spectacular war (especially the Vietnam War), mass industrialization, oppression and "th culture uv sameness" ("I want" 61). The collaborators not only express discontent with these conditions, but also offer a radical response to these problems. Acorn alludes to their intent in his poem "Wouldn't it be dreadful" where he writes: "If for our own good they would one day relieve us / of what troubles us . . . Our consciousness?" (*I Want to Tell* 12-13). Here he suggests that the troubling socio-political conditions of global capitalism originate from consciousness—more specifically, as implied by this unlikely collaboration, notions of consciousness that perceive differences between individuals as points of repulsion that actively divide a community—differences that capitalist modernity seeks to efface.

By marrying the two branches of the avant-garde, Acorn and bissett's seemingly incongruous voices create a hybrid form similar to what Roland Barthes proposes in his theories of a text (as opposed to a work): a pluralistic entity that "cannot be contained by hierarchy" or "classification" (157), that resists notions of conformity and commodity, and most importantly, gestures toward a multiform understanding of consciousness, which I am here calling *mosaical consciousness*. This notion emerges from the work of Marshall McLuhan whose ideas had strong currency in Vancouver during the 1960s.[4] In his examination of Harold Adams Innis, McLuhan abstracts the concept of a mosaic to describe Innis' writing in terms of a "mosaic structure of seemingly unrelated and disproportioned sentences and aphorisms" (qtd. in McCaffrey, "Media" 89) that work together in "a mutual irritation" (89). Mosaical consciousness demonstrates an intense awareness of one's differences with the external world, but does not conceive of difference as an impetus for repulsion or target for standardization. Instead, it is an irritation, which I understand in biological terms as a stimulation or active response. Further, mosaical consciousness is a state of awareness resistant to what bissett calls "th culture uv sameness" ("I want" 61) and privileges difference as a stimulus for the mind and community.[5] This idea is most effectively communicated by this collaborative text's thematic preoccupation with love—another mode of managing dissimilarity to formulate alliance. It is the "mutual irritation" (qtd. in McCaffrey, "Media" 89) of bissett and Acorn's voices that demonstrates this alternative form of awareness that opposes capitalism's project of mass global consumption and homogenization. In the remaining sections of this paper I will investigate how the notion of mosaical consciousness is developed in the typescript through their rediscovery of materialist avant-gardism vis-à-vis the marriage of their incongruous poetics, which I will then follow with an attempt to find an alliance by situating their politics in literary history.

As illustrated by Rankin's rejection letter, the most striking feature of the typescript is its mosaical presentation: the appearance of disunity in bissett and Acorn's collaboration created by their dissimilar poetic voices. When they began their collaboration, Vancouver's flourishing modernist scene shared the city with an emergent postmodern experimental poetic. Vancouver was not only home to leftist modernists such as Pat and Roy Lowther, Pat Lane, and Dorothy Livesay, but also to radical counterculture poets such as bissett, Judith Copithorne, Maxine Gadd, and Gladys Hindmarch. Christine Wiesenthal usefully details the mentality that

separated these groups: "Younger student radicals differed sharply from their elder 'comrades' in terms of their embrace of a more individualistic ethos, among other things. . . . The old guard, on the other hand, Roy Lowther among it, viewed the openly hedonistic, hippy, drop-out and drug crowds with suspicion and moral disdain that united it with the far right" (225). While the differing ethos of these groups ensured distinction within critical discourse, Vancouver's seemingly divided literary community was unified by sensitivity to the turbulent socio-political conditions of the time. Acorn, having lived in the city for only a short while, recognized this and established numerous forums of political and cultural engagement in an effort to bridge the two communities. He organized readings that featured both the established modernists and the emergent experimentalists (including a young bissett) at places such as the Vanguard Bookstore and the Advance Mattress Coffee House where he also created forums for political discussion such as the "Thursday night open-mike 'Blab sessions'" (Gudgeon 125). bissett was given the opportunity to give readings at both locations and admits that his involvement with Acorn's series to be "a veree important part uv th road uv my poetree development" ("I want" 59).

I Want to Tell You Love documents the development of bissett's radical aesthetic experiments that readers, editors, and scholars recognize today—notably his unconventional orthography, his destabilization of conventional reading practices (left to right, top to bottom), and his general distrust of language as a means of individual expression. Noting bissett's artistic emergence, Warren Tallman suggests that bissett finally begins to find his voice in "1966, the year of the [Michael] McClure visit" which he recalls as the time "when bill bissett moves into word-mergings, soundings, [and] chantings" ("Wonder Merchants" 66), a development that coalesces just after the completion of *I Want to Tell You Love*. Prior to this moment in 1966, bissett experiments with various modes of writing, which indicates his search for a voice, but also foregrounds the shifting nature of his poetics. In 1962 bissett's first published poems appear in *PRISM* magazine. In part, the poems reflect bissett's struggle to create a poetic voice. The first poem of this sequence (which is untitled) opens with the lines: "i want to scream out to everyone help me / poet goes to psychiatrist / doubts about his career" ("3 poems"). This clearly stated opening presents a facetious image of a poet struggling with his art. Following these lines, however, the speaker's language becomes frantic with violent, corporeal images such as "pellets of rotten stomach" and "twisted lung" that defamiliarize the body. bissett seeks

to destabilize notions of the body and mind as singular entities as further suggested in the line "head tooth CRACKD OPEN," which foregrounds his interest in opening up new forms of human consciousness. In these poems, bissett stops short of explicitly illustrating the effects of opening the body and mind in this way. However, the poem's shifting, frenetic composition and ambition to rethink conventions of the body and mind recalls the Surrealist practice of automatic writing—another mode of composition that explores states of consciousness in response to early twentieth-century modernity.

Similar experimentation can be observed in *I Want to Tell You Love* in the poem "when and how over high mountain into high dream out" where bissett frees both the reader's body and mind—the movement of the eyes and cognitive functions—from normative practices of reading and writing. Most of the poem consists of columns of words that can be read vertically and horizontally, shattering grammatical order. The reader, then, is permitted to proceed autonomously, unimpeded by the determinism of conventional left-to-right reading practices. The eyes can move from left to right to create a sequence of words like "know takes returns has" or top to bottom to create "know / next / week / passes / plays / resembles / returns" with many other possible permutations of the reading sequence. As a result, bissett creates an excess of meaning that depends on the individual reader's process of working through the words on the page. In addition, unconventional, yet for bissett signature, spellings begin emerging in the typescript where "you" is contracted to become "yu" and "the" becomes "th." Punctuation is omitted and unstable grammar disrupts the poem. Both of these poems present experimental methodologies, which ideally destabilize singular notions of the body, text, and authorial voice.

Further disrupting bissett's voice within the typescript and contributing to its mosaical presentation, these radical formal experiments emerge alongside some of bissett's more conventional-looking poems such as "The Body"—a free verse poem consisting of standard verse paragraph breaks, left aligned margins, and mostly standardized punctuation and grammar. "The Body" is remarkably unlike the radical aesthetic experiments that would characterize much of bissett's later writing. Indeed, and considering the alliance of their voices in this collaboration, "The Body" more closely resembles Acorn's radical verse. This type of shift between modes of writing disrupts the consistency of bissett's poetic voice and offers editors a provisionary rationale for the typescript's rejection. However, "The Body" thematically parallels bissett's previously mentioned experimental compositions that reimagine the

when and how over high mountain into high dream out

know	takes	returns	has
next	takes	is	goes
week	tells	has	is
passes	thinks	is	must
plays	does	is	must
plays	doesn't	spends	does
resembles	calls	spends	is
returns	time	takes	is
	introduces	knows	marries
laughs	studies	knows	gets
leaves	goes	knows	marries
laughs	is	knocks	falls
week	hears	is	is
night	has	intends	loves
last	has	gets	looks
lacks		leaves	leaves
	does	has	asks
takes	reads	enters	asks
sings	leaves	goes	asks
sang	leaves	has	Charles
has	admires	is	is
first	admires	reads	arrives
listens	asks	come	approaches
feels	interprets	does	has

and
and it's really quite exciting sometimes its nice to have a stick not
just any stick but one like that i will construe to thee all th happy
charactery of my sad brow yu can reflect in my basket glory i dont
give a damn for yur nonchalence a lot od that is bullshit in th
middle of nowhere its only natural woodshed th moon is float
is gaze thru yur every astral body cums to glow outward yes she
will
turn
right a
round
nd cum to
to to to
blank nd
in this cornur wham whap ba
zoom tulipgrowsing watchful
mercuries tickey taoldsurupp
shall we now dissembul to be
gin at th centre we move
out from shining luv to
do that aftur all
shup oobur da
d a bobobies
glow o do
they
thread yur
way thru th compass jack off baby in th bau hoot th orange o an th green
single stripes will follow yu th butter wud melt in any more an pourd it
yur eyeball in marah a rejoice scene comet into daco ourselves going out

body as a heterogeneous, mosaical entity. Verse paragraphs three through seven begin with variations of the phrase "One of THE BODY" which leads into a description of the different roles this body fulfills, i.e., "an artist," "businessman," "leader," and so on. To challenge notions of singularity, bissett plays on the ambiguity of the word "body," which can denote both a singular and plural subject position. The penultimate verse paragraph meditates on the relationship between the two:

> The largeness of THE BODY would increase
> and diffuse hopelessly the initial self-
> betrayals invited aroused to sustain it.
> As a consequence, the belief in self,
> in character would drop away behind
> the larger movement of the General Body. (51-56)

As if meditating on the consequences of homogenization and singularity, this section of the poem alludes to the loss of a "self" (54) and "character" (55) as "the General Body" (56), a large force that effaces qualities of the self, overtakes "THE BODY" (51—a problem this collaboration generally responds to.

In what appears to be a contrast to bissett's frenetic, disruptive, and rapidly shifting aesthetics, critics such as Purdy praise Acorn's poetry for its singular voice, precision, and stability. Acorn's aesthetic can be grounded in the traditional critical orthodoxies of Imagist modernism. Dorothy Livesay aligns Acorn with the Imagist tradition in her analysis of Acorn's "Charlottetown Harbour," a poem published in *The Brain's the Target* (1960), which she calls "a return to Imagism" (33) and "a still life painting in the Imagist tradition" (35). Louis Dudek usefully describes this mode of writing as "liberation in the direction of contemporary reality, toward the reality of images" (10) and further conceives of "modernism specifically as a line of technical development, in which the image is used as the basic unit in a construction kit" (10). This concern for the image as the basic unit of construction accurately describes Acorn's aesthetic preoccupation. Unlike bissett, whose poems are disjunctive and often sprawl across several pages, Acorn often strives for poetry characterized by precision and an image-based focus. "The Schooner," as it appears in *I Want to Tell You Love*, is composed in free verse, consisting of two verse paragraphs with left-aligned margins, and conventional spelling that effectively illustrates Acorn's aesthetic:

> Keen the tools, keen the eyes,
> white the thought of the schooner

lined on a draughting board,
fine the stone that ground the fine blind
and skills, the many fingers
that stroked and touched it surely
til, intricate delicate strong,
it leans poised in the wind. (1-8)

The language here is economical; he uses very few conjunctions and adjectives. The poem is driven by verbs that propel the poem, condensing the construction process of a sail-ready schooner into eight brief lines—from "draughting board" to "the wind." Preceding his collaboration with bissett, Acorn had published four collections, all of which largely employ this singular, consistent, and less overtly political voice. However, in his collaboration with bissett, Acorn does not remain fixed to a single mode of writing. Instead, Acorn shifts into more explicit polemic poems through which he explores his radical socialist politics.

Though there are some exceptions, critical discussion focusing on the radical politics of Acorn's poetry has largely been truncated.[6] Scholars perhaps have been led by Al Purdy's anecdotal introduction to *I've Tasted My Blood* in which he regrets deviations from Acorn's pure modernist signature into a social realist mode of writing. Purdy writes that Acorn's "[p]oems written from 1964 to 1968 . . . changed in style and somewhat in content from the earlier poems. . . . In a way I regret these stylistic and thematic differences" (xiii). Colin Hill's *Modern Realism* assists to define the social realist mode of writing that Acorn sought to explore "as a form of modern realism with a predisposition for a particular subject matter" (144). A synthesis of Hill's definition of modern and social realism describes a writing that uses "direct, immediate, contemporary, idiomatically correct language" and works "toward a mimetic representation of a contemporary world" (7) with a specific focus on economic, social, and political conditions (143). Acorn makes numerous contributions in which he attempts to capture and critique the socio-political conditions of his time. "One Day Kennedy Died and So Did the Birdman of Alcatraz" references the historically significant deaths of John F. Kennedy and Robert Stroud, and longs for a utopic "heaven of birdsongs"; "The Damnation Machine" describes hell as a place where innocents are disarmed and consequently unable to defend themselves; and "Ernest Void" questions morality and what it means to be free. These efforts emerge most strongly in his "Detail of a Cityscape" in which Acorn describes a "cripple" who "struggles / onto the bus" and picks the closest and "most uncomfortable seat; / because if he tried for another / the surge of the bus

starting / would upend him." The poem reflects the larger sphere of socio-political issues confronted by *I Want to Tell You Love*. Acorn presents a social struggle that occurs within public space: the "cripple" helplessly struggles against his designated position. In response, the poem's diction implores sympathy through words like "aimless," "flopping," and "poor," revealing an implicit socialist agenda that recognizes the "cripple's" tenuous and alienated position, prompting readers to rethink the structure of society and positions of individuals within it. Acorn's movement toward a social realist mode of writing contrasts his less abstract, "impure-imagist" poems. The juxtaposition of these two modes of writing, imagism—being harder, more precise, and less explicitly political—paired with these polemic social realist poems, formulates a mosaic of poetic styles, just as bissett juxtaposes his own conventional verse against his radical formal experiments.

Acorn and bissett establish the mosaical configuration of their collaboration as a step toward intervening into contemporary socio-political affairs. Not only do their poems describe the turbulence and homogenization created by the conditions of modernity, but they also create art in response to it. The title's singular pronoun "*I*" acknowledges the collaboration's aspiration to present a mosaic of their voices and indicates their socio-political program. In using the singular (as opposed to the plural) pronoun, bissett and Acorn depict an ideal vision in which seemingly different individuals conceive of a means of being together without dissolving their being in accordance to a society characterized by mass production and standardization. The urgency of this vision emerges in the title's unique syntax. bissett and Acorn do not want to passively offer this vision, they do not want to talk about or account for love, but they want to achieve the active transference of their vision to the implied reader: *to tell you love*. Instead of writing a collection of poems that presents the vision of their utopia, they create what they believe to be utopia itself: a space in which differences can coexist, a space defined by love.

Love resonates with the notions of mosaic explored thus far: a plethora of distinct pieces that, in interplay, formulate a whole. Usefully, Georges Bataille's complex writing on love and eroticism helps to highlight the importance of love to bissett and Acorn's socio-political agenda. In *Eroticism*, Bataille sees eroticism and love as disruptive forces, specifically provoking a disruption of the singular notions of individuality; he argues that eroticism enables us to grasp a "conscious refusal to limit ourselves within our individual personalities" (24) and leads "to the blending and fusion of separate objects" which is seen most readily in poetry (25). The fusing of separate objects has been explored in

various historical literary contexts. In Bataille's own lifetime, the surrealists sought to transform notions of an individual's consciousness through the merging of conscious and unconscious minds so that surreality may manifest itself in all aspects of life. However, this agenda to expand consciousness was also manifested earlier in the work of the Romantic poets such as Wordsworth, Keats, and Shelley who, like bissett and Acorn, reacted against what can retrospectively be considered as early stages of modernization.

Accounting for the revolutionary efforts of these Romantic poets and their resistance to modernity in their own time, M. H. Abrams traces a preceding reorientation of the individual and their relationship to separate objects with a particular focus on how consciousness can be reinvented by radical notions of love. Abrams argues that "[t]he vision" sought by these poets is to "[consummate] a holy marriage with the external universe, to create . . . a new world which is the equivalent of paradise" (28). Complementing bissett's previously mentioned *Open Letter* interview on his collaboration, Abrams' reading of the Romantics suggests that they reacted against "industrialization, urbanization, and increasingly massive industrial slums; of the first total war and postwar economic collapse; of progressive specialization in work, alterations in economic and political power, and consequent dislocations of class structure; of competing ideologies and ever-imminent social chaos" (292-93). The realm of Romantic politics is a fruitful context in which to situate bissett's and Acorn's politics, offering a sense of their cosmic idealism, but it also assists in grasping the radical connotations of love as a means of uniting the world and spirit, mind and body that they were working towards. Most important, this historical connection draws out the Romantic basis of the avant-garde with which the politics of *I Want to Tell You Lov*e can be aligned.

Acorn and bissett have both been regarded as poets with connections to the Romantic spirit. When Purdy notes Acorn's shift toward overtly polemical social realist poetry, he describes these poems as "diffuse" (xiii) and "utopian" (xiv). Purdy's descriptors characterize Acorn's political poetry in a way that is commensurate with Romantic-era politics and he admits that Acorn is "somewhat romantic in the best sense" (xii). George Bowering has also acknowledged the Neo-Romantic aspects of Acorn's political poetry; he writes, "[h]is politics are as much a poet's communism as Shelley's were. He's a romantic radical, looking to awaken or 'find outside the beauty inside me.' He has the romantic sense of man's perfectibility" (85). Acorn's "Poem for a Singer," which Dorothy Livesay has identified as an exuberant representation

of Acorn's "social revolutionary" spirit (40), best represents a Romantic mode.[7] The poem, which is featured in the typescript and separately published later, is unlike Acorn's mostly shorter and terse contributions in *I Want to Tell You Love*. Livesay notes that the poem is an "affirmation and belief in humanity's struggle . . . in the tradition of Blake and Whitman" (42) and in it sees "the phase of the conscious, social revolutionary poet defying the sickness of capitalist society" (40). Livesay's assessment finely articulates the spirit of the poem including its political goals; however, because she is examining the poem outside of the context of *I Want to Tell You Love*, her analysis can be expanded to address its contribution to the typescript as a whole. Livesay notes that the poem "ends with his [the speaker's] complete identification of himself with the singer" (41). In "Poem for a Singer," as it appears in *I Want to Tell You Love*, Acorn's speaker not only identifies with the singer, the speaker wants more than that; the speaker cries out, "Let me be the song" and then again, "Oh let me be the / men and women of her song," striving toward empathy for the singer, the workers, the song itself. When expressing his desire to "be" the others, the speaker is expressing a desire to move beyond the restrictions of bodily materiality and to merge with the others. In this way, the poem compares with bissett's "The Body," in which he too plays with notions of bodily singularity. Acorn's speaker strives toward a more mosaical form of being, thinking, and seeing that is "necessary / : for the standing up proud and hopeful way, the / way expressing the truth of our lives [sic]" ("3 poems"). In essence, "Poem for a Singer" demonstrates the various complex notions of mosaic as well as the radical social politics that are at the heart of the typescript.

On the other hand, while bissett's writing can be discussed within a discourse of radical aesthetic experimentation, it is useful to note that critics such as Tallman have—as Purdy and Bowering did for Acorn—connected bissett to a Romantic tradition. In his "Statement for bill bissett"—a statement that was written to persuade the Canada Council for the Arts to award bissett funding in 1978—Tallman compares bissett's spirit to that of Percy Shelley. Tallman writes, "I think that Shelley set the standard for a romantic striving after a 'wisdom and spirit of the universe' which, in his own contemporary Canadian way, bissett has so steadfastly sought in his visionary poems" ("Statement" 99). bissett's poem "a carriage that were green" illustrates a Neo-Romantic sentiment that reacts (as did Shelley, Wordsworth, and others) against industrialization and other manifestations of modernity. The poem criticizes the municipal government, "th mafia

boys" as bissett calls them, for tearing down houses in Kitsilano—including bissett's own home—and replacing them with shopping complexes; bissett writes,

> o if ever
> there were
> a carriage
> that were
> green,
> mushrooms
> and banners
> flow
> from behind
> stops for
> lunch on
> orange
> toadstools
> blue sky
> above, all
> green
> clear, below.

While this poem is remarkably different from any poem by Shelley—especially in its formal approach—bissett's speaker here, in a quintessential Romantic spirit, longs for life in a natural world without industrialization and excessive consumption.

These Romantic associations and their shared revolutionary spirit provide useful entry into the discourse of avant-garde modes of theorization. Calinescu argues that the "concept of avant-garde in radical political thought" (101) emerges in the latter half of the eighteenth century, the beginning of what is generally acknowledged as the Romantic period for arts and literature. Calinescu describes the characteristics of a Romantic avant-gardism that includes following an "anti-elitist program" and acknowledges that "life should be radically changed" (104). These attributes most certainly inform the collaboration's creation. However, bissett and Acorn's collaboration does not at first glance appear to be a resolutely avant-garde text. Charles Russell describes "the avant-garde writer" as one who "frequently explores limits of the creator's freedom to disrupt syntax and to use new patterns of linguistic association" (36). While some of the disruptive patterns are clearly exhibited in bissett's poems, the collection does not completely fit Russell's conception. *I Want to Tell You Love*, then, offers an expansion of Russell's definition since it is not purely avant-garde

in its syntactical disruptions, but in its pairing of seemingly incongruous aesthetic approaches that disrupt conventional understanding of a book as a product created with singular aesthetic and political values. Instead, bissett and Acorn envision the book as a mosaic. As evidence of the more common and commercial desire for singularity, Rankin, as consolation for rejecting the typescript, expressed an interest in producing individual selected volumes of what either bissett or Acorn considered to be their "best work" (n. pag.). However, the unusual alliance of bissett and Acorn provides the type of disruption necessary to create a sense of "disorientation" (Russell 35), which in turn allows the audience to "experience states of abruptly expanded consciousness" (35) and it is accepting this expanded consciousness that leads to material change within the socio-political sphere.

In striving toward this expanded consciousness, they formulate a mosaical model: Acorn's imagism and social realism and bissett's radical formal experiments march together. Within the context of their poetic mosaic—the "mutual irritation" (qtd. in McCaffrey, "Media" 89) of their voices—bissett and Acorn formulate a materialist avant-gardism. This mode of avant-garde practice is also attributed to Arthur Rimbaud in whose work the "the two avant-gardes, the artistic and the political, tended to merge" (Calinescu 113) and who, in "A Season in Hell" recognizes that "love must be reinvented" (Rimbaud 229). In Rimbaud's thinking, a poet should strive "to reach the *unknown*, to invent an absolutely *new* language" (qtd. in Calinescu 112). In bissett's contributions to the typescript this attempt to reinvent the semiotic system is certainly present. However, this reinvention is not the central mandate of their collaboration. Instead they seek to invent an alternative approach to the semiotic system in their disruption of conventional reading practices that expect regularity. *I Want to Tell You Love*, then, offers a means of rethinking our positions in the face of the project of capitalist modernity and all of its aims. Acorn and bissett offer an example of how discursive differences can correlate and present how they can co-exist within the same space in a way that suggests opposition, but is unified by politics, by a desire for love—a salient metaphor to heal a turbulent world.

I am left, then, with the problem of materiality. The material aspects of my effort face the same obstacle that Acorn and bissett confronted when seeking to publish the collection: the typescript remains unpublished and its energies have yet to be unleashed. This is not to say that they did not re-discover materialist avant-gardism or develop a multiform consciousness. Nor does it mean that the typescript and its artistic political agenda are

valueless. In part, this paper's recuperative project seeks to draw attention to the typescript's value—beyond that is speculation. Had it been published and received an optimal reception, *I Want to Tell You Love* would have served as a radical literary model of awareness and community during a globally turbulent period of history. The typescript and its mosaical formation of consciousness offers a mode of opposition to capitalism's homogenous and destructive project and seeks a more equal and peaceful means of life. Locally, the typescript would have been significant to Vancouver's cultural and political formation by offering a bridge between its distinctive communities, which, had they been unified, could have amassed enough energy to seek change and political action on a grander scale. That said, the world has changed significantly since 1965, and for now, the typescript participates in a resurgence of interest in two of Canada's most influential writers. Just recently a new selection of Acorn's work entitled *In a Spring Time Instant* has been published and scholars are beginning to return to and reproduce some of bissett's earlier work such as the recently re-issued *Rush: What Fuckan Theory. I Want to Tell You Love* is not only textual evidence of an intersection of interesting vectors of Canadian writing, but it also offers a glimpse at Canada's radical literary history.

NOTES

1 Thanks to the generous support of Mary Hooper of the Acorn Estate and bill bissett, I am currently working on an edition of *I Want to Tell You Love* to be published by Toronto's BookThug.

2 According to material in Acorn's archive at Library and Archives Canada (LAC), the typescript circulated among publishers and editors like Rankin at McClelland & Stewart, Raymond Souster at Contact Press, and Fred Cogswell at Fiddlehead Press, but it was never published. Notes on the typescript are also held in The Very Stone House series of Seymour Mayne's archive at Library and Archives Canada. These notes were made for a volume of a selection of Acorn's poems being prepared by Mayne for Very Stone House. Like *I Want to Tell You Love*, this volume was never published. A copy of the unpublished typescript eventually arrived at LAC in 1988, from William Hoffer Books of Vancouver.

3 See *Milton Acorn: In Love and Anger* by Lemm, *novel* by bissett, and *Avant-Garde Canadian Literature: The Early Manifestations* by Betts for brief mentions of bissett and Acorn's relationship and collaboration.

4 McLuhan's thinking greatly influenced Vancouver's art and culture community in the 1960s; he lectured at The New Design Gallery on Pender Street in 1959, and later the 1964 Festival of Contemporary Arts was nicknamed "The Medium Is The Message" (see Turner's "Expanded Literary Practices"). In bissett's first published collection, *We Sleep Inside Each Other All* he writes, "Marshall McLuhan sz we are poisd between the typographic individualist trip th indus trial revolution & th electronic age" (n. pag.) effectively suggesting that bissett was familiar with McLuhan's writing.

5 This appeal to a mosaic-like structure anticipates Canadian cultural politics in the 1970s and the notion of a Canadian cultural mosaic, which sought to characterize a nation by its difference.

6 See "Acorn and the Revolutionary Mind" by Deahl, "'For My Own Damn Satisfaction': The Communist Poetry of Milton Acorn" by Doyle, and "Vehement Radical Obfuscation: The Political Poems of Milton Acorn" by Neilson for some critical discussion of Acorn's politics.

7 This poem was published in 1965 in an issue of *The Literary Review* (and later in *I've Tasted My Blood*).

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The Legacy(ies) of the Confederation Group of Poets

Mark Abley
Conversations with a Dead Man: The Legacy of Duncan Campbell Scott.
Douglas & McIntyre $32.95

Eric Ball
Archibald Lampman: Memory, Nature, Progress.
McGill-Queen's UP $34.95

Reviewed by Thomas Hodd

In recent years little attention has been paid to dead white male Canadian writers. Instead, the bulk of literary scholarship in this country has been driven by a critical interest in such areas as post-colonialism, women writers, and transnationalism. While this focus has yielded a much richer understanding of historically marginalized literary figures and cultural groups it has also, at times, been to the detriment of historically important writers who helped shape Canada's cultural flowering, particularly the Confederation group of poets. The recent appearance of two lengthy treatments on Duncan Campbell Scott and Archibald Lampman is therefore a publishing event worth noting.

Having said that, the critical shift in the treatment of our country's earlier writers is in some ways exemplified in the two publications under consideration, since one of the writers focuses almost entirely on the poet's art whereas the other fixes his gaze almost exclusively on the politics of the man.

Mark Abley, a writer and columnist for the *Montreal Gazette*, has penned an accessible portrayal of Duncan Campbell Scott's legacy. Rather than offering a straightforward biography he creates a series of imagined conversations between himself and the ghost of Scott in order to engage with the writer's art, life, and especially his attitude towards First Nations and his role as Deputy Superintendent of Indian Affairs. Structurally speaking, this book is neither fact nor fiction, biography nor essay. It is a form of creative non-fiction that attempts to convey ideas through the lens of superficially constructed characters.

To his credit, Abley appears to have spent considerable time on research. He also attempts, with limited success, to acknowledge Scott's artistic ability and to praise his poetry. But make no mistake: *Conversations* is not a scholarly book in the traditional sense, nor is it meant for the literary critical community. Instead, this book explains to the general reader why Scott was named "one of Canada's worst Canadians of all time." What is troubling about this approach is that Abley has constructed a narrative that ensures condemnation of Scott while salvaging little of his life or art. His portrayal of Scott, for instance, is one of convenient stereotype; presenting him as an elitist Victorian Canadian in a way that makes it easy for the reader to dislike him. Equally frustrating is Abley's uneven use of historical materials: by and large he minimizes the context of Scott's generation while drawing on a myriad of contemporary scholars, testaments, and initiatives to make clear to the reader that he, not Scott, is on the right side of history. Even the "conversations" he has with Scott are less than convincing: by and large they are stifled and

artificial, ideological positions superficially couched as dialogue. Put another way, Abley has written from the privileged position of historical hindsight and presumes that Scott will speak with a view of wilful ignorance.

Eric Ball, a professor at Langara College in Vancouver, has taken a long critical gaze at Archibald Lampman. As the back cover notes, Ball's study "is the first book on this foundational figure in Canadian literature to appear in over twenty-five years and the first thematically focused study." Beginning with a solid overview of the history of Lampman studies, Ball offers readers a largely formalist reading of Lampman's oeuvre, grouped broadly under three main elements: memory, nature, and progress. Chapters are then subdivided into clearly delineated readings of individual poems, making them feel initially like separate scholarly critiques that, when taken together, are meant to produce an overall intellectual effect. That is not to say Ball's structure is disjointed, but the grouping and presentation of his findings is uncommon in most book-length scholarly treatments of a writer's work. Also worth noting is that Ball shows thematic links between the major works and lesser-known publications. Generally speaking, Ball's close readings of individual poems, including extended discussions of prosody is a welcome change to the heavily theoretical readings in many scholarly books.

Of the three themes, it is Ball's treatment of "Progress," that is, his examination of Lampman's links to the Fabian Society and his poems about social issues, that is perhaps most rewarding. Comparatively, his chapters on "Memory," while clearly argued and convincing, are critically less engaging; likewise, his discussion of "Nature" feels longer than warranted, given the extensive treatment of Nature by previous Lampman scholars. Still, Ball's illustration of Lampman's use of irony in the nature poems is a provocative idea worth further study. Truth be told, if there is any real criticism of this book it is that it feels too long, that its ideas could have been conveyed more succinctly and that Ball's extensive close readings of technique sometimes overshadowed rather than helped illuminate Lampman's idea. In contrast, Ball's conclusion is much too short, an abrupt denouement that ultimately weakens the book's accomplishments rather than serving as a thoughtful summary of Lampman's achievements and a signpost for future studies.

Students and scholars will no doubt benefit from Ball's focused examination of Lampman, which will hopefully generate renewed critical interest in this significant early Canadian literary figure. The same, however, cannot be said of *Conversations*. The Canadian critical community is well-aware of the duality of Scott's position as a polarizing figure in the country's literary history, and so *Conversations* brings little if anything new to the research. Moreover, the ideological positioning of the writer-narrator makes this book an uneven treatment of Scott that will only find favour with those who share a similar opinion of Scott the bureaucrat, rather than Scott the poet. While perhaps not Abley's intent, his rendering of Scott has oversimplified and trivialized Scott's legacy.

Memorials

Maleea Acker
Air-Proof Green. Pedlar $20.00

Karen Connelly
Come Cold River. Quattro $18.00

Renée Sarojini Saklikar
Children of Air India: Un/authorized Exhibits and Interjections. Nightwood $18.95

Reviewed by Andrea MacPherson

How do we navigate the world around us? This struggle—in its many varied, nuanced forms—informs three new poetry collections. One collection explores abuse

and remembrance, another meditates on the natural world, and a third intricately explores tragedy, both the internal and the communal. Yet, in the end, all three collections attempt to make sense of our place in the world and our responsibilities to it.

In *Air-Proof Green*, Acker's connection to the natural world is apparent through her lush, image-dense verse. We move through geographies, and seasons, and a catalogue of emotional responses, always accompanied by her keen observations of landscape and her relationship to it. Acker, as well, is aware of this intrinsic connection to nature; in "Blue Mountain Lake Elegy," she says:

> A green wall
> divides my life. Birds,
> fishes, foliage—
> things disappear. I can no longer get through.
> Sometimes, remembering
> is a thirst; I go out on the lake—
> when I dip my hand
> the losses return.

In other poems, Acker explores animals, from frogs to dogs to birds and their "*coo, coo, coo*, urgent, hilarious," and exotic locales as points of departure. Some of her strongest work appears in the section *To the Unstated Theme* where her poems reveal, in riveting detail, the Spanish towns of Aleria and Calle Alcudia:

> Sometimes
> after the valley of the oranges, having seen the bees in wait, knowing
> all sleep now in the house, having not upset
> the thin bowl which is this night spreading way.

The attention to natural detail and the thickly poetic language, while effective in specific poems, did create a sameness in terms of tone and narrative stance; the reader is kept slightly apart from the visceral experience of the narrator. Ultimately, I wanted more access to the interior worlds being explored in this meditative collection. I wanted, as the narrator says in "Moving Pictures, Silent Films," for the poems to "Pull me in and smoke for us / as interior happiness tips and pulls history free."

Connelly, alternately, in *Come Cold River*, explores family politics—including abuse and addiction—as well as marginalized voices: in this case, the sixty-eight women murdered by Robert Pickton. Within the collection, Connelly acknowledges that she had difficulty finding a home for the book; the response to her work was, "Haven't we all heard these stories before?" This commentary, in and of itself, speaks to the greater purpose of Connelly's poems in *Come Cold River*: to explore the invisible histories that we take for granted, that make up the gaps in our personal and collective histories.

Connelly approaches her work as a kind of memoir-poetry, where the poems are narrative-centred, often telling violent and tragic stories. This is where, at times, the poetry falls flat, drifting further from verse and closer to prose. Yet she utilizes voice to inhabit these various spaces, from the complex history of Canada to her own recollections of youth. In "The Breakfast Cereal of His Youth," she addresses her brother, and his desperate addiction:

> because it crackles when you cook it
> up and suck it in
> snap-crackle-pop
> the smoke swirls,
> the pipe's so hot
> you burn your mouth
> (the hotter the higher the faster)

She reinforces the universality of addiction with plain language, offering an almost conversational tone, drawing the reader deeper into the intricacies of this family's past. This, indeed, is Connelly's gift: her ability to connect with the reader within each poem, regardless of the subject. In "Swimming Lessons on Vancouver Island," she takes on the task of exploring Canada's complicated

history with First Nations groups, directly addressing and implicating the country itself in the various injustices:

> It is the dead
> who teach us how to live,
> well or badly, it is the dead
> who teach us how to swim,
> well or badly, it is the dead
> who walk among us
> but cannot spell our names.

The longest poem in the collection, the ten-page "Enough," details the more than sixty-eight women murdered by Robert Pickton. The poem is haunting and claustrophobic, utilizing the echo and repetition of the women's names to remind the reader: this is real. This is loss. Throughout, Connelly is able to bring the past to life, providing a remembrance to these fragments of the past, offering importance to these moments that, sadly, we've all heard before.

The most experimental in form, *Children of Air India* utilizes structure to reinforce the inspiration behind the poems. Saklikar's aunt and uncle were passengers on Air India flight 182, which exploded off the coast of Ireland in 1985, and the author inserts herself into the poems via "N" the "niece" and "narrator" looking in to these final moments. Saklikar strives, with this collection, to create elegies for the dead, offering up "exhibits" to memorialize the 392 passengers who lost their lives, including 82 children.

The collection is a collage of sorts, combining fragments, aspects of documentary, archival language, and imagined moments in the lives of the passengers. Saklikar acknowledges the extensive research that went into the writing of the collection, and this research is obvious in the final poems: poems with redacted words, poems with repeated refrains of "82 children under the age of 13" and "another version of this moment exists," poems that utilize experimental forms to reveal the core truths. "Exhibit (1985): nine, four, ten months" reveals this tension between content and form and how it creates a dynamic experience for the reader:

> Status: bodies not found
> (list elegy interruption)
> Punctured crackled popped probed
> embedded bled
> Eviscerated
> Slashed
> de com
> Exhibit (1985): fourteen, two months.

This collection demands something more of its reader, a commitment to the narrative and to the reimagined intimacies of the passengers aboard the flight. Saklikar dedicates much of the collection to memorializing the children who perished—hence the refrain, "82 children under the age of 13"—but does offer space and time to a variety of characters, detailing both their deaths and the lives she imagines they lived before the tragedy. Saklikar moves seamlessly between settings and times, ultimately offering up a sequence of poems that honour last moments.

> Shush and now, now, now—
> We don't want to wake the girls
> my husband's fingertips—
> nipple's edge, outlined,
> one breast, in one hand,
> our girls pretending sleep, early so
> early in that hour just before dawn,
>
> the day before—
>
> Status: bodies unfound.

Resituating CanLit

Anahareo; Sophie McCall, ed.
Devil in Deerskins: My Life with Grey Owl.
U of Manitoba P $27.95

Reingard M. Nischik, ed.
The Palgrave Handbook of Comparative North American Literature. Palgrave Macmillan $213.00

Reviewed by Andrea Cabajsky

The two books treated in this review may seem remarkably dissimilar at first glance: an edited collection of essays on comparative North American literatures and a reissued autobiography, once a bestseller, first published forty years ago. Nevertheless, they both lie at the vanguard of recent efforts to resituate Canadian literature and culture in the context of changing scholarly and reading practices. For example, *The Palgrave Handbook of Comparative North American Literature* is motivated by its aim to integrate Canadian Studies meaningfully into the traditionally US-centred field of North American Studies. *Devil in Deerskins*, in turn, aims to reintroduce contemporary readers to the once popular, now neglected, autobiography of Anahareo (1906-85), the Mohawk writer, activist, and environmentalist formerly married to Grey Owl.

The five endorsements on the back jacket of *The Palgrave Handbook of Comparative North American Literature* variously agree that the volume is both comprehensive and transformative. Comprised of seventeen essays that approach comparative literature from various perspectives—from a reading strategy to a discipline—the volume is certainly comprehensive. Its primary achievement is to have gathered together seventeen essays, each offering new perspectives on literary comparison in North America, or new approaches to aesthetic movements (including Modernism and Postmodernism), categories (including regionalism, biculturalism, and multiculturalism), theoretical paradigms (including border studies, transnationalism, and globalization), and cultural perspectives (including African American, Indigenous, Asian American, Québécois, and Cajun/Acadian). In her introduction, Reingard M. Nischik identifies at least two main objectives: "charting a new approach to the literatures and cultures of the North American continent" and "chart[ing] relevant methodologies and major issues of Comparative North American Literature." It is important to note that Comparative North American Literature is an emergent discipline. Indeed, this volume aims in part to define its composite preoccupations and map its territory (hence the repetition of the term "charting" throughout the introduction and in the title of the first of five sections, "Charting the Territory"). In this respect and others, the volume is ambitious, even groundbreaking, and deserves serious scholarly attention. The quality of insight in the majority of contributions is excellent. As I was reading *The Palgrave Handbook*, however, I was preoccupied by one matter. The introduction defines it as "the very first of its kind in this research area," meaning that it differentiates the comparative approach to North American literatures from existing hemispheric, continentalist, or borderlands approaches while acknowledging that overlaps exist. Indeed, in general terms, Nischik situates Comparative North American Studies "next to" hemispheric and border studies. This kind of differentiation is not, however, necessarily borne out by the contributions, many of which approach "comparative" studies as discursively or conceptually interchangeable with "hemispheric" or "border" studies. A more explicit introductory engagement with the terms and methods that contributors bring to bear on their subject matter (to accompany the existing useful survey of relevant frameworks) would help to clarify the links between the contributors' various interventions and the volume's objective "to

help this [comparative] approach find its place in the ever-changing constellation" of literary and cultural studies of Canada and the United States.

When it was first published in 1972, *Devil in Deerskins* achieved Canadian bestseller status. Even now, a casual Internet search reveals the extent to which fans of Anahareo and Grey Owl have welcomed the reissue of Anahareo's autobiography dealing with the author's early life and marriage to Grey Owl. *Devil in Deerskins* is the inaugural text in the University of Manitoba's *First Voices, First Texts* series of critical editions, whose General Editor is Warren Cariou, Canada Research Chair at the University of Manitoba. It is edited with an excellent afterword by Sophie McCall, an associate professor of English at Simon Fraser University. As McCall observes in her acknowledgements, the series aims to reintroduce "Indigenous texts now out of print" to a new generation of readers. The series also stands out for its self-awareness about scholarly methods; that is, "the *hows* and *whys* of practising ethically grounded, Indigenous-centred . . . research[,] editing, . . . publishing, distributing, and marketing." There is a clear link between the series' objectives and the way that the text is presented. For instance, the paratextual apparatus, which includes acknowledgements, forewords by Anahareo's daughters, and nineteen photographs, suggests the extent to which the work involved in putting this volume together under McCall's editorial supervision was collaborative. McCall's informative afterword situates *Devil in Deerskins* within the larger context of its narrative strategies, reception history, and the series' aims. Written in a conversational, self-aware, even lighthearted prose, *Devil in Deerskins* is at once lively, intimate, and memorable. While it will be welcomed by those interested in Anahareo and Grey Owl, *Devil in Deerskins* deserves also to be recognized on its own complex terms for the ways it allows readers to better appreciate the cultural value of Anahareo's personal life and familial history of displacement and relocation, and better understand the literary historical value of her autobiography within the larger corpus of Indigenous writing in Canada.

Precarious Terrain

Andrew Atkinson and Mark Harris, eds. *Running the Whale's Back: Stories of Faith and Doubt from Atlantic Canada.* Goose Lane $19.95

Cynthia Flood *red girl rat boy: stories.* Biblioasis $18.95

Reviewed by Sam Knowles

Running the Whale's Back is a metaphor on several levels. As explained in Samuel Thomas Martin's story of the same name, it refers to the perilous process of jumping between floes in a partially frozen bay; daredevil Canadian youngsters would "hop the ice pans and copy quick-like from one to the next . . . criss-crossing the bay before their mums would yell." On another level, as the protagonist Patrick concludes when he finishes the story by chancing these same pans, it involves taking repeated leaps of faith—for "*if [he] slip[s] and drown[s], then so be it*" (italics original)—so this activity is representative of the insecurity of religious belief. In this story, Patrick's religious faith is tested by the infidelity of his wife; elsewhere in the collection, various factors shape what Atkinson, in the introduction, describes as the "precarious terrain between faith and doubt." Finally, the phrase "running the whale's back"—with its connotations of occasional security, imminent peril, and the vagaries of the natural world—is a metaphor for Atkinson's "precarious" collection. Indeed, the titular story is a microcosm of the anthology: it is a mixed bag, including excellent reflections on such everyday poignancies as a "pillow damp some mornings to his touch," yet also over-done reflections about religious

characters; Patrick, like many characters in the collection, "can't make sense of his life without seeing it enmeshed in [a B]iblical story."

Some of the most convincing stories are not those that make this religious "enmesh[ing]" overt, but are rather those in which the secular and religious are naturally coexistent (as in the Joycean sparsity of Michael Hennessey's "The Priest and the Pallbearer") or those in which faith is brought into sharp relief by a chronic trauma (illness in Michelle Butler Hallett's careful, measured "The Shadow Side of Grace" or one-off event (Jessica Grant's Kafka-esque "My Husband's Jump." Alistair Macleod's "Vision" is a tour de force that begins with a focus on the near-physicality in the transmission of a story, like a "wound [that] will never really heal totally," and continues with a pitch-perfect description of two boys given a lift, "hesitat[ing] . . . outside the doorway of the house, waiting for the man [who has brought them] to go out of sight," but eventually ducking into the (incorrect) doorway because "they [feel] embarrassed and d[o] not want to admit that he ha[s] brought them to the wrong house." Having mused on the importance of Christianity in the migration narrative of those who "crossed the sea" between both Scotland and Ireland and Britain and Cape Breton, Macleod concludes with the daring admission that this story is not his; ideas of storytelling and authenticity are undercut in the admission that this tale, ostensibly told by the protagonist's father on one particular fishing expedition, "did not come from him, exactly as [told] on that day." There is no such awareness about the opaque, unforgiving sentences of David Adams Richards' "We, Who Have Never Suffered." Though it aspires to the inertia of a Beckett play or Faulkner story, with non sequiturs and ellipses, there is a frustrating predictability to it.

Cynthia Flood's use of a Beckettian template is rather more effective; in "Care," the vicious irony of the title is revealed in the opening paragraphs, as a "care" home superintendent summarily dismisses both her staff and the personal effects of a recently deceased inmate: "You idiots didn't notice this garbage? Clean it up." The narrative, like one character, "typifie[s] time served in care: rush rush, or so slow that rage beckon[s]." Flood is at her best with this focus on linguistic rhythm, from the detail of a character "thrash[ing] into her old winter coat," to the shocking opening of "Such Language": "*Fuck you*, the message tape said one October day" (emphases original). In spite of this story's beginning, however, it remains uncertain whether the titular phrase is meant to be positive or negative: Flood's command of the multiple uses of "such language" remains throughout, shown in the interweaving of a tale of infidelity with book-club discussions in which the members "uncorked the wine and their own narratives." Linguistic dexterity is Flood's primary strength. "Red Girl, Rat Boy," a fairy-tale narrative maintains Grimm's gruesomeness; the female protagonist "[goes] off elsewhere, over the hills and far away and still with that hollow inside," which has echoes of Angela Carter's no-nonsense re-visioning of such narratives. However, Flood's plotting can be tired, particularly in revisiting familiar scenes of organized activism. While it is clear that "the comrades [and] hall" of the political group in "Blue Clouds" constitute an informed, accurate portrayal, it is the extended metaphor at the centre of the story (told by the hall cleaner), wherein "telling is cleaning," that is most effective.

In "One Two Three Two One," a narrator comments on the dialogue, and then stops herself, having decided "this isn't the kind of story" that goes into extensive character detail. Though meta-narrative comment can be a successful feature—in Macleod's work, for instance—Flood's use of the device is less assured, despite her

implication that she *does* know what "kind of story" this is. Both these collections, while well-judged in parts, left me with an uneasy feeling about their writers/editors who seemed to not really know what "kind of [books]" these were, so that readers were left on the "terrain between faith [in] and doubt [about]" the success of these "precarious" stories.

Body and Soul

Catherine Banks
It is Solved by Walking. Playwrights Canada $16.95

Lucia Frangione
Leave of Absence. Talonbooks $17.95

Karen Hines
Drama: Pilot Episode. Coach House $17.95

Reviewed by Shelley Scott

The three plays under consideration deal with questions of spirituality and metaphysical inquiry. All three find ways to link visceral, physical qualities with ineffable experiences of transcendence and awakening. All three are also western Canadian plays: *It is Solved by Walking* premiered in April 2011 at the Pumphouse Theatre in Calgary in a production by Urban Curvz Theatre. *Drama: Pilot Episode* also premiered in Calgary, produced by Alberta Theatre Projects as part of the 2012 Enbridge playRites Festival of New Canadian Plays. And most recently, *Leave of Absence* was produced at Pacific Theatre in Vancouver in 2013.

In Catherine Banks' two-character play, *It is Solved by Walking*, the character Margaret is prevented from achieving her dreams of finishing her PhD, writing poetry, and becoming a mother because of the sexual demands of her husband, John. Her first pregnancy ends in miscarriage, the second in abortion. Her most profound and repeated line is: "I am not writing." John has long since left her at the beginning of the play, but Margaret's creativity is still blocked by her erotic memories of him. Only when she receives news of his death is she able to reengage with her identity as a writer, which is manifested through her conversations with Wallace Stevens. Banks' writing is layered with metaphors, most notably with bird imagery. The play is structured around the stanzas of Stevens' poem, "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird"; Margaret is called Magpie and refers to her own first pregnancy as Ladybird. In addition to the recollections of her sexual past, Margaret's other physical activity is walking. Sex becomes a metaphor for being distracted from writing, while walking is her way to prepare herself to begin. "The purest moment is just before it begins," she explains of both a walk and a poem. Margaret traces a route around the stage, from her bed to the platform where writing can take place. In the end, she achieves a kind of integration: she takes a new lover, a tradesman who repairs her home, and she begins writing. In a final poetic metaphor, Margaret and her lover capture fireflies and then release them in their bedroom. The final stage direction tells us "the theatre is awash in fireflies."

The connection between sexuality and spirituality is also at the heart of Lucia Frangione's *Leave of Absence*, and it is manifested especially in the lesbian awakening of the fifteen-year-old central character, Blake. Sister Margaret teaches her students about the female Christian mystics and recites their "lusty" poems about longing for union with their saviour. Margaret's appreciation for the feminine divine intermingles with Blake's desire for her best friend. The result is tragic—perhaps unnecessarily so, as the play veers from a thoughtful and even comic consideration to a quite shocking conclusion—as Blake is bullied, assaulted, and then murdered by a group of high school boys. Only faithful Margaret is left to defend her religion, as the other characters leave. Leap journeys to Europe for a trip he should have taken with his late wife. The ex-priest, Ryan, and Blake's mother,

Greta, embark on the Camino de Santiago, a spiritual pilgrimage. As with *It is Cured by Walking, Leave of Absence* ends with a magical effect, as the air fills with singing that the playwright describes as "mystical" and "miraculous."

In Karen Hines' ambitious neo-noir *Drama: Pilot Episode*, what might be a comic parody of Calgary's slick western boomtown lifestyle and the soulless machinations of television production is given a larger dimension through the introduction of ghosts, spirits, and a character called The Sage, who shepherds the other six characters through shifting layers of dream and reality. Animal imagery again plays a large part in creating the supernatural atmosphere, including a cow skeleton and bison skulls as prominent stage elements, and the repeated motif of a bird falling from the sky. At one point, the stage is flooded with white ants. The most obvious connection with the physical is the repetition of references to pregnancy, birth, and babies: one character is pregnant throughout the play, another carries her baby and breastfeeds, and the main character, an ex-forensic psychologist, is asked constantly if she has children. While the audience might be challenged to follow the logic through the dense discussions of god, environmental degradation, and psychiatry, the key seems—as with the other two plays—to find the connection between the physical and the metaphysical, to embody a spiritual experience.

The Poetry Percentage

Douglas Barbour and Sheila E. Murphy
continuations 2. U of Alberta P $19.95

Susan Helwig
And the cat says... . Quattro $14.95

Priscila Uppal
Summer Sport: Poems. Mansfield $17.00

Reviewed by Tanis MacDonald

At the end of December, I did a little math and discovered that books of poetry comprised 34% of my reading for that particular year. The number seemed to shock many people, but for a variety of reasons. Some friends—poets themselves—wondered what I was doing reading so much in genres other than poetry, while other friends wondered exactly where I was finding all that poetry to read. The answer is simple: small presses publish much of the poetry in Canada, with a hefty boost from academic presses. These three books, two by Toronto small-press publishers Quattro Books and Mansfield Press, and the third by a prairie university press with a strong poetry list, are diverse in style and subject matter, but taken together, they cast a wide net for readers.

The experiment in poetic partnership between Douglas Barbour and Sheila E. Murphy in c*ontinuations 2*—the title a pun on duality and continuity—is a project of considerable length and accomplishment. A true collaboration in which neither poet can now remember which of them wrote which lines, this series of rolling sextets are titled simply with lower-case Roman numerals (beginning at "xxvi"—this is part 2, after all) but cover a lot of ground, from philosophy to ecopoetics to lyric time travel, like this passage from "xxxv":

> time might shuttle its own
> weight beyond the lift
> of small lights flecked
> against stone cut from ages
> evening the flow
> of miracle as seen /not seen

This stanza, in particular, seems to speak also to the seamlessness with which these lyrics tumble into one another: time shuttling the flow of miracle. There is a questing persona at the core of these stanzas; these are continuations not just from the earlier volume, but that also work with continuation as an aesthetic—the unstoppable poem. In their afterword, Barbour and Murphy discuss collaboration as work that creates "a third, phantom voice" and that phantom voice is relentless even in its ordered stanzas, pursuing meaning and its slippery twin, non-meaning: "just for the nonce be / fore the lashing savage f / ails to be queath." This is a book that expands as you read: book as accordion, as rolling rock.

If you are reading in nearly any genre in Canada, it is hard to miss Priscila Uppal, who has recently published poetry and fiction as well as a memoir (*Projection: Encounters with My Runaway Mother*) and its adaption into a play, *Six Essential Questions*, performed at Factory Theatre. *Summer Sport: Poems* is a follow-up to Uppal's 2011 *Winter Sport: Poems*, the products of Uppal accompanying the Canadian Olympic team in competition. Uppal was dubbed "Canada's coolest poet" by *Time Out London* during her time with the Canadian Olympic team at the London-hosted summer Olympiad. *Summer Sport: Poems* is more than a poetry collection, with additional features of the book meant for readers who may be new to poetry, sports, or their intersection, including a short essay "Training for Your Life, or My Poetic Triathalon," referring to Uppal's time as poet-in-residence for the 2011 Rogers Cup Tennis Tournament, as well as for Canadian Athletes Now at the 2012 Summer Olympics and Paralympics. Uppal's afterword, "Sports Writing Boot Camp," is a series of writing exercises (or "literary coaching tips") to introduce novices to writing sports literature. Uppal has carved out a niche for herself with these sports poet-in-residence gigs and the poems are full of the energy of each sporting event. She changes up her poetic styles and the analogy of exercising the poetic form as the athletes exercise physical form is well worked throughout the collection. It is awfully good fun, especially because Uppal is not above making puns, as in her "clerihews for Clara Hughes," or riffing on tradition with her rewrite of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's most famous sonnet as a tennis poem: "I shall love thee better after match point." It is this kind of play that carries the day in *Summer Sport*: a summery, breezy grab bag of sports poems that honour the athletes and the idiosyncrasies of their chosen sports.

The last of these three collections of poetry is terrifically worth the wait. Susan Helwig's *And the cat says...* offers lyric poems that are spare in structure but rich in their invocation of what's missing and what's possible. In the eponymous poem, the cat decides not to eat the sparrow right away, but rather to keep it alive and talk to it. The sparrow is both the lover and the reader, and Helwig is the cat with the stories: a reverse Scheherazade. And beautifully bleak stories they are, too, drenched with rain and missed chances, eight-day affairs in cold borrowed apartments. It is as though Helwig has taken Jean Rhys' *Good Morning, Midnight* and rewritten it in twenty-first century Prague. Helwig's narrator wades in Rhysian longing and loneliness, and wafts upward on the same kind of hope, but is drugged on impossible love instead of wine. But where Rhys' narrator ends in despair, Helwig's poetic speaker finds a wry strength in the distance between the lover and herself, and the books arcs into an exploration of women's survival after love. What Helwig offers towards the end of the book are not strategies but evidence of a stringent resistance to slipping away unnoticed; the feminist sass of "Letter to Philip Roth" and "The Snake's Poem" and the melancholic mysteries of "January 1975" and "And I" suggest

neither tragedy nor hope, but rather something more tart and more knowing. The strength of Helwig's collection is that she knows exactly how to bring the reader to the brink and then just leave her there, thinking.

Translating Desires

John Barton
For the Boy with the Eyes of the Virgin: Selected Poems. Nightwood $19.95

George Stanley
After Desire. New Star $18.00

Daniel Zomparelli
Davie Street Translations. Talonbooks $16.99

Reviewed by Andrew Lesk

George Stanley's central concern is clearly suggested by the title, and it's a sad and somewhat dour place to be, this post-desire place. In tandem with being or becoming invisible as an object of desire as he ages, Stanley's poetry also ruminates on the process of making poetic meaning itself when the impetus—desire—abates.

This process is often difficult but necessary, since living out life's final stanza(s) lends an urgency to understanding how to write a testament to that life. The poet "would like to read the poem / that departs from truth / at the cost of death / invisible to all." What is invisible here? Clearly, the poet knows it is himself, living in a world little noticed by the youths he admires; and it is the poem too, being created, always in process; a process never shared but whose final output, the poem, becomes the "kindly stature / disclosing opening out / the eternal world where the others live." This is the gift that the poet (considered in the collection also as someone writing a detective poem) can offer others, having lived through the mysteries of desire, having not yet, not ever solved the pull to beauty, to youth, to the consolations of old age.

As if to contrast Stanley's languid elegiacs, David Zomparelli is that youth speaking back to senior (gay?) men on the Skytrain, in a poem that (after a quick "Vancouver Sunrise") opens this excellent, exuberant collection. From scoping the restaurants and denizens of the West End, to the bashers who trickle down to Davie Street, Zomparelli's sharp glances at the changing circumstances of queer life are anything but languorous. In a presumed "found poem from Craigslist," the seeker wonders "how can I find the person i wanted here"; and the forgotten comma between "wanted" and "here" suggests that "here," temporally dislocated, could be anywhere. He seems to ask, "How can you summon up a person you earlier cruised on the street?" concluding that "I lost you before it was over." The speed of life on Davie mirrors the speed of the internet, where a missed connection is already a foregone conclusion.

Zomparelli knows that "Peep shows are so 20th century," as selling and consuming and desiring has taken on new, ephemeral forms; so, "WiFight it?" But he is wise, too, to know that self-reflection, after the rains painted Vancouver skies "a different colour," is necessary; and so the closer, "[t]omorrow," settles for the week, this week, and eventually, today. He closes his eyes to "see the world in which would have been"—been what? You? The one who has "one mutual friend with yourself"? The party, having us all run pell-mell up and down Davie, leaves Zomparelli, leaves us, with understated satisfaction, at the best of excited, hyper poetics travels, here on the Best Coast.

In a collection that might easily be considered "the best," not just on this coast but in Canada, John Barton reveals why he doesn't really have a peer in queer poetry. It's difficult to consider even reviewing this *Selected* collection, given Barton's thirty years of writing what R. M. Vaughan, in the introduction, calls "the poetries of John Barton." And Vaughan usurps what I might have to say about Barton's very fine work in this collection, one that "offers the

reader everything from skinny, sexy erotic hymns to form-bending diary prose poems to *J'accuse!* rants in ghazals to polyphonic post-Pop queer theory dialogues." He rightly concludes, "there is no such thing as a cowardly John Barton poem."

And the poems do not shy away from the material condition of the body, a theme in this selection. In a very bold counterpoint to earlier, nationalist poetry, Barton writes of "This body: its constitution / beyond amendment and spastically tense, the upper and lower chambers of the heart loud with perpetual ringing," calling attention to the *body* in the Canadian body politic. Disparate Canadians, flung wide across the varied landscapes, are bodies arrayed in "loose constellations / frayed networks of light ablur in the wheeling / night skies." Barton shows how *personalized* desire (of any orientation) is metonymic of this country's varied populace who also discretely desire, but who often never see or experience others on the east coast or west coast or points between, but who nevertheless are free to choose, who desire to be here, wherever here is (as Northrop Frye might say), wherever and whatever we imagine here to be. Barton's (poetic) body is inclusive and imaginative, highlighting not jingoistic impulses but rather the best ideals of our body politic. What a gift to us all.

Sense and Sensitivity

Michael Bedard
The Green Man. Tundra $21.99

Meg Rosoff
Picture Me Gone. Doubleday $18.95

Reviewed by Suzanne James

In YA novels, teenage protagonists are commonly presented as more sensitive and perceptive than the adults in their lives, and these two works about articulate young women attempting to bring clarity and resolution to increasingly mysterious situations are no exception. The protagonist of Bedard's work finds herself caught up in a series of supernatural events placing her and her aunt in danger, while in Rosoff's novel, the main character and her father set out to find a middle-aged professor whose abrupt disappearance has confounded both his family and friends. Yet in spite of initially predictable plots, both works succeed in transcending generic expectations and reaching more nuanced resolutions than one might initially expect.

Michael Bedard's *The Green Man* opens in a low-key manner, as 15-year old "O" (she hates her given name, Ophelia, and its association with Shakespeare's mad heroine who drowns herself), learns that she will be spending her summer holiday with her eccentric Aunt Emily, a poet who runs a bookstore in a small town back east. Emily has recently suffered from a heart attack, lives alone, smokes too much, eats poorly, and comes to appreciate her niece's companionship and mothering tendencies. For the first quarter of the novel it seems that the plot will focus on the increasing interdependence of the two women and their charmed summer living and working together in The Green Man bookstore.

However, Bedard's novel slowly builds in intensity as O notices strange appearances and Emily recounts a disturbing, recurring dream of a malicious magician. Readers must accept the occasional supernatural shift in time, and the appearance of a few literary ghosts (Emily Dickinson sometimes haunts the bookshelves, and the young man who befriends O just may be the French poet, Rimbaud), yet the novel remains generally grounded in the daily routine and realistic life of a small town. By alternating between the perspectives of O and her aunt, Bedard is able to provide a dual interpretation of events, develop ironic misunderstandings in their relationship and present Emily as a poet-mentor to her niece.

However, *The Green Man*'s rather romanticized presentation of poetry as the "magic of creating something new with words," "nothing to be dabbled in" and potentially "a dangerous thing" is one of the weaker strands of the novel. Emily makes pronouncements like "[e]very day, poets must believe in the possibility of the impossible" and advises O to write poetry only if "you absolutely have to do it, if something inside you will die if you don't." On their own these pronouncements carry some weight, but repeated attestations of the power of poetry and the role of poets as "outsiders and rebels exercising a sort of passive resistance to society at large" become tiresome, rather than inspirational.

From the outset, Meg Rosoff's *Picture Me Gone* is a faster-paced work, blending somewhat ironic observations of American society from the perspective of a British teenager with an increasingly frustrating search for a missing middle-aged professor. Mila, the novel's first-person narrator, is proud of her sleuth-like abilities to interpret situational clues and to read character and incident more effectively than her often distracted father. In a characteristically breezy tone, she informs us that,

> I collect images like a camera clicking away. I can barely remember what Matthew looks like and there are no pictures of him to remind me. No picture of him and Suzanne on their wedding day or him with Gabriel. Or just him.
> *Click.*
> Other details leap out at me: A pair of muddy shoes. A stack of bills. A cracked window. A closed door. A pile of clothes. A skateboard. A dog. *Click click click.*
> First impressions? This is not a happy house.

However, concrete clues to explain Matthew's disappearance remain elusive, and the novel takes an interesting twist when Mila suddenly realizes that her father is not seriously looking for his supposedly lost friend. Her subsequent feeling of betrayal challenges her earlier, somewhat patronizing view of her father, as well as her instinctive trust of his integrity, and the novel ends with the aftermath of a surprisingly non-dramatic meeting with Matthew, the man they have been pursuing. Mila, her father and the reader are left without easy answers. Her quiet epiphany about the difficulty of understanding relationships is presented in the context of her father's work as a translator: "So much of translating, Gil once told me, takes place in an imaginary space where the writer and the translator come together. It is not necessary to sympathize with the writer, to agree with what he's written. But it is necessary to walk alongside and stay in step."

As well as presenting realistically idiosyncratic relationships and interpersonal problems without tidy resolutions, *The Green Man* and *Picture Me Gone* both bring to life a reflective and quirky female protagonist who positions herself outside of the mainstream of popular culture and teenage romance. As such, these works have the potential to be quietly transformative without being too self-consciously inspirational.

Avant, Again

Gregory Betts
Avant-Garde Canadian Literature: The Early Manifestations. U of Toronto P $65.00

Peter Quartermain
Stubborn Poetries: Poetic Facticity and the Avant-Garde. U of Alabama P $45.95

Reviewed by Alessandra Capperdoni

The publication of these two important contributions to the field of avant-garde studies confirms not only the enduring fascination that writings variously positioned as "avant-garde" still exercise on readers, but also the productive instability of a term which has been understood, adopted, critiqued, and rearticulated by

different generations of writers in historically and culturally contingent ways. Such instability is addressed by Gregory Betts through historical probing and meticulous attention to literary and cultural context in *Avant-Garde Canadian Literature: The Early Manifestations*, and underlies Peter Quartermain's resistance to attempting new definitions in *Stubborn Poetries: Poetic Facticity and the Avant-Garde*.

Quartermain emphasizes the recalcitrant nature of "difficult" writing and, especially, writing that resists the logic of meaning and explication by foregrounding the "thereness" of poetic language, its "facticity: that quality which resists explanation and interpretation and cannot be accounted for." Barely mentioning the term avant-garde beyond the title, the author privileges a way of reading grounded in Olsonian processual and open forms of the long (post)modern/ist moment.

Quartermain's book collects essays written between 1989 and 2006 "for and to an occasion" (vii), thus embodying in its very form the postmodern suspicion of critical methods that congeal reading practices in ahistorical or universalist stances. With the exception of discussions of Basil Bunting, Richard Caddel, and Mina Loy, all British, the essays engage with North American poets ranging from William Carlos Williams, Louis Zukofsky, George Oppen, and Lorine Niedecker to Lyn Hejinian, Bruce Andrews, Robin Blaser and Steve McCaffery. Every piece is a reading act that responds to its own time and place. As Quartermain suggests in the introduction, more questions are raised than answers given. The very fact that the book was not conceived as a collection, nor a book for that matter, testifies to the importance that the author places in the reading act, rather than the authorial intention, but also urges us to rethink the relationship between vanguardish writing and the historical: What prompts the publication of these essays as assemblage at this juncture of (neo-liberal) history?

Gregory Betts delves into a fascinating exploration of the transhistorical and transnational vectors that shape the formation of avant-garde nodes within and beyond the borders of the nation. This highly ambitious and thoroughly researched volume dedicates a long first chapter to the theories of the avant-garde as "historically and philosophically different positions"—rather than a unified theory—to show the "motivations and ambitions" that informed avant-garde artists in their own time and space. The chapter recasts the reading of the much-contested "military" and "aesthetic" forces of avant-garde discourse in the context of the socio-political. Betts' engagement with key European and North American theorists of the avant-garde, as well as critics working on the specificity of Canada's avant-gardes, lays the ground for uncovering and reconstructing an "alternative literary history of Canada" (one, for example, that includes the contested position of decadence). But it also highlights the interconnectedness of different avant-garde formations, including Canada's that problematizes in postcolonial fashion, the metropolitan-periphery model lingering on in avant-garde theorizations. While addressing the problematic aspect of naming, Betts is more interested in taking up "avant-garde" as a site of negative dialectic and critical *différence*.

Betts' next three chapters focus on three specific nodes of difference. The first addresses "The Cosmic Canadians" (a term derived from Dr. Richard Maurice Bucke's 1901 treatise) and discusses, among others, Lawren Harris, Merrill Denison and Herman Voaden (part of Toronto's Little Theatre movement), W. W. E. Ross, and Bertram Brooker. "Surrealism and Automatists" carefully maps the interrelationship between French Surrealism and Canadian artists' flirtation with the movement before attending to the Automatism of Paul-Émile Borduas and

Claude Gauvreau. It also gestures toward West Coast Surrealism in the work of Gregg Simpson and Roy Kiyooka. "Canadian Vorticism" focuses on the influence of English Vorticism and Wyndham Lewis on the Canadian artistic and literary scene—specifically Wilfred Watson and Sheila Watson—and the effects of Vorticist aesthetics on the socio-political. Nodes are never presented as self-enclosed or auto-referential clusters but always through a dialogic model in conversation with the contemporary interrogations, reflections, and practices taken up again in the concluding short chapter "L'Envoi: The Future of the Avant."

While the book centres on the problematic of the avant-garde in its early formation, as the title suggests, Betts attentively foregrounds the dangers of constructing a teleological model, albeit an "alternative" one. Given the scope and depth of the research offered, this effort is to be commended. If, at times, overlappings appear, Betts' weaving of past and present, theory and literary practice, aesthetics and politics is carried out in a brilliant way.

Le Français en cause

Chantal Bouchard
Méchante langue. La légitimité linguistique du français parlé au Québec. PUM 24,95 $

Compte rendu par Isabelle Violette

L'histoire sociolinguistique – tant récente qu'ancienne – du Québec est ponctuée de débats récurrents sur la qualité de la langue qui y est parlée. Avec *Méchante langue*, Chantal Bouchard revient sur ce qu'elle qualifiait d'« obsession québécoise » dans un précédent ouvrage qui a fait date. Dans *La Langue et le nombril* (Fides, 1998), Bouchard dressait l'évolution des perceptions négatives entretenues à l'égard du français parlé du 19e siècle à la Révolution tranquille. À l'issue de cette monographie restait toutefois à expliquer la soudaine perte de légitimité linguistique recensée à partir de 1840, d'autant plus frappante que le français était jugé conforme au bon usage avant la Conquête britannique. C'est à cette tâche que se consacre Chantal Bouchard dans son plus récent ouvrage en proposant comme hypothèse les conséquences (socio) linguistiques de la Révolution française. Dans les deux premiers chapitres, l'auteure cerne le rôle clé joué par la nouvelle bourgeoisie au pouvoir en France dans l'adoption de nouvelles formes de prestige et la dévaluation d'anciennes marques distinctives. Or, selon Bouchard, la dépréciation du français parlé au Québec n'est pas uniquement due à l'écart qui se creuse alors avec la nouvelle norme, faute de contacts avec la France. La cause est également d'ordre idéologique : la visée uniformisatrice de la Révolution française a eu pour effet d'imposer un modèle de langue unique qui rend la variation fautive. C'est donc à dessein que, dans les sections suivantes, Bouchard repère les traits caractéristiques du français québécois au 19e siècle et analyse la première querelle linguistique qui éclate en 1841, à la suite de la publication du *Manuel des difficultés les plus communes de la langue française* de l'abbé Maguire. Bouchard démontre que la polémique entre les lettrés québécois tient surtout à la difficulté d'établir à distance la norme parisienne contemporaine. Si les débatteurs s'entendent pour affirmer que le français parlé au Québec doit être conforme à celui des Parisiens instruits, ils évaluent différemment cette conformité – d'où leur désaccord – puisque les ouvrages normatifs de l'époque se contredisent sur les marques de bon usage. Ainsi, c'est à la reprise des contacts avec la France que le sentiment d'illégitimité linguistique s'accentue, nourri qu'il est de l'idéologie de la langue homogène, héritière de la Révolution française.

Cette monographie présente de nombreuses qualités. Outre le fait que la lecture est rendue agréable par un souci de concision

et de clarté, le propos d'ensemble reste accessible aux non-spécialistes. L'auteure dose efficacement théorie, contextualisation, et démonstration sans faire l'économie d'une documentation étoffée sur les traits linguistiques en concurrence aux 18e et 19e siècles en France et au Québec. Cet ouvrage, qui va aux sources de l'aliénation linguistique québécoise, suscitera certainement l'intérêt des littéraires qui explorent les rapports entre langues et sociétés dans la littérature franco-canadienne. Par ailleurs, cet ouvrage a le mérite de démontrer les mécanismes sociaux qui président à l'établissement des marques de prestige linguistique. Un rappel, qui tout en étant historiquement ancré, arrive à point nommé dans un contexte actuel toujours marqué par la délégitimation des usages non standard.

Wordplay, Play on Words

George Bowering
Words, Words, Words: Essays and Memoirs. New Star $19.00

Maia Joseph, Christine Kim, Larissa Lai, and Christopher Lee, eds.
Tracing the Lines: Reflections on Contemporary Poetics and Cultural Politics in Honour of Roy Miki. Talonbooks $24.95

Reviewed by Natasha Dagenais

The pieces included in *Words, Words, Words* and *Tracing the Lines* explore the uses of language by individual writers to connect with readers moving in and out of literary and cultural communities, in other words, beyond stifling or predictable moulds and conservative academic circles. In fact, both works attest to the power of words to expand the limits of imagination: a power that can be used, on the one hand, to express everyday life experiences, and, on the other, to fight for and demand justice for those who have been silenced or, to use Roy Miki's term, muted.

In the first collection, George Bowering never seems to be at a loss for words. At the outset, the front jacket points to the playful (and light) nature of the book's contents by featuring a set of "chattering" teeth (with a partial definition underneath)—emphasized by the photo caption of the author with a set of his own on the back cover. *Words, Words, Words* includes pieces that have appeared in modified form in previous publications, but for those readers looking for a collection of the poet's essays and memoirs, this one spans a range of topics, beginning with three "memoiristic" essays (two of which show "sort-of how" he became a writer and teacher) and ending with a piece on the "usefulness" of the dead. It also has pieces on writers such as bpNichol and Al Purdy, and some other pieces on baseball—reminiscent of Bowering's sportswriting days. While his voice is often lighthearted and playful, even ironic, the two-time winner of the Governor General's Award (and Canada's first Parliamentary Poet Laureate) understands how well-connected words can sometimes express, on a more serious note, what seems inexpressible. For example, in the third of the memoiristic essays—one that offsets some of his other pieces by its serious tone and topic—that begin this collection, he addresses the issue of how people write and speak (and, in fact, sometimes miswrite and misspeak) about grief and mourning (see "May I Bring You Some Tea?"). Not surprisingly, the writer's style and voice reveal a search for meaning and clarity while sometimes intentionally confusing meaning and forsaking clarity. Indeed, his wordplay is such that readers unused to his style and voice may find themselves wondering what to take seriously and what to recognize as playful, even paradoxical. Perhaps that is part of what draws many readers to his writing. Despite its lighthearted tone, *Words, Words, Words* is not always a "light" read in the conventional sense. Bowering chooses words, not to clarify a particular message,

or even to point out that there is a "real" message or meaning behind his words, but rather to show that choice of words and lines can greatly impact how readers are able to take in the effect of writing practices that strive to stay clear of forms of regimentation.

Similarly, readers of *Tracing the Lines* are left to interpret how language couched in different perspectives and used by diverse voices will affect the overall reading experience. Based on the 2008 conference of the same name, its subtitle, "Reflections on Contemporary Poetics and Cultural Politics in Honour of Roy Miki," highlights Miki's influence as critic, teacher, poet, and activist on communities of artists and intellectuals. In order to give greater significance to the pieces in this volume, the editors contextualize Miki's life and work in their introduction to ensure that readers grasp the parallels and departures between the varied styles and voices of the contributors. Bowering himself contributed three poems ("Voice," "Love," and "Translation") to the *Tracing the Lines* anthology, whose contributors are inspired by Miki as a creative and critical writer, and as "a practitioner of ideas"—who, by definition, must think outside the box of academe—as a passionate activist, specifically concerning the Japanese Canadian redress movement, in which he played an all-important role. The more than twenty-five contributors (from Daphne Marlatt and Marie Annharte Baker to Hiromi Goto and Smaro Kamboureli) to *Tracing the Lines* were "chosen because of their involvement in the communities of writers, activists, intellectuals, and artists through which Miki moves." Readers of this anthology will certainly appreciate the variety of pieces categorized under the four main sections: Poetics, Social Justice, Biotext, and Institutions. They are introduced to varied tastes, styles, collaborative initiatives, and techniques. Of particular interest in the first section are the poems "Abdijection" and "Abdijection 2" by Fred Wah, who creates "an exercise / in syntax" in compact four-line stanzas, and Baco Ohama's ongoing writing project that combines words and images on the page to reflect a breaking free from the confines of language and the body. The second section contains five works with two texts (by Mona Oikawa and David Gaertner) revisiting the Japanese Canadian redress movement. In addition, the anthology incorporates a thoughtful "performance experiment" that bears to fruition the collaboration of three women (i.e., The Sybils) with seven invited Sybils who explore, albeit to varying degrees, issues of discourse, connection, lineage, alliance, relationship, justice, and coexistence, thus revealing a need for more connections and dialogues among peoples. Those readers interested in autobiographical practices may find the third section enlightening because the writers play with creative means to produce their "biotexts." In the fourth section, the authors revisit language in and out of the academic world. Lastly, readers who want more on the redress movement and the connection between photographs, memory, and language should have a look at the discussion on poetic practice between Roy Miki and Kirsten Emiko McAllister which appears after the "Institutions" section.

These collections reveal multilayered approaches to using the written word and delve into a range of topics, from memoiristic views on mundane circumstances (*Words*) to discussions on the self, language, and voice (*Tracing*). In the end, readers will discover that the lines of thought and expression here converge, and the paths (from light and playful to serious) intersect to articulate something meaningful and worth reading.

Beginnings and Endings

Randy Boyagoda
Beggar's Feast. Penguin $22.00

Carrie Snyder
The Juliet Stories. Anansi $22.95

Reviewed by Ranbir K. Banwait

Carrie Snyder and Randy Boyagoda both intertwine a global geopolitics with the personal lives of their characters, reflecting on the material and social processes through which children become adults. What are the historical, political, and social contexts through which we become who we are, they ask? But while Snyder's *The Juliet Stories* is a contemplative narrative about the loss of family through displacement and illness, Boyagoda's *Beggar's Feast* is a more provocative story about traumatic beginnings that a boy furiously attempts to rewrite in his youth and in adulthood. Boyagoda's Sam Kandy is an angry, hard, and contemptuous man and he thus poses a thought-provoking contrast to Snyder's Juliet Friesen.

The Juliet Stories is, first and foremost, a novel about mourning and loss. Juliet's family moves to Nicaragua during the 1984 Revolutionary war. Protesting the American connection to the political unrest in Nicaragua, the Friesens are plunged into chaos along with their three children. The story is made all the more gripping because it is seen through the eyes of a child who witnesses the events around her without fully comprehending their significance. We see early signs of the Friesens' crumbling marriage; the strain increases when Juliet's younger brother, Keith, is diagnosed with cancer and the family moves to Canada. Keith desperately struggles with cancer; his death disperses the family. Juliet grows to adulthood and has children of her own, but in spite of this attention to generational time and growth, the novel's ending returns to the protagonist's childhood and the ongoing mourning of its loss. The last scene closes in this cyclical sense, and is perhaps one of the most intriguing moments in the novel: "You spring out of the camera's frame, splash into the waves, crouch. . . . You cover the keyboard and stand. You climb onto the window ledge . . . without listening for the cries of your children, you spring onto a shifting cloud." In this final scene, Juliet rewrites an old memory, picturing her brothers standing beside her as someone takes a photograph. The narrator collapses both time and space as she takes a step out of the photograph's frame. In turn, this act of imagination returns the narrator to the present, but the ending is also ambivalent for, in foregrounding the sense of displacement Juliet inherits from her childhood, the novel also reveals the multiple temporalities at work in shaping the narrator's consciousness of the past and her ability to survive in the present.

In contrast, Boyagoda features a very different coming of age story. The young boy reinvents himself as Sam Kandy after his father abandons him at a Buddhist temple at the age of ten in 1909: "And so he was taken to robes . . . to begin a new life of desire and suffering, defeat and triumph, from which would come another, and another, and another, and . . . after one hundred years of steel and pride, fever and speed, another." *Beggar's Feast* begins in a small village in Ceylon, in pre-Independence Sri Lanka, and the narrative that follows makes it clear that Sam's fate is closely tied to the village of his birth, and that the village is a microcosm refracting the larger stakes of empire. The one hundred years of Sam's life are marked by reinvention, we are told, but he is as much a self-made man as he is a product of his time. Over the course of his long life, Kandy marries three times and fathers sixteen children, but what is perhaps most fascinating about him is that he is an altogether unsympathetic figure. As a child, he adapts quickly to street life, raising himself up in the world through calculating

betrayals. The driving force in Sam's life is to return to his childhood home with a splash, and to validate himself in front of the village that once disdained him.

Boyagoda reinterprets the rags to riches story with an abandoned boy who extends as little compassion and empathy to others as was dealt to him. A cold and unfeeling swindler and murderer, Sam kills two of his wives in fits of rage. In fact, his treatment of women and children as objects sits uneasily with the novel's ending. In an interview, Boyagoda suggests that the ending of the novel is redemptive: Kandy dies contentedly in his third marriage surrounded by a house full of children. This lack of poetic justice in the novel is as compelling in its honesty as it is infuriating. Kandy lives his life with impunity, relentlessly taking advantage of existing social hierarchies. Although this is a candid portrayal of a character that emerges from the brutalities of the colonial order, the novel would have been enriched by a more careful treatment of the gendered regimes of power that allow Sam to benefit so immensely.

If Juliet's story is about mourning the losses of childhood, then Sam's life embodies the opposite; it is a furious rebuttal of all that childhood dealt him. This distinction importantly suggests the need to consider the novels in their proper postcolonial contexts; Juliet's travels from the US to Nicaragua to Canada in the final decades of the twentieth century, and Kandy's hundred-year personal history in the twentieth century, including his flights from Ceylon to Australia to Singapore and eventual return to Sri Lanka. Reading these novels together is rewarding because each reveals how these subjects become who they are through post/colonial trajectories of trauma, loss, mourning, and anger.

Between Light and Time

Nicole Brossard; Erín Moure and Robert Majzels, trans.
White Piano. Coach House $17.95

Sandy Pool
Undark: An Oratorio. Nightwood $18.95

Souvankham Thammavongsa
Light. Pedlar $20.00

Reviewed by Ryan Fitzpatrick

Translated by Robert Majzels and Erín Moure, Nicole Brossard's *White Piano* dwells along a series of temporal and physical borderlines: between the apocalyptic panic of the future and the archival pleasure of the past, between the body's politics of touch and language's typological risks, and between concrete detail and totalizing abstraction. Similar in composition to earlier collections like *Lovhers* (originally *Amantes,* translated by Barbara Godard, 1987) and *Installations* (translated by Majzels and Moure, 1989), Brossard's miniatures work between the concrete and the abstract, often concretizing abstractions in the process. Language is constantly doubling in Brossard's poetry as an eye/I needs to be careful to watch for the moments when words take on new resonances. In this collection, Brossard turns the violence and possibility of the relationship of body and language around each other, simultaneously considering a politics of expression (of musicality, of textual history) alongside a politics of touch (of relation, of *love*). In this, the piano becomes a strange kind of figure for her explorations; it is at once lounge fixture, consumer product, and instrument of expression that is not merely neutral, but carries a kind of violence ("piano massacre of teeth"). Brossard works in a space defined by both a worry about the potential violence carried in the body and language *and* an understanding of the need for *story*. It is this need for story, for language that connects us rather than bashes some of our teeth in, that draws Brossard and her poetic

companions to the museum and archive as a space of futurity, as a site for discovering resonances with the present. "[T]his is devious landscape," her archival companion suggests, leaning hard on that final word, "we will have to count our belongings."

In *Undark*, the follow-up to her *Exploding into Night* (nominated for a Governor General's Award in 2010), Sandy Pool chases a series of voices that speak to the impact of radium as a commercial product in the early years of the twentieth century. Pool's language works between the vibrant and literally seductive language of convenience and the troubling language of disease. *Undark* is a poetic drama of gaps in the painted-on light—giving voice to those left unnarrated in the sweeping teleologies of industrial progress. Switching between temporalities and characters, Pool zeroes in specifically on the radium dial painters—women hired to paint luminescent radium paint onto watch dials (often for use by the military)—and their struggle to be compensated by their employers for the way their unsafe working conditions demolished their bodies. Using this narrative as an organizational thread, Pool is able to incorporate voices ranging from Sabin von Sochocky (inventor of the Undark paint and co-founder of the Radium Luminous Material Corporation), to the disembodied voice of Undark's advertising copy, the misnamed figure of Marie Curie, and the decayed voices of Sappho and Hatshepsut. The effect of Pool's vocal mixture is an examination of time—both the reckless, profit-above-all futurism of capitalist progress and also the elegiac archaeologies of past remembrance. The half-life of radium (1601 years) is overmapped onto both the quickly decaying lives of the radium dial workers and the long decayed textual traces of other historical women. Pool accompanies her dramatizations with a literal countdown clock at the bottom of each page, which suggests radium's half-life but also poses the question of what we're counting down to. Perhaps, we're meant to count the moments to our complete forgetting as we stare into the luminescent screens of our smart phones, produced god knows where by no one.

Souvankham Thammavongsa's third book, *Light*, spins poem after poem out of her title, considering "Light" in all its timbres: luminosity, weight, race, etc. As is thematically appropriate, *Light* has a tonal weightlessness—the book is a light breeze to read—that betrays itself in the stacking, interleaved serializations at work. Thammavongsa's poems are formally economical, tackling a range of subject matters from sea creatures to family relations. Within this economy, her poems are connected through a consideration of geometry and orderliness gestured to in her opening poem which references American abstract painter Agnes Martin, who gave the title *Untitled #10* to a number of canvasses, each composed of neutrally coloured horizontal lines, often blurring together. Like Martin, Thammavongsa composes similar canvasses, serializing minor variations across multiple poems. Thammavongsa gently plays between the orderliness of Martin's lines and the way they seem to blur together. That said, *Light* is at its best when it finds ways to deviate from its consistent surface—the turn to recounted narrative in a poem like "Perfect," for instance, comes as a surprise that rearticulates the lightness of much of the rest of the book by redefining the book's abstract stakes on a more personal level. It's in this continual circularity, this repeated cycling through a number of intersecting serial forms, that we see a cyclical reframing of ideas and forms in the light of other ideas and forms—a continual bringing of things to light.

Buffy, Unmuffled

Brian Busby, ed.
The Heart Accepts It All: Selected Letters of John Glassco. Véhicule $22.00

Reviewed by Hilary Turner

John Glassco described *Memoirs of Montparnasse*, the book for which he is best known, as a record of "the years in which [he] really lived—before the onset of death or the inevitable dullness of a mature outlook." The reader of this collection may beg to differ. Composed between 1929 and 1980, his letters chronicle a full and interesting life, and culminate in an outlook that is mature, yet dignified rather than dull. Styling himself a world-weary aesthete with a sparkling past, Glassco was in fact a literary late-bloomer who did not write and publish seriously until the late 1960s. By the time the *Memoirs* appeared in 1970, the Paris of the early 1920s had become the stuff of legend, and Glassco could comfortably supplement his experiences with legends of his own. Yet this book was followed by at least a dozen others, including five volumes of poetry, a translation of the *Journal* of Hector de Saint-Denys-Garneau, as well as his edited collection, *Poetry of French Canada in Translation*. Always bearing in mind the distinction between living and writing, it is fair to say that it was Glassco's last two decades, not his first two that witnessed more activity, satisfaction, and (modest) recognition.

The man of letters ("Buffy" to his friends) emerges clearly in this collection, in regards to both his signed and pseudonymous works. His epistolary tussles with Maurice Girodias of the Olympia Press indicate the predicament of the pornographer whose books have no official status, yet who would like to be paid in official cash. When Girodias reissues Glassco's sadomasochistic classic, *The English Governess*, unaltered but retitled, Glassco rebukes him and expresses his "determination to put our relationship henceforth on a proper commercial basis." The following year, having sold the American rights to *Under the Hill*, another pseudonymous work, he handsomely acknowledges that, like *Lolita*, his earlier book would not have seen the light of day without the "original acceptance and beautiful production" of Girodias. The episode suggests that Glassco took all his work quite seriously, and that he was privately at ease with his artistic double life. He cheerfully catalogues his many *noms de plume* for an old acquaintance, Milton Kastillo, each one attached to a fetishistic study of delicately different texture. All the while, he is hobnobbing with the literary establishment at the inauguration of the Centennial Theatre at Bishop's University, making plans to attend the 1967 World Poetry Conference in Montreal, and investigating the application process for a Guggenheim award.

Letters addressed to A. J. M. Smith, Leon Edel, and F. R. Scott, all of whom were Glassco's lifelong friends, contain some fine literary gossip as well as amusing thumbnails of the doyens of CanLit. Robertson Davies "gives the impression of a magnificent but (possibly) spurious Rembrandt"; Irving Layton's ideas are those of "the village atheist verging on the village idiot"; Morley Callaghan is "a confused altarboy" and "Earl Birney's star is fading; he's become a bore," while the poets of the West Coast "faithfully but belatedly reproduce the 'experiments' of Europe in the 20s." He is similarly withering on the subject of literary prizes: "a bad book will win one year when there's no competition, and a good one will lose the next year when there is." Ironically, in view of this remark, his *Selected Poems* was to win the Governor General's Award a year later. Editor Brian Busby is surely correct to observe "this country has not treated Glassco well," and yet the evidence is here that Buffy was warmly appreciated by a good many of the well-connected, and

enjoyed at least a few moments in the sun.

It is puzzling, as Busby also writes, that these letters in particular should have been preserved for publication when Glassco wilfully destroyed (and just as wilfully sold) large bundles of his personal papers. They would, on their own, portray a complicated, enigmatic man; under Busby's able editorship, they do much more. In addition to supplementing Busby's biography, *A Gentleman of Pleasure* (2011) with its subject's own voice, they also reveal Glassco making the best of the indifferent hand of psychological cards he had been dealt as a child—through subterfuge, misdirection, and fairly transparent imposture. Yet, as Philip Sidney said, "the poet never lieth, for he nothing affirmeth." These letters testify to Glassco's ultimate desire to set the record straight: to be known posthumously, as he knew himself, complete and without disguise.

Beautiful Thieves

Charmaine Cadeau
Placeholder. Brick $20.00

Kate Cayley
When This World Comes to an End. Brick $20.00

Sadiqa de Meijer
Leaving Howe Island. Oolichan $17.95

Reviewed by Andrea MacPherson

Writers are often called thieves, stealing images and fragments of conversations, mining both their own experiences and the experiences of those around them. Writers look to the past, to historical figures, and to moments as inspiration. Writers reimagine, reinvent, resuscitate the voices that have long disappeared.

The three poets reviewed here, Charmaine Cadeau, Kate Cayley, and Sadiqa de Meijer, are all fine thieves. Each author explores the past to comment on the present, utilizing startling imagery and precise language to recreate these interior worlds.

In *Placeholder*, Cadeau's second poetry collection, the author explores the concept of the placeholder, mining that overlap of presence and absence through sharp twists of language between lines of verse. The "shifting terrain" of the collection comes not only through the subjects that Cadeau chooses to explore—from domestic interiors to the prevalent themes of navigation and the nautical—but also through her exploration of form; Cadeau uses lyrical narratives and prose poems, even the visual poem, experimenting with language and erasure. Much of the collection is conversational in tone, echoing confessions and whispers in warm kitchens with chipped countertops: here, we see the familiar, but also the surprising under Cadeau's gaze. Cadeau further discovers ghosts in her work, both human and literary; in "Throwaways," Cadeau tackles the familiar trope of the vanished girl, but in an entirely fresh way:

> Aboard over dinner, we'll talk only
> about the warning given to tourists:
> throw nothing overboard. How otherwise
> a woman can spin anything, the heel
> of a bone, into a skyboat, cast off.

Cayley's first collection, *When This World Comes to an End*, is a captivating debut. Cayley uses alternate personas, fables, alternate modes of storytelling, and photography for inspiration in her poems. The collection is arranged in three sections, the first exploring historical figures, the second unidentified images in photographs, and the third myths and fairy tales. She moves seamlessly between characters to tell their stories, both the well known (Emily Dickinson, Persephone) and the more obscure (the first man to die in the electric chair, archival photos). The poems are all concerned with the past, and the notion of history.

The images Cayley creates are arresting, leaving deep impressions on the reader's mind. Themes and motifs carry from one

poem to the next, offering insight to the complexity and interconnectedness between lives, eras, and experiences. Her experience in playwriting and the theatre is obvious, as her poems have a decidedly theatrical tone to them, both in approach to subject and the personas themselves. The poems in the final section, "Signs and Wonders," offer a strong narrative presence, often employing different forms and structures for the poems. In "Three Cautions for Water," a prose poem in three sections, each poem explores a different figure—real and imagined. This sequence appears clearly influenced by the darker side of fairy tales, reminiscent of Angela Carter's work.

> On Tuesday, it rained so much that when the girl came home, her mother had been eaten by a school of fish.
> The girl knew this because her mother always wore a pink arm band on her left arm. When the girl paddled into her front yard she saw it caught on the lowest tree branch. It was savaged by the very small teeth of very small fish.

I first became aware of Sadiqa de Meijer's work when she won the CBC poetry award for the sequence, *Great Aunt Unmarried*, and this collection echoes much of what we see in that winning poem: meandering images, sharp lines, glimpses into other lives. De Meijer explores the themes of childhood, belonging, motherhood, familial tensions through snapshots, and intimate explorations of subject. She uses short interludes as narrative breaks, allowing them to exist in a purely visual form. From "camera, film":

> Three girls in salt dresses, ribbons
> askew. Fierce shine on tired shoes. He'd told
> them to clasp their hands and freeze.
> Foto Modern embossed in gold.

De Meijer repeats certain images throughout—binoculars, kerchiefs, clocks—to create layers to the narrative, the overlapping of experience and response. And while de Meijer does not use a wide variety of forms or structure in her poems, her attention to detail creates dynamic pieces. Each image feels purposeful, carefully selected to propel the poem forward to its eventual conclusion. In "Exhibit," de Meijer explores the idea of the other, of the outsider, of the experience just beyond grasp in an intimate and engaging way:

> These seams fasten sleeves to skin and
> the trajectory
> of free-fall was impossible to document
> because of snow. Salwar kameez as
> nakedness.
> Salwar kameez as parachute.

Immense Precision

Edward Carson
Birds Flock Fish School. Véhicule $16.00

Deena Kara Shaffer
The Grey Tote. Véhicule $16.00

Laurelyn Whitt
Tether. Seraphim $16.95

Reviewed by Laura Cameron

"An immense precision is necessary," observes Edward Carson in "Landscape," the second poem in *Birds Flock Fish School*. It is with "immense precision" that the land meets the sky on the line of the horizon in that poem; and so too it is with "immense precision" that Carson, Deena Kara Shaffer, and Laurelyn Whitt craft their poetic lines in the three volumes reviewed here. All three collections offer poems meticulous in their language and imagery, and vast in the philosophical questions and natural truths that they explore.

Birds Flock Fish School is preoccupied with the invisible energy that leads birds to flock and fish to school. Throughout the volume, Carson considers the ways in which this energy might be, or is, imitated in the human world. "We long to give ourselves over to its might / to find in its flow something to find ourselves," the speaker

remarks in "Undercurrents." We also "long," I think, to "give ourselves over" to the clean, lyrical rhythms of Carson's poems. Almost all composed of six couplets each, they are loosely ghazal-like: and indeed, in their insistent pursuit of illumination in the realms of "fish" and "birds," they find an obvious Canadian literary precedent in Phyllis Webb's 1984 volume of (anti) ghazals, *Water and Light*. Carson's limber movement from image to image, couplet to couplet, emulates the mind in action: these poems *think* vigorously, on behalf of the entire human community. The impersonal grandeur of the collective "we" assumed by the poems leads to sweeping statements and occasionally lends an awkward vagueness to the otherwise precise poetry, but what that "we" sees always dazzles—like snow falling in the morning light, "an intelligent patience filling the air."

The speaker in Deena Kara Shaffer's debut volume is definitely an individual rather than a collective, and yet the poems gesture towards the shared experiences that make us human. *The Grey Tote* unfolds a deeply personal map of the corners and corridors and gaping spaces of grief: of the speaker's grief for her parents, taken by cancer. The book is about the process of dying, and also about the process of going on living after a loved one has departed. Shaffer's treatment of grief is subtle, stirring, playful, tragic, eloquent, and never self-indulgent. Her poems resound with the hugeness of small things, such as "putting paperwork in order" or remembering to refer to the dead in the past tense, "now that now / has no them in it." The "grey tote" of the title is a "generational satchel," a bag passed from family member to family member, carried along to the hospital for a birth, and carried along too for a death: the baggage of first and final and everyday journeys. Handed down to Shaffer's speaker, it becomes a "miscellany bag" holding the "gear" of her "not yet adventures." At first it "sits buried in the closet's corner" as she heals and wonders, "Will I ever get there — / to when poise and terminality coexist"? Certainly "poise and terminality coexist"—as do beauty and illness, grace and grief—in Shaffer's poems that she has brought out into the world in "*The Grey Tote*."

In *Tether*, Laurelyn Whitt is fascinated by memory. Her poems dwell on the unpredictable permanence or ephemerality of things: of cultures, languages, myths, religions, stories, and of human and animal lives. Like Carson, she is interested in *thinking*, in the nimbleness of the mind that imagines and the mind that remembers: in thoughts that are untethered and thoughts that are tethered. Prayers, she writes, leap ahead, "[u]ntethered from thought and language . . . a step into the simple." Memories, on the other hand, often operate as "[f]elt thought": "thought become // membrane, tethered to touch." The poems in *Tether* modulate tonally with as much flexibility as that thinking mind. Thematic coherence is the price of such modulations, and these are poems to be tasted one at a time rather than gulped all at once. But even as she takes on weighty topics—immigration, assimilation, poverty, imprisonment—Whitt cultivates a quiet energy that compels our empathy.

All three poets operate likewise. Whatever the immensity of their subjects, Whitt, Shaffer, and Carson all prove particularly captivated by—and adept at evoking—hushed intensity: moments that make "palpable," as in Whitt's poem by that title, "the hush of pine needles / as they fall to earth, // of wind that shifts in the cedars." These moments, and the poems that contain them, ask softly and urgently for our attention. And we should listen carefully.

Old Hats, New Heads

Catherine Chandler
Glad and Sorry Seasons. Biblioasis $18.95

Tom Wayman; Owen Percy, ed.
The Order in Which We Do Things: The Poetry of Tom Wayman. Wilfrid Laurier UP $18.99

Rob Winger
Old Hat. Nightwood $18.95

Reviewed by Philip Miletic

In the past couple of decades there has been an increasing tendency in both Canadian and American writing—but certainly not all—to resist a cynical scepticism towards language, a renewed interest in the common, the cliché, and the old(er) poetic forms. This turn looks towards the past and tradition to revitalize the new and to re-examine the old; it looks towards the quotidian to free language from commercialization and return language to the people.

Rob Winger's *Old Hat* opens with a list of everyday cliché phrases, but these phrases are ever so slightly tampered with. Winger's appropriative play with the quotidian commercial signage removes the commercialism from the language. The poem ends with "It's the know of the world as we end it," drawing attention to the need for the continual restoration of language to resist its limitations on the world. The opening poem sets the tone for *Old Hat*, sifting through and exploring the tensions that arise when limitations are set on our knowing the world. In "Southern Ontario Stereoscope," a key poem in *Old Hat,* Winger uses the metaphor of the stereoscope to describe the southern Ontario landscape, overlaying places of memory with places in the present. The poem is not necessarily one of lamentation for a past natural landscape gone; it is rather a landscape that is "almost gone" but that can be preserved in writing. The Ontario landscape is renewed, in this sense; the past is set in writing, but the writing of the past also re/sets the present, renewing the Canadian landscape as well as preserving an older, sentimental, nostalgic landscape. Winger's poetry, revelling in the old clichés of Canadian literature, is refreshingly beautiful, humorous but illuminating, providing an "open door" to language and to the Canadian landscape rather than a closed-off space that suffocates.

In *Glad and Sorry Seasons*, Chandler does not look towards old phrases and words but to older poetic forms. Chandler is meticulous in her exploration of the rondeau, the triolet, the pantoum, the Sapphic stanza, the sonnet, and more. The sheer number of these forms can be overwhelming and disorienting, weakening the cohesiveness of the book. Yet, Chandler's mastery of these forms, her allusions to other poets, and her translation of five French Canadian and five Spanish American poets make *Glad and Sorry Seasons* a book of poems about poetry, specifically Chandler's love for poetic forms as evidenced by "Sonnet Love." Yet the strength of Chandler's return to these forms is more than homage, it is revision, revising the patriarchal discourse and "ownership" of older poetic forms and highlighting the constraints and criticisms of women poets who are consistently left out of the "canon": "They seem to sense I'm not one of them; / I'm much too serious, too plain." Despite the lack of cohesiveness of *Glad and Sorry Seasons*, Chandler boasts a strong collection of poetry that presents an argument for a return to older poetic forms to further explore the experiences of women and women writers in the present.

Owen Percy's introduction to Tom Wayman in *The Order in Which We Do Things* contains a sentence that resonates with the previous poets mentioned: "what is new in the new work writing is in fact what is old—the fact *that* we work." This new introduction seeks to reintroduce Wayman to a newer generation and provides a strong collection of Tom Wayman's "new work writing," with its focus on the mental

and physical effects of labour and labour conditions, the integration of working class politics, and Wayman's admiration for and affiliation with the working class person. The collection confidently boasts Wayman's belief and faith that language can shape our knowledge and experiences in the world. This stance is most explicit in the humorous "Postmodern 911," wherein the speaker attacks an academic who professes "that neither language nor history permit / definitive statements or authorities." Wayman demonstrates a disdain for a postmodern aesthetic, and *The Order* presents an argument for poetry's involvement in and connection to the social world.

Each of the poets looks towards old forms, whether these forms be language itself, poetic forms, or the forms of work. They see in the old a reflection, and, as Winger writes, "the reflection there / might tell me something new." The old hat, the old cliché, the old form carry the potential to reflect on the present, and through that process of reflection something new and beautiful is created.

French Canadian Literature in English

Rosemary Chapman
What is Québécois Literature? Reflections on the Literary History of Francophone Writing in Canada. Liverpool UP $109.95

Sherry Simon, ed.
In Translation: Honouring Sheila Fischman. McGill-Queen's UP $29.95

Reviewed by Lee Skallerup Bessette

When I first picked up Rosemary Chapman's book, I was not encouraged by the title: *What is Québécois Literature?* I scoffed at the limited and limiting question the title posited. But one should neither judge a book by its cover, nor by its title without reading the subtitle. Chapman addresses the title and subtitle of the book in the first sentences of the Introduction: "As my subtitle suggests, the question provokes not answers but further queries and reflections." Taking a postcolonial approach to her topic, Chapman critically explores how the history of French literature from Canada has been shaped and reshaped in French, illuminating who has been included and excluded, and how that fits into the various historical narratives about nation, place, and language.

The book begins with a chronology of historical and literary events that Chapman argues shaped how we talk about the literature. Chapman herself acknowledges that any timeline is necessarily exclusionary and subjective, but hers serves as a solid introduction to the important moments in Canadian, Quebec, and world history, as well as to landmark publications. Her chapters are then divided up according to where and how literary histories are written, unwritten, and reinforced: the traditional literary histories, the curriculum, and anthologies. It should not come as much of a surprise that twentieth-century literary histories focused on nation-building, and that these exercises (reinforced in what is taught and what is anthologized) exclude many voices. Chapman's most important chapter is her final one where she brings forward the voices of those excluded from the nationalist literary history, including Aboriginal voices and those from Francophone communities outside of Quebec. She points in the direction of further studies and areas still waiting to be examined and included.

This is an excellent book on the literary history of francophone writing in Canada, including how the term *Québécois* came to be, and what was gained and lost in that process. Interestingly, this complete and provocative examination of the history and evolution of Francophone literature in Canada was written in English by a British researcher and published by a UK university press. It is a great asset to those

who are interested in French Canadian and Québécois literature who don't read French. That the book was written and published overseas also likely reflects just how fraught language politics are in Canada.

English Canadian interest in French Canadian and Québécois literature, exists in no small part because of the work of Sheila Fischman, the grande dame of translation in Canada. Sherry Simon's collection *In Translation: Honouring Sheila Fischman* makes this case. It is an argument that has merit. The book begins with a history of Fischman and her evolving work in translation, which is basically a history of translation in Canada. There would no large, rich, and varied corpus of French Canadian and Québécois literary texts for us to read, enjoy, and study, without Fischman. She has translated hundreds of books from French to English.

Fischman also has furthered the critical study of translation and worked endlessly to bring legitimacy and respect to the field of translation and adequate compensation to the translators working in it. The collection also includes a number of critical essays on translation, honouring the other work that Fischman did as a translator. The book also contains a selection of Fischman's poetry as well as a number of interviews with her from the past twenty years.

The book also contains an example of Fischman's brilliance as a translator: a beautiful and devastating short story called "The Anguish of the Heron" by Gaétan Soucy translated by Fischman. It perfectly recreates Soucy's distinct style and voice, which are challenging even in French, while retaining the fluid quality of his prose. Soucy, along with many other authors who have worked with Fischman, contributes a reflection on their relationship, calling her "*my* translator" and saying she is, "like any true translator, an authentic writer."

Over and over again, writers, editors, and fellow translators describe her generosity, her creativity, and her skill as a translator. One of the dangers of these tributes is that they make translation seem easy, but each tribute, each essay, works hard to detail the time, skill, and dedication Fischman brought to each new translation, always highlighting the challenges a translator faces, and how Fischman always seemed to overcome those challenges.

To understand French Canadian and Québécois literature, an Anglophone should start with these two books to get both an outsider's critical view of the literary history, as well as one privileged insider's contribution to that same period.

Versatile Service

Ins Choi
Kim's Convenience. Anansi $14.95

Tomson Highway
The (Post) Mistress. Talonbooks $16.95

Reviewed by Sylvie Vranckx

Both Tomson Highway's and Ins Choi's new plays focus on the everyday lives of popular characters as seen through the lens of the service industry and celebrated with a humour based on incongruity and the cadences of ordinary language. While *The (Post) Mistress* follows Marie-Louise Painchaud, the eponymous postmistress, *Kim's Convenience* focuses on a family-run Korean Canadian convenience store in Toronto.

The (Post) Mistress marks a new collaboration between Highway and Peruvian-Canadian singer Patricia Cano through the form of the one-woman musical. The romantic and emotional Marie-Louise (played by Cano), a postal services employee with a celestial laugh, an uncanny ability to "divine" letters, and an inability to keep secrets, presents a multifaceted account of the love and sex lives of the citizens of a town called Lovely in northern Ontario. Marie-Louise's gossip

and tendency to laugh at her own jokes are presented as sassy, impish, and charming, and as evidence of her fun-loving temperament. She presents her mid-1980s Franco-Ontarian town as a crossroads of cultures and worlds. Marie-Louise has Cree ancestry but is one of the Queen of England's employees, as shown by the decades-old stamps picturing Elizabeth II in the print version. Moreover, her late first husband was Anglo-Protestant. Her Métis friend Sylvie Labranche has an affair with a "linguini" from Brazil who writes to her in Cree, thereby hinting at academic culture. Yvette Paquette "with her big hair" has dated an African-American man from New Orleans nicknamed after a cigarette brand. A little girl has a dream about becoming the Little Bear (French for the Little Dipper), which alludes to mythology and the animal realm. As a Catholic, Marie-Louise nonetheless reluctantly accepts the homosexual relationship between Daniel and Guy. Finally, she envies another woman's love story in Argentina and wishes to become a Latino man's (post)mistress. The choice to set the play in Francophone Canada is reminiscent of one of Highway's main inspirations, Michel Tremblay's *Les Belles-Soeurs*. The libretto is trilingual: in English, (glossed) French, and (glossed) Cree with some words of Spanish. Cree is compared to Brazilian Portuguese as one of the world's sexiest languages. Accordingly, the songs involve a Cree mourning prayer, samba, bossa nova, tango, French café chanson, and Berlin cabaret rap. However, the self-aware exoticism of the play and the colourfulness of its characters (reminiscent of those from Highway's *The Rez Sisters*) should not make one forget its dark overtones as a tragicomedy: separation, death, and abuse are omnipresent and Lovely is always one letter away from "lonely."

Unlike Highway, Choi is a brand new voice in Canadian theatre. His debut play earned him the Best New Play award from the Toronto Fringe Festival in 2010. Set in today's world, *Kim's Convenience* is less complex and more realistic than Highway's modernism-inflected *(Post) Mistress*, but is by no means simplistic. The artistic director Albert Schultz points out in the foreword that the play is "a major cultural event," one which celebrates Canada's relatively new Korean communities and even newer Asian-Canadian theatre. The play is presented by the author as a love letter to his parents. This comedy mainly revolves around the character of Appa, Mr. Kim, a jerk with a heart of gold who is obsessed with illegally parked Japanese cars for historical reasons, who tries to pressure his photographer daughter Janet into marrying and into taking over his store, and who has not seen his son Jung for sixteen years after they had a violent altercation. Most of the humour is derived from his quirky, childish stubbornness and poor command of the English language (try saying "Two popo [kisses], too many popo" without laughing). He is also celebrated for the sacrifices he made when he came to Canada and the energy he pours into his store. The play is also concerned with the relationships between the Korean Canadian and African Canadian communities; a Black entrepreneur offers to buy the store which leads to a turning point in the Kims' lives as Janet is reunited with her Black childhood crush Alex (now a police officer), and Appa is convinced that a Black man in a jean jacket is shoplifting and manhandles him. The play also focuses on the church, the risk to the convenience store from Big Business, and the small rituals involving everyday corporate products, such as drinking the sweetened milk of one's Frosted Flakes. Choi's play also has more character development than Highway's, leading to a very satisfying though somewhat conservative finale.

All in all, both plays feature endearing, memorable characters and focus on *métissage* and love. Despite their different forms, they

are both concerned with the everyday or mundane, and they offer compelling insights into what it means to be Canadian in today's multicultural society and into the varied possibilities of Canadian theatre.

Other Voices

Anne Compton
Alongside. Fitzhenry & Whiteside $14.95

Richard Greene
Dante's House. Signal $18.00

Stephen Scobie
At the Limit of Breath: Poems on the Films of Jean-Luc Godard. U of Alberta P $19.95

Reviewed by Chiara Falangola and Michael Meagher

Throughout the four parts of Anne Compton's *Alongside*, the reader witnesses the transfiguration of the emotional, intellectual, geographical, and seasonal realities of the poet-biographer and the poet-gardener. If the garden and library are "between the wild and domestic" ("Reading Around"), what seems to lie beyond life and death are the recurring italics—in dialogue with the vague "voice they have there" ("Bread")—speaking from and about both closer and more distant pasts. The ongoing conversation with the dead turns the poetical word into a reversed psychopomp instrument, not accompanying the beloved (the Poet) into the afterlife, but allowing these voices from the hereafter a trip back to presence and utterance. In *Alongside*, which seems to be a metaphor for presence, memory and language are superimposed, generating figures of what has passed. Compton's poetry as biography is a rewriting of life as cyclical time: the suggestion of an afterlife or a previous life conjoins the seasonal lives of the garden and the east coast.

The conventional diction, occasionally straddling the line between poetry and prose, and themes (love, nature, writing) remain fresh because of the poet's experimentation with form. In "The tree in winter," an unidentified tree is likened to a "sonnet without content." One of the shorter poems in the collection at twelve lines, it reads like a sonnet, each line containing between ten and twelve beats. "Waste Places," the final poem in *Alongside*, is a glossa, integrating a quatrain of lines from Canadian poet Don Domanski. Compton's ability to bring life to clichés is one of her greatest strengths. In "Seeing Things," the speaker's late lover is not an eye-opener, but an "opener-of-eyes"; in "Thank-you note after a morning visit," the tulips are "past-tense" rather than dead; and in "He was a beautiful man. What more needs to be said?" the speaker notes, "You were my South Shore and North Cape, / my East Point and West County lighthouse." Compton manages to precipitate a discourse between reader and poem with language that is accessible enough to fulfill the casual reader, yet demanding enough to beg a second and third reading.

In *Dante's House*—a collection of a dozen richly textured, visceral poems—Richard Greene is never far from the wheel. The first half of the book, containing eleven poems, takes on subjects such as the failing mental health of a mother, physical and psychological illness in a corrections facility, the social and economic devastation of Port-au-Prince following the 2010 earthquake, and, interestingly, a professional baseball game. Despite the apparent innocence of "Yankee Stadium," the narrator admits, "That night Mussina / pitched a sinker—just to remind us / of the human condition, I suppose."

While the titular piece, an epic-feeling narrative about a teacher-tourist in Italy coming to terms with a mother's death, is written in "approximated" *terza rima*. The first poems are written in free verse. They are no less in control—both because of temporal distance, as is the case in "Oils," a reflection about a mother who, after a troubling childhood, was "never / right afterwards, except perhaps in oils," and

because of a dream-like distance, indicative in the concluding lines of "A Moveable Feast" and "The Idea of Order at Port-au-Prince": "He yawns and walks towards / a tree at the pavement's edge, gazes up / into leaves, tugs at elastic, pees"; "The sole of one / bare foot is caked in dust, his elbow up, / knuckles in his hair. His eyes are closed."

The strict form of "Dante's House," a long poem in twenty-nine parts, successfully walks the thin line between emotional subtlety and melodrama. The narrator, an aging foreigner in Italy, says "Hours of walking tells more about my age / than Siena's" instead of transgressing into self-pity and sentimentality. Likewise, instead of being destroyed by familial disorder, the narrator is "saved by books / that taught me other ways to hope." Structured, rhythmical, impassioned: *Dante's House* is an impressive follow-up to 2009's *Boxing the Compass*.

Stephen Scobie's *At the Limit of Breath* is a personal literary homage to director Jean-Luc Godard's oeuvre. Following the chronological order of Godard's features, Scobie creates one poem for each movie, except for the title eponym, which opens and closes the book. Beginning with the epigraphs about self-reflexivity, Reverdy's "distant and true" image paradigm, and the love of quotations, the reader is thrown into a poetical experience in the tradition of Godardian aesthetics. Paratextual elements, including final notes by Scobie, make sure the reader is guided not only through the maze of quotes and references, but also through the poet's intentions and creative process.

Scobie captures Godard's poetry ("The haunted face of Simone Weil / in Tarantula lighting, / playing a mother carrying a child / on the Odessa Steps"—*Film Socialisme*), interprets his filmic elements ("Alpha Soixante (his ruined voice) / who is made of Time, / who is destroyed by Time"—*Alphaville*), and translates the volatile essence of a movie (*Pierrot le fou*) or scene ("What you believe in the long conversation, / Matisse and Renoir on the wall, the tiny room / filled by a bed and William Faulkner"—*À bout de souffle*). At times, the movies induce Scobie's own memories and ideas (the first *Bande à part* and the second *Masculin féminin*).

The collection is held together by a dense net of recurring motifs—both intertextual and infratextual: the limit of breath, the wide screen, the train crossing the Bir Hakeim bridge, the Lac Léman, the old ocean, the image distant and true, and the words "lie to me." The Godardian inspiration is not merely thematic, but the filmic style of the French *enfant terrible* also pervades the poetical structure in the two takes of *Le Livre de Marie* and in the montage technique in *Histoire(s) du cinéma. At the Limit of Breath* is a textual space where Godard's characters, places, images, and actors take on a Pirandellian existence, crossing borders of both poems and movies.

Healing Imagination

Beth Cuthand
Voices in the Waterfall. Theytus $14.95

AmberLee Kolson
Wings of Glass. Theytus $20.00

Lee Maracle
First Wives Club: Coast Salish Style.
Theytus $18.95

Reviewed by Madelaine Jacobs

Do excruciating efforts to bring about truth and reconciliation between Indigenous and settler peoples lack imagination? Beth Cuthand's *Voices in the Waterfall*, AmberLee Kolson's *Wings of Glass*, and Lee Maracle's *First Wives Club: Coast Salish Style* demonstrate that imagination is not frivolous. Rather, imagining is critical to understanding and fundamental to life. It offers hope for healing and restoration. Indigeneity must be respected with imagination because Indigenous identities do not lie imprisoned in fusty glass cases. Within the borders of

the Canadian state, Indigenous persons live and change even though they are not necessarily bound by its mapping.

Beth Cuthand is a Cree author, Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing, and Anglican minister. Cuthand's *Voices in the Waterfall* is a captivating collection of poetry with a dash of prose. In four parts, "Our Sacred Spaces," "Invasion," "Revolution," and "Return to Our Sacred Spaces," Cuthand shifts between blunt and enigmatic voices as individuals and communities grapple with pivotal choices. Although these voices have a predominantly feminine ring, masculine expressions are featured. The discovery of a page of Louis Riel's oration juxtaposed against the chorus of a lodge of Orangemen is stimulating. Cuthand also dedicates a poem to her dad, who admonishes her not to heed "people who / say the stories have to be told / exactly the way they're / given to you . . ." because "[t]hat rule was made for / Anthropologists / who didn't understand / the stories come from down here." Although people may engage new mediums and technologies, the "stories won't die. . . . As long as we tell them / they'll live." Cuthand's stories of the physical and existential journeys of families are simultaneously grounded, ingenious, and highly personal. Although some readers may find these stories shocking, Cuthand avoids titillation. Instead, she uses intimate pain as a tool to dig ferociously towards a common humanity that has the power to produce meaningful change. Stories of individuals as they interact in time, place, and community are told through a lens of indigeneity; however, this is a vast and living indigeneity, even as it brushes the history books.

In *Wings of Glass*, Chipewyan-Polish author and playwright AmberLee Kolson chronicles the daily life of an unnamed, depressed woman whose voice has been weighed down by her roles as wife and mother and by the childhood trauma that plagues her. The title is taken from the protagonist's observation of a mosquito, slapped and severed of its fine resilient wings, and her fantasy that these wings adhere to her body and allow her a flight of freedom. She and her siblings are orphaned and, after living with their grandparents for a time, they are sent to an orphanage. Her sense of identity warps when she is told that she was separated from her siblings and chosen for adoption because she had blond curls and was least phenotypically recognizable as half-Chipewyan. For the remainder of the woman's formative years, parent-child interactions are modified by the use of the word "adopted" as a slur. Alienation is intensified by the awareness that her tragedy is "common knowledge" even though she is not allowed to speak of it. In adulthood, the woman's propensity to burst into tears is associated with such childhood abuse and the realization that her adoptive mother enjoyed making her cry. The woman feels "pushed from behind . . . by some great black amorphous shape of such magnitude that [she] dared not look behind to see what it was." Perversely, this force from behind does not propel her forward but embeds her in depression. *Wings of Glass* culminates in a mystical encounter and astonishing surprise for the tortured woman as she vacillates between death by suicide and depressively slogging through life.

Lee Maracle is a renowned Stó:lō author, professor, and authority on Indigenous relationships with the Canadian state. Despite opening in a chatty voice absorbed in the topic of sex, Lee Maracle's *First Wives Club: Coast Salish Style* is probably not what most readers will envision as a glance takes them halfway through the complete title. Maracle tips the balance of this collection of ten short stories towards the latter half of the title. Perhaps it is a clue: a play on words, an invitation to imagination, and an indication of something beyond disastrous divorces of Mother Earth. The stories sound notes of weariness and frustration alongside

propitious tones as Maracle exercises voices that linger on the themes of sex, belonging, indigeneity, and gender. Maracle explores the ways in which sex is vital to human interaction while "permission, however, is structured by the social milieu from which we arise." Winking at the humorous impossibility of discussing sexuality without double entendre, Maracle employs sex as a device for examining the relationships between Indigenous and settler peoples in the lands that became Canada.

Cuthand's, Kolson's, and Maracle's works have a quality and relevance that preoccupies the imagination. Cuthand's volume is slim yet it has the capacity to consume time because it is so fertile. Spaces on the page are an important poetic mechanism because they guide rhythm and allow Cuthand's poems to be read in a variety of ways. *Voices in the Waterfall* will not grow old because it will be reread and reimagined. In its fantastical imaginative spirit, the delightful conclusion of Kolson's *Wings of Glass* could appear dismissive of the hard realities articulated on preceding pages. A western, quantitative, pseudo-scientific bias teaches that wondrous experiences are somehow less real and less useful in everyday life. There is a great deal to be learned from holistic, inclusive, Indigenous perspectives. It is not wise to discount the inexplicable. Kolson suggests recovery in her protagonist's painful path. For the woman, healing is found in fleeing the people and places that impose shrouds on Indigenous identity, returning to a place of belonging, reinvigorating long-suppressed connections, and restoring family. Likewise, Maracle's *First Wives Club* ends in a father picking up the bundle of a mother's dreams for her child. All three authors pursue hope and healing through imagination.

New Canadian Poetry

Dina Del Bucchia
Blind Items. Insomniac $16.95

Ann Shin
The Family China. Brick $20.00

Reviewed by Leah Horlick

Ann Shin's *The Family China* is a multilayered narrative of migration, settlement, and family in five suites—each delicately fragmented like the china doll on the book's cover. Beautifully formatted with space and air on the page, Shin's strength is in the shards of her line breaks and indentations, which break the tendency towards the prosaic: "That time is gone, / he is gone / and the world is not stopping / for the love of God." While larger poems wrestle with aging and coming-of-age, loss, and identity, Shin's language is at its most crisp and unforgettable in the series of footnote-like micropoems that hover throughout the text; this is Shin at her most condensed, sharp and immediate as she digs into the memories each word holds to present a prismatic definition: "legacy: the sound / of plates at our / wedding when the / sambuca shots / came out: to *life!* / crash! to *life!* / *thio* Marcel had / the wrong plates . . ." Within the larger narrative there are moments where language dips into the fantastical ("I'll add it to an armoire of lepidopterous dreams"). *The Family China* is at its most vibrant when the "jagged seams" are exposed, the words picked clean, and narrative smashed and reassembled in challenging new ways.

In Dina Del Bucchia's collection of "hypermodern confessional poems," our fascination with celebrities is exposed in all its seamy, fabulous glory. *Blind Items* is an irresistible reimagining of the tabloid world, a mash-up of sensational celebrity daydreams, sexploits, and cruel reality. Julia Roberts? "She's not even secretly mean." James Franco? "He sounds like a baby goat," the narrator assures us, the poetic

equivalent of that friend you always invite to the party even though you know she's lying—fabrications so good the truth doesn't matter. The blind items in this collection, poems where the narrator is truly obscure and the object of the celebrity obsession a mystery, act as a grounding point for the text—revealing the loneliness of fame, the banality of drama: "Who said she wished for a better place / to work on whom to hate?" The risks of this work are myriad given the ever-changing world of illusion and Hollywood; rather than dating itself, Del Bucchia's "Bill Cosby" poem in particular holds up after the terrifying reveal of his predatory behaviour. These poems are at their strongest when they brush up against that frightening possibility of realness, of childhood obsession and the truly nightmarish quality of celebrity worship: in "Courtney Love," the narrator's voice is particularly haunting: "I would have been okay to just huff gas in the corner of the garage, but instead she guides me, barefoot in Dior, through the dark." Reminiscent of the edgiest collusion of narrative, celebrity, and sex—Amber Tamblyn's "Bang Ditto" and Daphne Gottlieb's "Fucking Daphne" come to mind—*Blind Items* is a brilliant hallucination of entertainment, emotion, and excess, and the reader can't help but trust the narrator and dive right into the celebrity wreck.

Transcultural Identities

Anna Pia De Luca, ed.
Investigating Canadian Identities: 10th Anniversary Contributions. Forum Editrice $25.65

Nora Tunkel
Transcultural Imaginaries: History and Globalization in Contemporary Canadian Literature. Universitätsverlag Winter $59.95

Reviewed by Tina Northrup

The University of Udine established its Centre for Canadian Culture in 1998, and between 2008 and 2009 it celebrated that Centre's tenth anniversary with a series of visits from scholars and artists. Their readings and lectures have been printed together in *Investigating Canadian Identities: 10th Anniversary Contributions*: a heterogeneous collection with contents ranging in subject matter from the perspectives of minority writers in Canada during the "race for theory," to Canada's interventions in Haiti since 2004, the ethics of embellishment in memoir-writing, the legacy of painter Albert Chiarandini, and the works of Margaret Atwood, George Elliott Clarke, Janice Kulyk Keefer, and Armand Garnet Ruffo.

Taken as a whole, the collection is a pleasant piece of memorabilia: one that may be of most interest to those who contributed to the Centre's anniversary series. Taken individually, its contents will be useful variously to those who are interested in the works of those writers mentioned above. In this regard, readers of Kulyk Keefer's works may find the collection particularly helpful, as it includes a lengthy interview between Kulyk Keefer and Deborah Saidero, as well as a selection of Kulyk Keefer's poems translated from English to Italian by Francesca Romana Paci, and an essay by Paci on the demands of translating Kulyk Keefer's award-winning suite "Isle of Demons."

In her introduction to the collection, Anna Pia De Luca writes warmly of the progress made in multicultural Canada

since the 1980s, and argues that "today many novelists and artists have re-appropriated an autochthonous space in Canada where they can narrate their history of initial displacement and marginalization in order to reclaim their cultural heritage and past." Although this characterization of "autochthonous space" is troubled by some of the collection's contents—most notably an essay by Nduka Otiono on Ruffo's *Grey Owl: The Mystery of Archie Belaney*, and another by Linda Hutcheon and Michael Hutcheon on Clarke's *Beatrice Chancy* and *Québécité*—De Luca's enthusiasm for "transcultural and postnational identity" glosses over the matter of Indigenous resistance and sovereignty too easily. This makes for a fraught entrance into a collection that aims to recognize and celebrate contributions made by diasporic peoples to Canadian society, but does not consistently consider those contributions in relation to Indigenous peoples' prior presence and contemporary claims.

Nora Tunkel's *Transcultural Imaginaries: History and Globalization in Contemporary Canadian Literature* is similarly inconsistent in this regard. The study makes a productive intervention into scholarship on historical fictions in Canada, which Tunkel argues are insufficiently understood through the lenses of postmodernism and postcolonialism, and must be considered in light of globalization and its socio-cultural effects. Tunkel finds contemporary discourses of transculturalism to be promising extensions of the discourses of both interculturalism and multiculturalism, both of which seem to envision cultural diversity as a "side-by-sideness" of "separate components." Transculturalism, on the other hand, "acknowledges difference and at the same time lays stronger emphasis on complex cultural interactions and the resulting hybridizations."

Tunkel's argument that transculturalism offers a better understanding of globalized identities is largely persuasive, but her commentary also suggests that it can only thrive in situations of social equality. Her analysis of the impossibility of transcultural dialogue between racialized and disenfranchised peoples and those who benefit from the white supremacist state in Clarke's *George and Rue* provides a telling case study in this regard, and so it comes as something of a surprise that her positioning of Indigenous writers in relation to her vision of "transcultural imaginaries" is relatively cursory until almost the end of the book, where she at last addresses how the threats of cultural genocide or assimilation might factor into their engagement with discourses of transculturalism, and with the genre of historical fiction as well.

However unfair it may be to judge two books against one that had not yet appeared at the time of writing, *Investigating Canadian Identities* and *Transcultural Imaginaries* both left me wishing for the kinds of sustained, nuanced considerations of immigration, diaspora, transculturalism, and Indigeneity that appear in *Cultivating Canada: Reconciliation through the Lens of Cultural Diversity*: the final volume of the research series produced by the Aboriginal Healing Foundation for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Both books have much to offer their readers, but their claims to transcultural identities ought to be considered in light of other claims as well.

The Collaborative Vision

David Dowker and Christine Stewart
Virtualis: Topologies of the Unreal.
BookThug $18.00

Chus Pato; Erín Moure, trans.
Hordes of Writing. Buschek $17.95

Lola Lemire Tostevin
Singed Wings. Talonbooks $16.95

Reviewed by Douglas Barbour

Collaboration can take many forms. In two of these books, two writers work together in various ways, but all five writers know full well that they collaborate with historical texts whenever they set out to write; in that sense we all always already collaborate with our literary past.

We all owe a great debt to Erín Moure for learning Galician and translating Chus Pato's genre-bending works into English, to, as Moure suggests, discomfit and exhilarate the literature of Canada, not to mention the UK, the US, and the whole English-speaking world. Call *Hordes of Writing* poetry, perhaps poetics, or a mash-up of all genres—fiction, essay, memoir; no, just call it writing. It's certainly skittish, changeable, shifty, and, despite its deliberate refusal of the conventions of all these forms, *Hordes of Writing* is also mesmerizing (as Pato says, "The horde is the perfect mode of human relation because it is the perfect protective space for human beings, like the mother's womb. It also makes us think of constant movement, of mobility like the barbarians had, with their absolute freedom."). It demands the reader's constant attention or s/he'll be thrown off.

There's an author, a narrator, and "characters" (so deliberately "thin"), more than one "I," and figures so to speak of speech speechifying throughout. The text continually interrogates the concepts of "I" and of character, yet even in their minimal presence these figures compel. Galician history, geography, and culture lie at the heart of this horde, yet it restlessly rides (and writes) its way into other histories, the abysms of human cruelty both political and personal. Although never at ease, readers will find themselves pulled ever deeper into this text by its precision, dark humour, and visionary humanity.

In *Virtualis: Topologies of the Unreal*, the two writers collaborate with each other as well as the texts they acknowledge and the texts they do not. Like all the best collaborations, this highly complicated arrangement makes it difficult if not impossible to figure out who wrote what.

Each section begins with a poem that takes off from both its title and a quotation from a poetic theorist such as Giorgio Agamben, Paul Celan, Gilles Deleuze. Within that poem at least one highlighted phrase serves as the title of a following poem, containing at least one highlighted phrase, and so on. It seems that Dowker and Stewart are taking turns. This allows for both a give-and-take of imagery, metaphor, pun, concept, etc., as well as a wide range of forms. As *Virtualis* investigates the topologies of the contemporary baroque topographies found only in the virtual worlds of the Internet, and always, therefore, quoted in some manner, it reveals an often savage, wonkily academic wit.

Throughout, "the inadvertent curvature of the argument" allows for a wide, and wild, exploration of the melancholic/ecstatic body, which "is plural, / a congeries / of metamorphoses / —its engine / is difference, its dermis / absurd — a hinged incidence / in a terminal display." That final line beautifully exemplifies the way these writers double down on possible meanings, leaving everything carefully ambivalent.

A poem lacking highlights demonstrates how the whole works, with internal rhyme, punning, sly metaphors representing something of the complete text:

> By all means let polar opposites repose,
> transfixed contraries so disposed.
> These flowers of delirium blossom

> in that aporia, a frenzied catatonia
> or raving calyx array, a mutant line
> to a smooth space engendered,
> the implicit lucidity of the body
> in the near fields of the unreal.

Virtualis: Topologies of the Unreal challenges and delights equally.

On one level, Lola Lemire Tostevin's *Singed Wings* offers a wildly ekphrastic homage to a number of her female artistic forebears. On another level, it's a wise and often witty excursus into the realm of aging, a song of the elder self, as the epigraph from Agnès Varda implies: "I play the role of a pudgy and chatty little old lady." But the chats have teeth. And most of her collaborators are those other artists, whose works and words inspire and enter her own writing.

In "The Daughters of Necessity," she converses with Camille Claudel, Louise Bourgeois, and Betty Goodwin, all visual artists who managed, often against great odds, to put something of their own feminine vision into visual/material form: "What is given to see is given to touch"—a core concept of this poem sequence. In the case of Claudel, something put her "out of touch . . . / Losing touch as a little insane / But not too much / Just a touch." Except it was too much, finally, her "only failing / . . . never carving a change of heart." Bourgeois on the other hand lived long, and in her art "doesn't recreate the way she lived / She lives the way she recreates." The poem celebrates Bourgeois doing, undoing, and redoing, throughout a long life of engagement. This is also true of Betty Goodwin, who "folds, unfolds, refolds" all those "Double helices of replication // The paradox of lives held / Between / *Hier-* / *Aujourd'hui*."

A few examples give a sense of the complex metaphysical chats all the poems in *Singed Wings* offer: "XVI Philippics / After Cicero" takes on old age as he did, but does so through engaging Varda and Hannah Arendt: the poem casts a cold, hard, and very honest eye on aging. "Punctum," on the other hand, recalls, through near matching photographs of her grandson and her younger self, something of the child's visionary encounter with the world. "Singed Wings" finds inspiration in the writings of Marguerite Duras, who could never not write. Duras, and Tostevin by implication, understand that "[t]he ransom of formalism / Is the permission to love and live / Still." "Lichens" returns to Ontario wilderness, and "La Fiesta de los Muertos" celebrates the pain-full art of Frida Kahlo, whose self-portraits make her viewers "point of view her point of view / Accomplices, each on a half-footing // What I take away are not self-portraits / Of la mestizo but a space / Where I am left standing." Which is what *Singed Wings* offers its readers.

The Poetics of Everyday Life

Glen Downie
Monkey Soap. Mansfield $17.00

Sonja Ruth Greckol
Skein of Days. Pedlar $20.00

Luann Hiebert
What Lies Behind. Turnstone $17.00

Reviewed by Kit Dobson

These three recent books of poetry attest to the range and diversity of works that are being published across the country by both new and more established authors. Glen Downie's *Monkey Soap*, Sonja Ruth Greckol's *Skein of Days*, and Luann Hiebert's *What Lies Behind* work across and between found, procedural, and lyrical modes in order to display the possibilities of the poetic form.

Glen Downie's *Monkey Soap* is a book that mines its material from a series of out-of-date, how-to and fashion books, as well as noir films. It builds on Downie's previous titles, such as his 2008 Toronto Book Award-winning *Loyalty Management* and 2011's *Local News*. The title comes from a

recipe found by Downie for a household produce that he states, "includes no monkeys among its ingredients" and whose "efficacy in washing monkeys" he is unable to "vouch for." The book manages to uncover surprising poetry in what would otherwise be relatively banal material. For instance, the poem "The Wild Grain" notes, with deceptive simplicity, that

> Anyone who has had anything to do
> in the last 15 years
> can hardly have escaped
>
> contact
> with plywood
>
> But many persons know
> very little about it[.]

The poems of *Monkey Soap*, in other words, work across the everyday and the bizarre, finding poetry in places we might not expect. The everyday world reveals important questions and answers that move from the quotidian toward the existential, and, as the book ends with a woman who "was once kind enough / to mourn" the speaker's death, even though it ended up being an "occasion" that "was / fortunately // a false alarm," we see a poetic practice that builds upon the scraps of daily life to uncover broader questions.

Similarly, Sonja Greckol, in *Skein of Days*, uses archival newspaper research in order to construct an image not only of the poet's life through headlines, but also of the ways in which life proceeds over the second half of the twentieth-century and into the twenty-first. This book builds on her previous *Gravity Matters* and displays a strong command of its material. Greckol searches for and remixes material from headlines in key periodicals on dates near to her own birthday each year, and sets it alongside snatches of then-popular songs and lines from each year's Governor General's Award-winning book of poetry. Each year produces a poem as a result; for 1969, for instance, we read:

> comets and petroleum transverse optical
> lattice scared claw
> or suddenly velvet returns to bug and
> prod Edmonton refinery of $85
> million rising to bad moon Aquarius
>
> *Now we are here and because we*
> *are short of time*
> *I will say it; I might even speak*
> *its name.*
> *—Gwendolyn MacEwen*

The effect is jarring, yet at the same time curiously melodic; the cacophony of the competing voices that we encounter in every year makes way for a settled voice that demonstrates that these unsettling rhythms are simply the poetics of the world. People die, suffer, and debate endlessly in the headlines of Greckol's book, yet, as we hear in the poem "Small Matters Still Matter," "small things thing / up into / large, complex like us" and, ultimately, "still matter." The minutiae matter, profoundly so, and become the hum according to which the days assemble themselves over a long enough timeline.

Finally, Luann Hiebert's *What Lies Behind* is a strong debut volume of lyric poetry that meditates on the middle of life from a prairie landscape. Hiebert's verse is at its strongest when she uncovers puns in the language that she playfully breaks apart, as in "meno madness":

> how do you do
> meno pause your imbalance
> hormones all heyday
> fight
> to con troll the game
> live play
> m-bodied craze

Hiebert's book plays with the line and with language at the same time as it traverses questions of love, loss, the natural world of the prairie, and the haunting calls of trains on tracks that "race on relentless==just beyond reach." It is welcome as a debut

book that provides glimpses into an order that seeks quiet in between the eruptions of the everyday world.

Distortion of Perception

Stan Dragland
Deep Too. BookThug $12.00

Don McKay
The Shell of the Tortoise: Four Essays & an Assemblage. Gaspereau $25.95

Reviewed by Alexandra Gilbert

Don McKay's *The Shell of the Tortoise: Four Essays & an Assemblage* is a collection of his own essays on Canadian nature poetry. McKay delves into a number of concepts that explain, but also further problematize, the human relatonship with nature. In "Ediacarian and Anthropocene: Poetry as a Reader of Deep Time" McKay discusses the concept of the Anthropocene epoch, a recently-conceptualized era in geologic time that is characterized by the impact of human activity on the earth. He goes on to discuss the problematics of colonialism in "Great Flint Singing: Reflections on Canadian Nature Poetries." At midpoint is "The Muskwa Assemblage," a collection of poetry and prose pieces: "a work of art consisting of miscellaneous objects brought into relation." "From Here to Infinity (or so)" is a meditation on place, citing that the concept of place is an "unresolved issue" for, well, almost everyone. "The Shell and the Tortoise" is about hubris, especially McKay's own, as he says, in relation to the natural world.

In reading these essays, it is evident that McKay is exploring topics he has been thinking about for a long time, especially if one considers his deep consideration of ecology and landscape in previous works such as *Strike/Slip* and *Songs for the Songs of Birds*. However, this largely non-fiction collection does not hold together well in a couple of ways. In his discussion of Dennis Lee's poetics, McKay argues that "poetry might exceed the boundaries of craft and even art to become a practice." McKay's point is valid in the context of *The Shell of the Tortoise*: the overall theme of this collection of essays is that poetry has the potential to provide a way of seeing that might open up new possibilities in the way we perceive ourselves in relation to the natural world. But this interesting point is lost in a writing style that comes across as pushy. McKay seems to want to tell the reader what to think rather than share some of his insights and let the reader decide for themselves. Part of this tendency occurs in McKay's excessive adjective usage. Apparently, Alexander McLachlan made a "wonderfully egregious error" in his poem "The Emigrant." The second is an accusatory tone towards anyone who is not up to McKay's standards, such as those who lack an immediate appreciation of North American birdsong or an extensive knowledge of bird nomenclature. Third is the "For Further Study" list, which comes across as pedantic.

Stan Dragland, on the other hand, accomplishes something in *Deep Too* that combines, in my view, the best aspects of literary criticism and the development of self and cultural awareness. *Deep Too* is a collection of jokes, anecdotes, spam emails, photos, graffitti, limericks, etc. that range from the hilarious to the disturbing. The overall questions this book asks are: why do we, as a culture, have an ongoing obsession with the penis, especially with its relative size? Why is humour about the male member so grotesque? After reading *Deep Too*, my questions expand on these: why does such humour include representations of lascivious women, such as in the limerick, "There Once was a Lady from Twickenham," and why is the female voice appropriated in this way? Dragland presents this series of meditations on the penis joke in a way that elicits, in me anyway, uncomfortable yet amazed laughter, which is then transformed into meaningful dialogue.

In early March 2014, I had the opportunity to host a reading of *Deep Too* at Memorial University of Newfoundland. Dragland explicated each piece with the same humour and inquisitiveness which inspired its compilation, bringing difficult subject matter to light. *Deep Too* is especially relevant in the context of masculinity studies, an area of study that is gaining strength as we explore in detail how masculinity is culturally constructed, the ways in which it is problematic, and how it distorts our perceptions of femininity.

I like *Deep Too*. I enjoyed being presented with difficult, even perverse subject matter and coming out feeling fuller and more human at the end of it. I want to like *The Shell of the Tortoise*. McKay discusses a number of texts that I am very close to. I would probably really like this book if McKay spent more time showing and less time telling, mostly because I prefer to draw my own conclusions rather than being told what to think.

Screaming at the Rafters

David Fennario
Bolsheviki. Talonbooks $16.95

Oscar Ryan, Edward Cecil-Smith, Frank Love, and Mildred Goldberg; Alan Filewod, ed.
Eight Men Speak. U of Ottawa P $18.95

George F. Walker
King of Thieves. Talonbooks $17.95

Reviewed by Niall McArdle

Political drama can be a difficult thing. For every masterpiece of theatrical agitprop that puts the audience into a state of agitation or fires up a crowd into revolutionary spirit, there is a dreary, hectoring piece of nonsense that is usually—thankfully—forgotten. Brecht's *The Threepenny Opera* is revived every couple of years, but Howard Brenton's anti-imperial *The Romans in Britain,* for instance, is not known much outside academic circles.

A similar fate could have befallen *Eight Men Speak*, if not for Alan Filewod. A professor of Theatre Studies at the University of Guelph, Filewod has done an exceptional job of rescuing and editing a forgotten Canadian play, Oscar Ryan's 1933 political drama, which was staged only once, and which has the dubious distinction of being the only play banned in Canada for political reasons.

Written in support of Communist Party leader Tim Buck, who at the time was imprisoned in Kingston Penitentiary, the play is, in Filewod's words "at once a play, a Communist Party leadership pageant and a political campaign; a text and a text event." Ryan (a contributor to the *Daily Worker*, and later Tim Buck's biographer) and his three collaborators wrote a six-act drama for the Progressive Arts Club that incorporated avant-garde staging, music, and propaganda. On its first and last night at Toronto's Standard Theatre, the audience booed when the orchestra played "God Save the King," but cheered when "The Internationale" was performed. The reviews were mixed. *The Varsity* commented that "dramatically it was patchy, hit and miss and in many cases it relied on melodramatic tricks and parlour stunts for effects." The *Toronto Daily Star*'s review focused on the audience reaction rather on than the play itself. *The Worker* predictably declared it "an outstanding success."

Eighty years later, it is perhaps difficult to see what all the fuss was about. It isn't a great piece of theatre; it's too didactic and simple-minded, but it must have scared a lot of people. Set around the events of the Kingston Penitentiary riot in 1932 and the attempted murder in his cell of Tim Buck, the drama is one-sided in its view of history, even as it attempts to give a broad cross-section of reaction to the riot from all levels of society across the country. There are few real characters per se; instead Ryan and his co-writers used types to represent the proletariat, the middle class, the capitalist, and so

on. Scenes are short and highly populated (there are over forty speaking parts). Staging techniques include projectors, stark lighting, spare sets, voices from the wings, music, song, and whatever else the authors could think up to alienate or agitate the audience.

Filewod's excellent edition from the University of Ottawa Press includes the text of the play in full, as well as dossiers, reviews, and reports on its ban, in addition to a detailed background to the play, the Communist Party in Canada, and the Leftist arts scene in the 1930s. *Eight Men Speak* is an important text in the development of Canadian drama, and Filewod has edited what will be the definitive edition for many years to come.

Filewod provides extensive footnotes to *Eight Men Speak*. Similarly, David Fennario has included explanatory notes to *Bolsheviki*, his one-man satirical-revisionist take on Canada's role in World War I. Part invective against militarism, part anti-imperialist rant, part foul-mouthed diatribe against some cherished values, the piece must be an actor's dream, affording a performer the opportunity to mimic a variety of voices, to sing, to joke, to bluster, and to chew the scenery with aplomb. On Remembrance Day in Montreal in 1977, veteran Harry "Rosie" Rollins sits and drinks with a young reporter, telling tales from the trenches, many of which are of the sort that do not get written about in official histories of the war.

Rollins recalls the carnage and the bloodied bodies and the shell shock, all of which is familiar territory of course, but he also recounts the fates of Canadian soldiers who deserted and who made unofficial truces with the Germans. *Bolsheviki* is trenchant and loud; it makes unsubtle points about war, but it deserves a staging, if only to see Canadian audiences bristle at its more uncomfortable shock moments.

There are similarly unsubtle points about capitalism and criminality in George F. Walker's *King of Thieves*. Suggested by John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera*, and set in New York just prior to the Crash of 1929, this is a play that tars crooks and capitalists with the same brush, and it has an unoriginal premise: bankers are bad. It is part scatological cabaret, part gangster melodrama, part political satire, but wholly uninteresting.

S/Tex(t)ual Transgression

Bennett Yu-Hsiang Fu

Transgressive Transcripts: Gender and Sexuality in Contemporary Chinese Canadian Women's Writing. Rodopi $50.98

Reviewed by Ziyan Yang

In *Transgressive Transcripts*, Bennett Yu-Hsiang Fu studies how four Chinese Canadian women writers—namely SKY Lee, Larissa Lai, Lydia Kwa, and Evelyn Lau—develop "hidden transcripts" as "offstage speeches, gestures, and practices" to resist and undermine public discourses of domination. By highlighting the interplay between sexuality, textuality, and ethnicity, Fu argues that their writings, while questioning common stereotypes related to Asian women in North America, promote "culturally heterogeneous, racially hybrid, and historically and genealogically inclusive visions" of Chinese Canadian womanhood.

Inspired by Foucault's theory of sexuality, Fu's book relies on the works of North American and Western European feminist theoreticians such as Elizabeth Grosz, Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, and Judith Butler. The theoretical insights of some Asian American and Canadian critics including Rey Chow, Lisa Lowe, David Eng, and Eleanor Ty, among others, are also incorporated in this focus on diverse sexualities as a transgressive way for Chinese Canadian women to articulate their agency and subjectivity.

Fu's work is divided into four chapters, each dealing with one writer and the specificity of her "transgressive transcript." The first chapter, based on SKY Lee's

multi-generational family saga *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, examines a certain "spatial transgression" in which four generations of women negotiate their subjectivity between fixation and mobility. According to Fu, space is a "crucial factor in the social production of sexed corporeality." The trope of displacement, in Lee's novel, participates in the redefinition of Chinese Canadian women's sexuality and subjectivity. By reconceptualizing migrant movement in terms of sexuality, Fu contends that the heroines' transgression of boundaries defined by race, class, lineage, and gender challenges the cultural domination by race and sexuality imposed by the Chinese and the Canadian communities, both obsessed with racial purity. Therefore, "Lee's contestation of homogenizing and authenticating Chinese Canadianness (or Canadian Chineseness) within a patriarchal, heterosexual definition" suggests "a new Chinese Canadian sexual, racial subjectivity" defined henceforth by "heterogeneity, hybridity, and multiplicity."

In Chapter Two, Fu describes the transgression in Larissa Lai's novel *When Fox Is a Thousand* as a "morphological" one. The interweaving of three narrative voices—the fox spirit, the ninth century Chinese poetess Yu Hsuan-Chi, and a young Chinese Canadian woman named Artemis Wong—presents various forms of boundary-crossing: shape-shifting, naming and name-changing, transvestism and cross-dressing, doubles and doubling, and so forth. Lai's use of Chinese and Western histories as well as various cultural sources places the novel within different intertexts and multiple territories, defined by "mythology, history, and geographical reality." Fu employs Elizabeth Ammons' notion of the trickster to analyze these transgressive practices and indicates that such "cross-cultural, -racial, -sexual, -gender identifications" create "a female intersubjective paradigm." This intersubjective paradigm perceives the body as "proliferating, fluid constructions," stresses "multi-voiced interpretations of History," and promotes the collaboration of multiple women's voices and narratives to achieve a multidimensional subjectivity.

In the third chapter, Fu provides a reading of Lydia Kwa's debut novel *This Place Called Absence* through Julia Kristeva's notion of abject(ion). Associating abject(ion) with displacement, in-betweenness, and blurred boundaries, Fu considers Kwa's representation of lesbianism as a resistance to "the dominant masculinist positions in the field of Chinese American studies." By merging four female voices—mother, daughter, and two prostitutes—into the narrative, Kwa creates a "utopic lesbian site" where prohibited female desire is fully voiced, and lesbian subjectivity is constructed by subverting the patriarchal law and breaking temporal and spatial barriers.

Two autobiographical texts by Evelyn Lau, *Diary of a Street Kid* and *Inside Out: Reflections on a Life So Far*, are examined in the fourth chapter to illustrate what Fu calls a "hypersexual transcript." Focusing on two deviant representations, the motifs of the runaway and prostitution, Fu demonstrates how deviance "as a borderland, a liminal space" offers a terrain for Lau to "distance herself as a deviant subject (prostitute and drug addict) from the rest of the model minority community." Her writing, shifting between "inplacement (belonging) and displacement (marginalized), between the Freudian homely (*das Heimliche*) and unhomely (*das Unheimliche*)," resists "hegemonic cultural discourses imposed by both patriarchal Chinese and Canadian imperatives."

According to Fu, the four writers studied in his book demonstrate their own way to "construct a utopic sexual site through their textual productions." Their writings serve "as the basis for developing a new feminist praxis that articulates the ways in which (in)visibility, otherness, bonding,

and stigma are reproduced on Chinese Canadian women's bodies." Hence, their "hidden transcript," disclosed in transgressive ways, becomes "public transcript." Fu's book addresses important issues in the history of Chinese Canadian women's writing and opens up new areas for future research.

Voices Through Time

Gary Geddes
What Does A House Want?: Selected Poems.
Red Hen $19.95

Anne Szumigalski; Mark Abley, ed.
A Woman Clothed in Words. Coteau $16.95

Reviewed by Angelika Maeser Lemieux

Gary Geddes' recent selection of poems written between 1971 and 2014 is an eclectic mix that will be an excellent introduction to his work for a new audience and a confirmation to those already familiar with his oeuvre of his formidable gifts. Fifty-seven poems are grouped into nine sections, each introduced by an epigraph, while endnotes provide historical context. Their arrangement is by subject and theme, and the topics covered are wide-ranging, embracing the public and private, the personal and political domains; for Geddes, these binaries are not oppositional but complementary facets of his life and craft, inseparable spheres of human self-discovery and a search for truth through experience and language. In "Last Canto" he advises us to forget "dicta" and to simply "listen to the poems" because they are "wiser and more truthful than the poets":

> Remember the ideogram
> from the Chinese
> the one representing truth
> which shows a man
> standing beside his word.
> Nothing more.

And listen he does—always to the voices of humans who have struggled in their historical contingency. As we enter Geddes' house of language, we find there a welcoming space of intimacy and empathy, providing a meaningful encounter with many personalities from times between the Neolithic to the contemporary, and from places around the world to a city or farm in Canada. Geddes' skillful use of the lyric, dramatic, and narrative styles is ably demonstrated both in the shorter and longer poems, giving us the multiple voices of the victims of the collapse of the Second Narrows Bridge (1958), Trotsky, Chinese figurines, Palestinians, Latinos, or Gaelic ancestors.

He feels compelled to resuscitate them—"Midnight, my ghosts are restless, demanding answers."—but sometimes "The dead refused to talk." Language ceases in the face of great grief: "My bag of tricks was empty; my hat delivered only dead birds." He pays careful attention to the minute detail—the twitching mouse's tail—and to the larger movements of history as well as to the ubiquity of violence and death in unexpected moments. His historical subject is the common person whose diction he articulates in direct, colloquial, sometimes raw, and humorous tones. Although he rejects the "Neoclassical" and the Wordsworthian "sublime" style, Geddes nevertheless reveals a Romantic residue in his choice of speakers, elevating ordinary working people and their struggles to a level of simple nobility that arouses respect and recognition. The revolutionary impetus blazes still in his verse: "Clean the barrel of each sentence, / keep dry the magazine of words." In Geddes' house built of words, honed with poetic skill, the reader finds solidarity with the "Other" but experiences vulnerability and finitude in the disruption and death that are ever near.

A Woman Clothed in Words is a collection of the late Anne Szumigalski's poetry, prose, liturgical, and theatrical works (some of them previously published and performed, others incomplete), selected and edited by Mark Abley. The collection is arranged

chronologically in three parts dating from 1960 to 1999. An introduction, biographical and publishing notes frame this book intended for a non-academic audience.

The book is a gateway into the realm of the Goddess whence Szumigalski's creations emerge. Rhythm and image predate the word. She speculates that "pre-languages influenced the later spoken ones" and that their traces in ideograms reveal a lost evolutionary past: "We are all of us longing for Africa though we don't know it."

"Untitled," an early poem in which the Old Woman/Nature enters into Adam to make herself intimately known, reverberates in the later story, "A State of Grace," which associates childhood with the birth of stories. In the uterine state—"in the darkness between two worlds"—the stories already exist, and Old Woman later allows Nancy to touch Her mystery: "Now and then the Old Woman took my hand and let me feel in her basket."

Similar pieces ("The Child is Mother of the Woman," "The Story of the Heartberry," "Litany of the Bagladies," "Prairie Mass," "Golden Rat") probe the proximity of children, crones, and animals to the sacred. Many of her poems communicate spiritual mysteries through nature imagery. Szumigalski's traumatic wartime memories are exorcised in "Three Women at the End of the World" and in "Carrying the Stone" by voicing women's pain: "Carrying children, carrying water, carrying burdens almost too great to bear. Carrying stones." The poet-psychopomp has led us on a "pilgrimage" to the darkest places in the psyche where the Goddess dwells.

Transformations

Thomas Gerry
The Emblems of James Reaney.
Porcupine's Quill $22.95

Jenn Stephenson
Performing Autobiography: Contemporary Canadian Drama. U of Toronto P $45.00

Reviewed by Jerry Wasserman

These two studies overlap a little in their concern with Canadian drama, although *The Emblems of James Reaney* spends much more time on Reaney's poetry and symbol systems than on his plays. One book's argument is broadly political and the other's metaphysical, but both Jenn Stephenson and Thomas Gerry argue the virtues of authorial approaches that allow for transformation and revitalization.

Stephenson's *Performing Autobiography* won the Canadian Association for Theatre Research's Ann Saddlemyer Award for best book on Canadian theatre in 2013, and its virtues are many. Stephenson examines nine contemporary Canadian plays as case studies to illustrate how characters performing what she calls "the looping autobiographical act of self-storying" give themselves the chance to remake their identity "and write a new future or magically even a new past." In that sense, she argues, "autobiography is a uniquely powerful political act." Uninterested in the way these plays might dramatize the autobiographies of their playwrights, she focuses on what she calls meta-autobiography: the journeys and discoveries of fictional characters in fictive theatrical worlds.

Stephenson creates a useful schema for distinguishing among the "nested worlds" in which the autobiographical play transpires. The autobiographical protagonist occupies "world^{a}," autobiographical narrator "world^{b}," and autobiographical character "world^{c}"—although all three are aspects of the same self. Involving movement across these and

other worlds, autobiographical performance is further complicated by the actors' real-world bodies; in the case of Ronnie Burkett's *Billy Twinkle*, the real-world bodies of the living actor and his puppets.

Exploring the rich complexities of very fine plays like Burkett's *Billy Twinkle: Requiem for a Golden Boy*, Judith Thompson's *Perfect Pie*, Michael Healey's *The Drawer Boy*, and Daniel MacIvor's *In On It*, Stephenson's detailed textual explications showcase the theatrical intelligence of the playwrights and their works while supporting her thesis about the regenerative capacity of autobiographical theatre. Even in these cases her analysis sometimes risks being bogged down in an inelegant algebraic density ("work done by the world[c] narrator changes the world[d] protagonist but also by extension the world[b] itself"), which can dull her reader's aesthetic feel for the play, especially if one hasn't seen or read it. This is especially evident with the weaker plays in her study. Michael Redhill's *Goodness*, Anton Piatigorsky's *Eternal Hydra*, and Timothy Findley's *Shadows* all suffer from an excess of cleverness that Stephenson insists on tracing in sometimes minute detail. But she is also able to extract valuable, even startling insights about theatrical narration, the use of props, and "reiteration as creation" among other things. There is great pleasure in following the path of her keen intellect.

Stephenson concludes with brief, cogent analyses of Michel Marc Bouchard's *Written on Water* and Wajdi Mouawad's *Scorched*. The characters in these plays, she argues, suffer from "too much autobiography," trapping themselves in their own narratives. They are the limit cases that underline the political potency of those other autobiographical performances that allow the crafting of a reimagined life, if not the literal reliving of it.

The Emblems of James Reaney explicates the symbol systems through which Reaney advocated metaphysical transformations in ten visual/verbal emblems he published in the magazines *Poetry* and *Armadillo* in 1969-70. Gerry offers analyses of each emblem in conjunction with specific examples of Reaney's other work that they illuminate. These include the plays *One-Man Masque* and *Listen to the Wind*, the poetry collection *A Suit of Nettles*, the opera *Taptoo!*, individual poems such as "To Bishop Berkeley" and "Granny Crack," as well as three fine Reaney paintings. The breadth of Reaney's artistry and talent is impressive and its theme consistent: to help us to see the world afresh and bring about spiritual renewal.

To unravel the puzzles of the emblems and interpret their arcane symbolism, Gerry filters them through the lenses of Edmund Spenser and William Butler Yeats (the subjects of Reaney's doctoral dissertation), Northrop Frye, William Blake, and Carl Jung. The emphasis on Frygean readings, especially, gives the book an old-fashioned feel, though Reaney was no doubt heavily influenced by Blake, the bible, and other mythopoeic systems privileged by Frye, his teacher and supervisor at University of Toronto. Gerry, who was Reaney's doctoral student, shares his master's appreciation of symbology, but his interpretations are sometimes excessively literal and not always convincing.

The emblems themselves are fascinating: squares and circles, pyramids and spirals, perhaps some trees, a cross, a heart, arranged in significant patterns across the page, interacting with text. Like the worlds of autobiographical drama, they promote second chances, in Reaney's work not just for individuals but for humankind itself.

Death, Limitation, and Gender

David Gilmour
Extraordinary. HarperCollins Canada $23.99

Michel Tremblay; Sheila Fischman, trans.
Crossing the Continent. Talonbooks $18.95

Reviewed by Justin Shaw

Terry Eagleton suggests that "the self-giving of friendship is a kind of *petit mort*, an act with the inner structure of dying." Likewise, death has been figuratively understood as the social or institutional limits imposed on a life trajectory. In this regard, when death itself becomes imminent, it forces us to reckon with how we negotiated these limits, and whether we in turn imposed limits upon others, or chose instead the self-giving of friendship. Both Michel Tremblay's *Crossing the Continent* (2011) and David Gilmour's *Extraordinary* (2013) explore the effects of gendered limitation on two Canadian women, the former tracing the coming of age and into femininity of a girl from rural Saskatchewan in the early twentieth century, while the latter depicts the final evening of a wheelchair-bound woman who reflects upon the impediments that have shaped her life and her decision to commit suicide. In their encounters with gendered limitation, these characters learn to reconcile death with a meaningful life.

In Tremblay's novel, Rhéauna's life with her grandparents and sisters is disrupted when her estranged mother requests that her daughters live with her in Montreal. Rhéauna's departure from the rural idyll of her childhood is likened to death: "She thought about dying or, rather, that's what death was: a definitive departure for an unknown destination." This departure marks the death of Rhéauna's small town innocence, even though the rural prairies are revealed to have their own dark history of European imperialism, including the expulsion of the Cree. Rhéauna will come to critique related notions of "civilization" and "progress" in the urban lifestyle of her relatives on her trip to Montreal.

Generally, Tremblay's novel unfolds through Rhéauna's point of view, which is filtered through the traditional lenses of her elders. This world view proves to be limited and limiting. Rhéauna's inherited values and preconceived notions are challenged by the nuance of first-hand experience. Her aunt Regina, who is generally disliked for being unpleasant and unfeminine—the "bad cook or sour shrew" in the family—is revealed to be a talented pianist; whereas her aunt Bebette, who is generally approved as strong-willed but respectable, is actually revealed to be insufferably overbearing. Regina gives off an air of quiet desperation but finds solace in her music, while Bebette's desperation is of a louder variety and manifests itself in ostentation.

Tremblay displays sensitivity to the pressures of conforming to gender ideals, and the social repercussions for pursuing alternatives. In Rhéauna's eyes, Regina's music has "the power to soothe you during the difficult moments of life and ornament the happy moments with one more rapture." Thus, Regina conveys the opposite of empty gendered affect. If anything, she is sincere: having accepted imperfection—her own, the world's. Her sustenance is the transcendent release provided by her artistic talents, an "ornamentation" that contrasts with Bebette's material excesses. Bebette is a conspicuous consumer, and she serves decadent, high-caloric meals to her corpulent husband who is gorging himself to death, a self-prescribed palliative for incurable prostate cancer.

In truth, Bebette is the inversion of Regina: on the surface she is composed, buoyant, if not commanding, but Rhéauna senses an underlying unease. When Bebette literally forces a birthday party upon Rhéauna, she plans it with a "ridiculous energy that is very close to despair." In this

way, Bebette and her husband represent the excesses of urban "civilization"—exemplified in the pageantry of Rhéauna's birthday party, which is awash in movement and pleasantries, but little personal engagement. Bebette's association with the "big city" and its markers of modernity, aligns her busy-bodied character with progress itself. She chimes: "You can't stop progress, can you?" But Tremblay reveals the underlying humanity in Bebette, especially in her dedication to her husband's plight, which is sublime in its grotesquerie and compassion.

Gilmour's novel is narrated from a male point of view and focuses on a single evening, in which a brother helps his sister, Sally, commit suicide in her apartment. In extended monologue, Sally reflects upon her ex, Bruce, revealing her past gender preferences which limited her to choose a "masculine" man who turned out to be incompatible with her erudite "femininity." She had "admired" his "old-fashioned, tight-lipped masculinity," suggesting that "real men" were "a rare thing these days," and confessing that "what women like about men is that they are not women. And they don't think like women." But it is precisely this rigid gender binary that leads to their dissolution: Bruce's taciturnity develops into social anxiety, jealousy, and a general breakdown in communication, prompting Sally to leave.

Breaking free of these gendered limitations, Sally becomes an independent woman living on the profits of a business deal. She takes her children with her to San Miguel, Mexico—much to Bruce's chagrin—and it is here, seemingly at the height of her independence, that she has an accident, a mere trip and fall, that renders her immobile. And while lying on the floor, she imagines Bruce saying: "She brought this on herself." It is in this moment of weakness that a repressed masculine voice of judgment emerges, which is really her own internalized voice of patriarchy, condemning her for transgressing certain gender limits.

In this way, Sally's accident is a figurative death, a limitation of her newly acquired freedom. But here, actual death is construed as a last choice, an act of empowered volition, because it is what *she wants*. In this sense, the narrator is performing the penultimate selfless act for another: facilitating and bearing witness to the freedom to choose the ending of one's own life. Thus, the narrator's act is a *petit mort*—in Eagleton's sense—par excellence: a self-giving of friendship that actually puts him in a direct relationship with the freely chosen suicide of a loved one. Such "self-giving"—though not always to this extreme—can prepare us for the complete loss of self, gender included, that is death.

Genre and Gender

Elizabeth Goodyear-Grant
Gendered News: Media Coverage and Electoral Politics in Canada.
U of British Columbia P $90.00

Julie Rak
Boom! Manufacturing Memoir for the Popular Market. Wilfrid Laurier UP $29.99

Reviewed by Lucia Lorenzi

Forty-five years after feminist writer and activist Carol Hanisch popularized the phrase "the personal is political," scholars continue to emphasize the importance of connecting individual lives and private experiences with public identities and socio-cultural movements. Julie Rak and Elizabeth Goodyear-Grant explore this issue from rather different perspectives: Rak's book investigates the rationale behind the surge in the production and reception of popular memoir, whereas Goodyear-Grant focuses on electoral politics and their relationship to gendered representations in Canadian media. However, both works make a powerful argument, namely that the stories that we tell (as well as those that are told about us) are more than just

stories; rather, they are the very mechanisms by which citizenship is produced and reproduced.

While autobiographical theory has always concerned itself with the connections between public and private lives, Julie Rak's *Boom! Manufacturing Memoir for the Popular Market* discusses an oft-ignored aspect of these texts, namely how private experiences are transformed into public commodities. It is this embeddedness of narrative production within capitalist structures, Rak argues, that shapes how memoir is subject to generic expectations and regulations. This commitment to interrogating the material conditions of memoir (as well as its aesthetic merits) is clear in the methodological approach that Rak takes, which is to pay careful attention to the publishing history of life writing. Her chapters move from a broader analysis of the memoir boom and the publishing industry, to the role of bookstores and booksellers, to a focus on memoirs released by two popular American presses (Random House and HarperCollins), and a chapter dedicated to controversial memoirs. Of particular interest is Rak's chapter on "exceptionally public memoirs": Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis 1: The Story of a Childhood* and James Frey's infamous *Million Little Pieces*. Through a careful examination of Satrapi's memoir, which details a coming-of-age story in the Iranian Revolution, and Frey's memoir, whose memorable confession on the Oprah Winfrey Show raised questions about trust and the American public, Rak argues that memoir also has the capacity to make connections to world events, and, perhaps more importantly, to question existing narratives of national identity and international relations.

While Rak addresses the process of meaning-making and politics throughout all her chapters, the reader is left with a profoundly political message after reading the conclusion, entitled "Citizen Selves and the State of the Memoir Boom," in which Rak leaves us to ponder how we, as readers and citizens, are woven in the social and political fabric of community life. While it is easy to see memoir as entertainment or intrigue (and, thus, to characterize consumers of memoir as merely interested in the personal) Rak's argument emphasizes that the boom in memoir is also a boom in "personal stories of all types that continue to explore—and upset—the balance between public and private, personal, and political."

Elizabeth Goodyear-Grant's *Gendered News: Media Coverage and Electoral Politics in Canada* offers both a refreshing and a particularly cogent approach to politics and gender, a topic that continues to bear importance in Canadian electoral life, be it civic, provincial, or federal. While thoughtful commentaries about women's political lives are increasingly popular, Goodyear-Grant's thorough study is heavily backed by both quantitative and qualitative research.

Like the work done by other feminist organizations who seek to demonstrate an imbalance in representation, Goodyear-Grant's research blends hard data with analysis, an approach that makes starkly visible the sheer numbers of gender inequity in Canadian political life and media coverage of electoral politics. While Goodyear-Grant explores a wide range of the various structures and strategies that limit or impede women's representations, of particular note is the typology of identities and roles that female politicians are slotted into: the sex object, the mother, the pet, the iron maiden. Like Rak, Goodyear-Grant argues that stories and identities are most readily reproduced by limited or identifiable genres. In doing so, she offers a helpful pattern of identification that can help citizens and news consumers to better analyze and critically approach how politicians are presenting or being presented.

It is, of course, all too easy to simply assign blame to the media for poor or biased coverage of women in Canadian politics, and Goodyear-Grant's work

staunchly resists this easy conclusion. Rather, in studying the role of the media, and the perspectives of female politicians themselves, as well as our reception of these stories, she argues that the issue of equitable representation is one that is only able to be managed and resolved in common. As she writes: "the relationship between politicians, newsmakers, and citizens is triangular and dynamic: all three sets of actors bear responsibility for the media's informational deficiencies, as well as for the remedial action necessary to correct current imbalances in coverage."

These works by Goodyear-Grant and Rak are timely pieces of scholarship, especially as Canadians gear up towards the next federal election, and as readers continue to consume texts from the seemingly never-ending stream of memoirs that are released each year. Rather than arguing that texts or narratives simply work on the reader or the consumer of media, Goodyear-Grant and Rak's books suggest that consumers hold great amounts of power—as well as great amounts of responsibility—in helping to shape both the literary and political landscapes.

Dropping the Torch?

Neta Gordon
Catching the Torch: Contemporary Canadian Literary Responses to World War I.
Wilfrid Laurier UP $65.00

Reviewed by Alicia Fahey

The image on the cover of Neta Gordon's book is a close-up of a Canadian propaganda poster that depicts an armed soldier with his back to the viewer; his stance suggests he is ready to engage in what is presumably combat taking place on the horizon. The text on the original poster reads, "Back Him Up! Buy Victory Bonds," but the omission of this text from Gordon's cover allows for another interpretation of the image. In a second reading, the soldier is looking backwards, metaphorically fixated on the past; the activity that captures his attention is remote, reduced to abstract forms. The latter reading of the image resonates more closely with *Catching the Torch*. Gordon examines her primary corpus of texts (by authors who have not directly experienced the First World War) through the lens of memory studies, with particular focus on Maurice Halbwachs's term "historical memory," a subcategory of collective memory, which Gordon defines as, "false 'memory' of events that are known only indirectly."

The title of Gordon's book alludes to John McCrae's popular poem "In Flanders Fields." Gordon convincingly argues that the neglected third stanza of McCrae's poem, in which the voices of the dead soldiers call upon readers to, "Take up our quarrel with the foe: / To you from failing hands we throw / The torch," is a call to arms that complicates customary interpretations of the poem as a sacrificial narrative of distinctly Canadian values. These values—a sense of duty, a myth of the national collective, and a moral commitment to peacekeeping—provide a through line for the four chapters of the book. Gordon's revival of McCrae's famous poem, along with the title of her book, sets up the expectation that she intends to "take up [the] quarrel" by carrying forward the torch of Canadian war literature; however, this is not the case. Using McCrae as a point of entry, Gordon proceeds to argue that the works of literature she examines, including Jack Hodgins' *Broken Ground*, Frances Itani's *Deafening*, Joseph Boyden's *Three Day Road*, and Vern Thiessen's *Vimy*, among others, paradoxically disparage the mass destruction and loss of the First World War while simultaneously insisting on its cultural significance. As a result, instead of questioning the historical record, contemporary Canadian literary responses to

the First World War, according to Gordon, endorse a national myth that "promotes the collective by simply enlarging the category of the homogenous," a tendency that is propelled by an anxiety about the instability of Canadian national identity.

As a whole, Gordon's analysis is insightful and compelling, although she occasionally underplays the subversive aspects of the literature she discusses. For instance, in Jane Urquhart's *The Stone Carvers*, Gordon appropriately indicts "the artist figure" (Walter Allward) for "transforming the particular into the allegorical," but limits her discussion of Klara, Tilman, and Giorgio as alternative artist figures who challenge Allward's totalizing tendencies. While I agree with Gordon that the works of literature she examines share a common tendency to reinforce the myth of a national collective, I do not think this observation sustains the argument that these works are not critical of the historical record; many of these novels and plays (as well as R. H. Thomson's *The Lost Boys*, which is absent from Gordon's discussion) draw on lesser-known aspects of Canadian history *in order to* criticize official versions of the war and its effects.

Gordon concludes her study with the assertion that Paul Gross's film *Passchendaele* (2008) marks the end of "the Great Canadian War Novel"; Canadian authors have moved on to military events that are still part of living memory. *Catching the Torch* is an important survey of Canadian war novels and plays—Gordon also covers an impressive range of literary criticism generated by these texts—however, I am not convinced that we should drop the torch just yet. Is the state of anxiety that Gordon describes not simply a substitute for the myth of a national collective? Is it not possible to endorse a national collective *and* to challenge the official historical record? Before we extinguish this flame by declaring the First World War a "closed book," I suggest we wait and see how responses to the centenary shed light on these questions.

A Mighty Fine Epitaph

Catherine Graham
Her Red Hair Rises with the Wings of Insects. Wolsak & Wynn $17.00

Sina Queyras
MxT. Coach House $17.95

Adrienne Weiss
There Are No Solid Gold Dancers Anymore. Nightwood $18.95

Reviewed by McKinley Hellenes

Sina Queyras' latest collection is brutal and breathtaking. A tactical field-manual, *MxT* navigates the landmines that linger in the terrain of the living long after the dead have been buried beneath it. Complete with diagrams and equations, *MxT* cold comforts us with the hope that there is a science to grief and a procedure in place. But the poems themselves remind us that there is no such thing: "When in doubt, wear lipstick."

This is not kindly work. This is necropsy at its finest. The collection is caustic, harrowing, leaving us gut-punched and spitting teeth. I can't look them directly in the face without flinching. Queyras confirms the eerie superstition we all entertain—that the dead can hear us, and so can the void: "I have spent my life avoiding you, Emptiness," the speaker admits, and yet she can't shy away from her work. "I love the old questions," she says. Chasing the old questions results in unconstrained meditations on loss and memory over which Queyras exhibits a reckless control. "Why is pain so much better than nothing?" she asks.

Elegies more instinctual than calculated are nonetheless precisely honed. The incisions they make sting like expertly slit wrists. This collection is a vehicle that will save you from the worst of the crash, but the poems themselves will bleed you dry.

Yet this isn't a meditation on futility. It's not a dirge. It crackles, it screams. It burns. It remains even when we wish it wouldn't. "Grief is too bright. Too Head-on. We want to hide it with the empties."

The dead populating *There Are No Solid Gold Dancers Anymore* are mostly of the public variety. Adrienne Weiss employs a parade of familiar voices as oracles on life, loss, and our tawdry obsession with celebrity. Fairy-tale figures rub elbows with wage-slaves, and future starlets condescend to high-school nobodies. Former princesses hobnob alongside vaudeville legends. The deftly-handled vernacular of these impersonations remind us that we all inhabit the same world in our turn. Some of us gaze at the stars, some of us *are* the stars, and Death presides over us all like a game-show host whose finger hovers inexorably over the buzzer. "Here I am, a tramp, with a perfectly red mouth, her heart a perfectly arranged mess of rags," Weiss laments in Judy Garland's voice. "Old, hard me, forever talking to myself in the dark."

As uncanny as Weiss' impressions are, the unnamed narrators often resonate the longest. "What I do, what I've done, one day'll make a mighty fine epitaph," declares the speaker in the titular poem. "It is meaningless, dying," shrugs another nameless voice within the same poem. "This summer, you kill yourself while I job search," the final poem recounts, "wander Walmart's maze of aisles, the devastating weight of stuff." In Weiss' realm, ordinary deaths reverberate on par with the celebrated.

Catherine Graham continues the theme of loss in *Her Red Hair Rises with the Wings of Insects*. Many of the poems begin life as *glosas*, but beyond retaining the four-line *cabezas* borrowed from the works of Dorothy Molloy, they swiftly develop forms of their own. As well crafted as Graham's verses are, the italicized excerpts distract rather than illuminate: "The earth *slides over my face.* I see the exchange that's happening—a dead mother wants out. Her red hair rises with the wings of insects, and I sink further than *the lair of the fox*." What is intended as homage feels more like decoupage.

These poems feel needlessly secretive, the private cypher of a poet talking to herself, unaware that she has or even requires an audience. They retain a passivity perhaps too invested in the experiment of tribute to allow them to speak in their own voices. It may be unfair to pit Graham's understated eloquence against Queyras' unnerving incisions and Weiss's deft verbal mimicry, but compared with the other two collections, there is very little distinction in these cunning but ultimately bloodless poems.

Each of these collections speak to the dead, through them, or for them, with grief as a communal tapestry. These poets show us that stripped down, the scaffolding of loss is, if not the same for all of us, at least darkly familiar. This is what we go to poetry for, to remind us of what we have left when what we love leaves us.

Prairie Land/Lovescapes

Leah Horlick
Riot Lung. Thistledown $9.95

Don Kerr
Wind Thrashing Your Heart. Hagios $17.95

Reviewed by Moira Day

Even in an era of growing urbanization, land and the memory of land seem to be the rich mulch out of which the most intimate expressions of body, spirit and passion arise in the work of Saskatoon poets, Leah Horlick and Don Kerr. Though their individual lyrical voices are marked by differences in generation and gender, Horlick's and Kerr's sometimes humorous, sometimes haunting "lovescapes," interweave piquantly with a sharply observed and remembered sense of place.

Horlick's book of sixty-two short poems juxtaposes the memory of land as

remembered as a child—simple, sensual and elemental—with the growing complexity of sexual awakening and intimacy. While some poems, like "saskatchewan sex ed" are wryly funny, Horlick contrasts an early holistic oneness with land, animals, nature, bodies and friends with the growing complexity of puberty and gay and lesbian love in a richer, more diverse but fragmented urban world ("Meat Market," "Yarzeit," "The Visit," "Night Shift"). Beginning with her initial fitful memory of land, light, and wind upon her family's arrival in Saskatchewan ("I can tell you this much about the light") the collection ends the cycle in "Blood Oranges" and the fullness of landscape in all its variations—imaginary, prairie, tropical, sensual and human—drawing together in fruition. *Riot Lung*, Horlick's first published collection of poems, leaves one looking forward eagerly to the next.

Don Kerr's tenth volume of poetry, a collection of sixty-five poems divided into six sections, devotes nearly a third of its length to combining sexual and natural landscapes. Initially lyrical, sensual and exuberant (Section 1 "Love is"), the tone turns wry, ironic and pragmatic (Section 2 "Liquid Love") as reality too soon hilariously rears its hydra-like head in the Garden in the form of religious hypocrisy ("love thy neighbor"), birth control ("safe sex"), or not ("We had children," "no road map worth a damn"). The remaining four sections are more discursive and self-reflective though love and landscape remain a pervasive influence throughout. Section 3, "Travels," deals with the vastness of landscape and the seduction of travelling on it ("the drug of travel"), while other poems reflect poignantly on more fundamental passages through and into the earth ("Wind Thrashing Your Heart," "Wynn's Funeral"). Sections 4 and 5, "The GNP" and "that self," are delightfully picaresque reflections on the addictions of writing, smoking, and gas—car and bowel variety—as accentuated by the realities and humour of the aging body. ("The Unsolicited Manuscript" is guaranteed to bring a grin—or grimace—to the face of every writer or editor who has ever sent or received one.) Perhaps reflecting Kerr's interest in playwriting and performance, the final section plays with conflating blues and jazz with land imagery in the aptly titled "the environmentally sound."

For both poets, the seasoned veteran, and the promising contender, love and land in all their configurations—light, dark, male, female—form the intricate warp and weft of two rich new tapestries of poetry grounded in prairie earth while yearning towards the sky.

Scribing "Black" Canada

Camille A. Isaacs, ed.
Austin Clarke: Essays on His Works.
Guernica $20.00

Althea Prince, ed.
In the Black: New African Canadian Literature.
Insomniac $19.95

Reviewed by Madelaine Jacobs

As the required reading lists of course curricula evolve, winnowing out the tedious and adding the timely to timeless classics, the face of Canadian education changes. In this sense, otherwise deep-rooted African Canadian literature is a "new" addition to many classrooms and lecture theatres. However novel to uninitiated imaginations, Althea Prince's edited collection, *In the Black: New African Canadian Literature* need not be reserved for formal educational settings. *Austin Clarke: Essays on His Works*, edited by Camille A. Isaacs, provides a scholarly successor to Prince's fertile yet accessible introduction with its critical scholarly approach to Austin Clarke's Canadian literature.

In the Black is an enticing assemblage of "fresh writing" from African Canadian authors. Althea Prince has carefully crafted a creative flow from evocative poetry to

stimulating short stories. Dwayne Morgan's "The Ethnic Vote" gives voice to "the invisible Canadian, / Whose experiences and concerns are ignored, / Except for when an election is called" and whose "experiences are too rich / To be given away with nothing in return." Gayle Gonsalves chronicles Torontonian Linden's grappling with "A Good Woman" as he negotiates the distances inherent in the intimate places inhabited by families and the realities of Antiguan diaspora. Prince dedicates her work to, and includes pieces from, George Elliott Clarke and Djanet Sears. Each *In the Black* author is thoughtfully introduced alongside their chapter. By including these short biographies, Prince has literally added faces to prominent names of African Canadian literature, informed the newly-enriched of the excellence achieved by these authors, and encouraged further immersion in this invigorating field.

A different articulation of the excoriating poetic gaze of George Elliott Clarke searing through "A Record of the Ruction" in *In the Black* appears in *Austin Clarke* with his frank essay "Clarke vs. Clarke: Tory Elitism in Austin Clarke's Short Fiction." Following the introduction, Isaacs begins *Austin Clarke* with a brief biography and an edited transcript of an interview conducted with the "still angry" award-winning author who inspired the compilation. Clarke's voice in conversation is enlightening and sets a tone that echoes throughout the resolute grappling with his work in subsequent chapters. Sarah Phillips Casteel appraises the connections and limitations of representing Caribbean-Canadian diaspora in "Experiences of Arrival: Jewishness and Caribbean-Canadian Identity in Austin Clarke's *The Meeting Point*." Within the discourses in which they are employed, both "white" and "black" are uncomfortable, historically fraught, and potentially inflammatory terms. The intersections between "race," class, and gender are critical themes of Austin Clarke and, therefore, have appropriately been taken up in *Austin Clarke*. Clarke's often controversial engagement with the embedded colonialism found in institutions and attitudes is as requisite to understanding Canadian life as it is to understanding Canadian literature. Still writing at the time of print, Clark has been so prolific that Isaacs declines to include a complete list of his publications even in a volume dedicated to examining his works.

In the Black belongs in the commuter's briefcase, and on the reader's bedside table, as much as it does in the student's backpack. It is simply a great read: a compelling and manageable book artfully designed to open doors to important authors and their award-winning bodies of work. Readers interested in the complexities of Canadian society and triumphs of Canadian literature should be familiar, or become familiar, with the work of Austin Clarke. Isaacs' compendium of excellent *Essays on His Works* drives the inquiring mind to new depths and will likely spurn the aficionado to an extensive revisiting of Austin Clarke's literature. Packaged together with a selection of Austin Clarke's original works, these books will inform, interest, and engross readers in vibrant worlds of Canadian literature.

Innovation et poésie!

Danny Jacobs
Songs That Remind Us of Factories.
Nightwood 18,95 $

Michael McClure
Specks. Talonbooks 16,95 $

Shane Rhodes
Poems & Anti-Poems. Nightwood 18,95 $

Compte rendu par Jean-Sébastien Ménard

Lire *Poems & Anti-Poems* de Shane Rhodes, c'est d'abord manipuler le livre, le tourner dans un sens puis dans l'autre pour entendre tout ce que le poète a à dire, pour s'arrimer à la langue de ce « book of verse [that]

demands more of verse, this book demands perversity ». Ce livre, comme Rhodes le souligne, a été écrit « in the gaps between words written and words spoken, words meant and words meant only to fill the space of meaning ». Provocateur, original et intime, Rhodes parle des Amérindiens, de Idle No More, du Canada, des territoires, de ce qui l'anime. . . Il joue avec les conventions et les idées reçues. Son ouvrage en est un éclaté, difficile à suivre par moment. C'est un labyrinthe de mots et de poèmes dans lequel le lecteur peut se perdre avec un certain plaisir. Il est intéressant de préciser que la section intitulée « White Noise » a été composée à partir de commentaires parus dans des journaux canadiens entre le 20 décembre 2012 et le 28 janvier 2013; ces commentaires portaient sur Idle No More et sur la grève de la faim de Theresa Spence, chef des Attawapiskat.

Dans *Songs That Remind Us of Factories*, Danny Jacobs transporte le lecteur, pique sa curiosité, s'amuse avec la langue, installe des décors poétiques à lire et à entendre. L'originalité de ce poète est rapidement perceptible. Art, travail, dur labeur, vie de tous les jours, terre, machinerie, vie humaine et semences agricoles ponctuent sa poésie où l'innovation et l'imagination occupent une grande place. Jacobs n'hésite pas à jouer avec les sons et à modeler le sens des mots. Sa poésie « can help lay down roots, braid the soil, grow the shaky beginnings of a tree ».

La poésie de Michael McClure, quant à elle, en est une organique. De l'agencement des mots sur le papier aux associations entre le corps et l'esprit, il y a chez ce poète un engagement prenant racine dans les vers et leur sonorité. Spiritualité, rêve, viande, corps, squelette . . . Le poète se définit par sa quête et entraîne le lecteur à sa suite. Comme il le précise lui-même : « Language is the body – an extension of the body. » Tourné vers la science, les atomes, la biologie et le corps, McClure chemine et analyse le réel à l'aide de son regard unique. Ses poèmes plongent le lecteur dans des réflexions profondes. Il faut lire ce recueil ainsi que l'œuvre complète de ce poète associé à la Beat Generation.

Encountering Alterity

Janne Korkka
Ethical Encounters: Spaces and Selves in the Writings of Rudy Wiebe. Rodopi $107.88

Allen Smutylo
The Memory of Water. Wilfrid Laurier UP $39.99

Reviewed by Janicke S. Kaasa

Although different in genre and purpose, Janne Korkka's *Ethical Encounters: Spaces and Selves in the Writings of Rudy Wiebe* and Allen Smutylo's *The Memory of Water* share an interest in the representation of the encounters between the self and the other. Whereas the former is a literary study, concerned with the ethical implications of these encounters, as they are made current in the works of Rudy Wiebe, the latter is a selection of ten autobiographical accounts of Smutylo's experiences in the Arctic, South Pacific, Great Lakes region, and India.

Janne Korkka, who is a university lecturer at the University of Turku in Finland, has published extensively on Wiebe's texts. In this book, he explores "the ethics of knowing and the problem of representing alterity" in selected works by Wiebe, with basis in Emmanuel Levinas' ethics of the "Other" as unknowable, but also in Mikhail Bakhtin's understanding of language and meaning as fundamentally dialogic. Through his study of several of Wiebe's novels, short stories and essays, Korkka demonstrates how representation of alterity is a central concern throughout Wiebe's writing.

Korkka's study approaches the representation of alterity from different angles. In the book's second chapter, he explores the "self's knowledge of itself," or rather how the self can become unknowable to itself in what

are often referred to as Wiebe's "Mennonite" novels (*Peace Shall Destroy Many, The Blue Mountains of China* and *Sweeter Than All the World*). Korkka develops the discussion of the alterity of people in chapter three, but shifts his attention to the representation of First Nations in Wiebe's texts as well as to Wiebe's own thoughts on the possibility of addressing an Aboriginal other without resorting to reductive images in his essay, "Where Is the Voice Coming From?"

The fourth chapter is concerned with the alterity of space, first and foremost that of the Canadian Prairie. Here, Korkka makes use of examples from *The Blue Mountains of China*, *Sweeter Than All the World* and *The Temptations of Big Bear* to substantiate his claim that Wiebe exposes the Prairie as a landscape that can become knowable by experiencing it through physical interaction, for example by farming. In the book's two last chapters, Korkka explores further the alterity of space, this time in Wiebe's writings that deal with the Canadian North. In contrast to the Prairie, Korkka argues, the North *cannot* be made knowable. Rather, it actualizes an important ethical concern by being "the most radical form of unknowability" in Wiebe's work.

Korkka's research sheds new light on Wiebe's work and succeeds in drawing lines between different texts and genres that have not been drawn before. In particular, his refusal to label Wiebe's writings as either "Mennonite" or "First Nations" opens up for a discussion of the representation of alterity that complicates and exceeds the familiar Self/Other dichotomy. This point is illustrated by Korkka's fascinating and convincing reading of silence in Wiebe's texts, among these the short story "The Naming of Albert Johnson," as an engagement with the unknowable other. Overall, Korkka's study is more than "just" a discussion of Wiebe's work as it also provides new perspectives on the ethical implications of representation, which continues to be a major interest in literary studies.

In *The Memory of Water*, we accompany Canadian traveller, writer, and artist Allen Smutylo on some of his journeys. The ten stories span great geographical distances as well as a large period of time, from Tobermory in 1970 to Varanasi in 2010. As Smutylo writes in his introduction, these stories share the presence of water, be it oceans, rivers, snow, or icebergs. The stories are humorous and political, personal and historical. Most are thought-provoking and highly engaging. In addition, several of these accounts show signs of Smutylo's perspectives as an artist with references to viewpoints, colours, light, shadow and movement.

In my mind, it is exactly this artistic view that makes this publication interesting to read. In particular, I was captured by Smutylo's thoughts on the representation of people and places. These thoughts deal with practical challenges (How to convey the movement of water? How to portray the reticent knifemaker?), as well as issues of a philosophical character, such as when he reflects upon how artists embellish in order to see things in new ways or when he writes about the role of the kayak in his art. Throughout, these ponderings are accompanied and supplemented by Smutylo's diverse and truly beautiful artwork.

For Smutylo, art is a way of trying to know the other, such as when he makes watercolours "to get the feeling of a new place" in Maui. However, he is also concerned with the places and spaces he cannot reach, but still wants to render in his art. Water is such a space, and Smutylo is "fascinated with the idea of a hidden three-dimensional world accessible to men with boats only in the second dimension. One can float along the top, drop lines and nets into it, probe it with sonar, but one cannot enter. Only in tragedy, when boats capsize and men drown, do they gain access to water's third dimension."

In a way, the best of Smutylo's stories can be said to explore the ethical issues of representing alterity that Korkka is concerned with in his study of Wiebe's work. More than anything, Smutylo tries to know and represent the people and places he experiences through art. And he does this with a recognition that he might not always succeed. Although aware of the risks of this endeavour, Korkka's thorough study of Wiebe's works and Smutylo's personal accounts remind us how literature and art can provide ways for us to reach towards knowledge of the self and of the other.

Meta-Stories

Sarah Klassen
The Wittenbergs. Turnstone $21.00

Charlotte R. Mendel
Turn Us Again. Roseway $20.95

Reviewed by Reece Steinberg

Secret and buried thoughts lurk among family members in both novels; unhappy truths cleave relationships, leading to estrangement, uncomfortable silences, affairs, career problems, and broken partnerships. Both novels include stories inside the story—stories with family consequences—one recent and carefully written as an autobiography, one barely retained by an aging woman, and grasped in dribs and drabs by her granddaughter. Whether a family history, a personal history, or a journal entry within a personal history, the stories within the meta-story offer additional voices, richness, and layers to the writing.

Gabriel, a middle-aged Haligonian, and protagonist of *Turn Us Again* is called to his terminally ill father in England. Estranged from his family since his mother's death years earlier, Gabriel struggles with guilt and confusion over why he had lost contact with his father. He buoys his spirits about leaving by promising himself that he will travel solo around the country, unhindered by his girlfriend Jenny. Only once Gabriel has settled into his father's household does author Mendel reveal that Gabriel has hidden from himself that the father with whom he hoped to reconnect was physically and emotionally abusive. Mendel unwraps Gabriel's buried history through his deceased mother's manuscript—an autobiography thinly veiled as fiction, which includes her journal entries. The manuscript of the young nurse, and later wife and mother dominates the story; at times Gabriel and his father's interactions are merely bookends to the chapters of Gabriel's mother's life. The early writing provides distressing hints of the forthcoming abuse and elevating control by Gabriel's father.

Mendel's layers of storytelling come together soundly and cleverly, plunging readers into the intense storyline, while breaking boundaries in time and perspective. Gabriel's father, now aged, has read his late wife's manuscript with painful regret. He conveys his opinion of himself as sad and misunderstood and reveals that he intends to go through the manuscript with Gabriel, providing additional information and his own views on the story and continuing to dominate his son, who does not welcome his father's interruptions. Vitally, he is continuing to control his wife, attempting to shape what she has written even after her death, and preventing Gabriel from reading it without him.

When Gabriel returns to Halifax, ready to lean heavily on his girlfriend after the emotional turmoil he experienced with his father, he is shocked to find her less indulgent than he expected. Soon Gabriel's abusive behaviour rises to the surface of their relationship. Both the manuscript within the book and the book itself end abruptly. The manuscript is unfinished, and ends with potentially transformative thoughts after an instance of abuse; Gabriel's mother promises herself she will leave her husband.

Gabriel's girlfriend Jenny does move out, though the relationship doesn't end.

Mendel's realistic, careful writing explores cycles of abuse, and the differences made by the era in which the abuse occurs and the level of support for abuse survivors. Mendel tells the story of two men, but gives a woman—the woman who felt unable to leave an abusive situation—more of a voice than either her son or her husband. The author notes that this story is her mother's, and the warmth and realism conveyed in the writing makes it evident that it is a story she cares deeply about sharing.

Marital turmoil, depression, breaking and shifting friendships, and a challenging genetic disorder swirl around the story of Mia Wittenberg, a thoughtful high school student in *The Wittenbergs*. Descriptions of Mia's rich, sensitive relationships with various other characters provide nuance and detail to the story; it is easy to imagine that this character is the author of the book, and perhaps she is. Mia's father Joseph, a man struggling with uncertainty in his marriage and career, is arguably the main character of the book, but not the meat of it.

Author Sarah Klassen writes as if she has incorporated family history, and her own experiences and memories into the book. The detailed writing on unusual topics: Fragile X syndrome and Ukrainian-German life and immigration point to knowledge from personal interest. A family history of life as Germans in Ukraine, pre-immigration, is written by Mia as a school project shared with a dear teacher. The story within the story is told in fits and starts, and provides a contrast of hardships and some joys faced by previous generations. Again, Mia's connections to others in her life provide this story; while her father sees his mother as a burden, Mia happily visits her sometimes-confused grandmother and coaxes the family stories out of her. While *Turn Us Again*'s Gabriel tries and fails to build relationships, Mia's relationships flourish with ease; even friendships she is growing out of seem difficult to shed. Mia's uncomfortable friendship with wayward Danny has the potential to be buried in Mia's family issues, but is given the thoughtful treatment it requires. Their troubled interactions are essential to portray Mia as a teenager reaching into the adult world, but not yet solidly a part of that sphere. Mia's strength is her growing awareness of the problematic nature of several of her high school friendships, which conflicts with her need for these friendships.

The Wittenbergs offers a slightly pessimistic view of high school life—from both student and staff perspectives—and a glimpse into the struggles of an extended family. Delicately written, the novel weaves threads of hope into the lives of its characters.

Nation avant nationalisme

Yvan Lamonde; Phyllis Aronoff and Howard Scott, trans.
The Social History of Ideas in Quebec, 1760-1896.
McGill-Queen's UP $37.95

Reviewed by Andre Furlani

Yvan Lamonde is probably best known to English readers as a co-editor of the magisterial *History of the Book in Canada*, and the chief distinction of *The Social History of Ideas in Quebec, 1760-1896* is its superbly close attention to print culture after the Conquest. Lamonde provides, above all, an engrossing history of the advent of parliamentary institutions and the print vehicles for participation in them. As popular government began to emerge following the defeat of *l'ancien régime*, so too did another novelty, public opinion. Quoting extensively from the archive he has done so much to curate (e.g., in *Le Rouge et le bleu*, compiled with Claude Corbo), Lamonde confirms that old ideas have many young offspring yet in Quebec society.

The Treaty of Paris had guaranteed freedom of worship and the 1791 Constitution

authorized what soon became a bilingual House of Assembly elected by a broad, although by no means universal, suffrage. The British political system secured the loyalty of a population that had endured the disenfranchisement of absolute monarchy. *Les Canadiens* had already rebuffed the American revolutionaries and in 1812 would war against the US army and, more controversially, would resist their own revolutionary *patriotes* in 1837. As in Upper Canada, it was zeal for "English liberties" that inspired revolt when the metropolis balked at making the appointed Governor responsible to the elected House, but even this was insufficient to mobilize a large constituency against the Crown. "There is no escaping the fact," Lamonde writes, "that the French Canadians of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were culturally and politically Franco-British Catholics living in America."

With the Assembly came a free press that, while often persecuted, became the chief instrument to harass the prerogatives of the unelected English Legislative and Executive Councils. Although established initially by the anglophone merchant bourgeoisie at a time when Montreal was a majority English-speaking city, gazettes, voluntary societies, museums, organized sports, subscription and circulating libraries proliferated among francophones from the 1840s on. The Association Saint-Jean-Baptiste, commemorating the patron saint, is very much still active, counting among its officers the current chief of le Bloc québécois.

Lamonde poignantly documents the persecuted yet pugnacious Quebec career of liberalism, checked by British parliamentary Tories, *ancien régime* seigneurs, and the Roman Catholic bishops. The early journal *L'Avenir* promoted sovereignty of the people, an elected Senate (Legislative Council), freedom of conscience and of the press, for which outrages Bishop Ignace Bourget forbade parish priests to absolve the journal's readers.

The "Declaration of Independence" penned by Robert Nelson among the exiled *Patriotes*, deemed incendiary in 1838, proposed equality of all persons, including Native people, abolition of seigneurial rights and customary law, the repossession of all public lands, separation of church and state, abolition of tithes and freedom of conscience, secret ballots, and bilingualism in all public affairs. For this the Church harried the rebels while Bishop Lartigue refused burial in Catholic cemeteries of any *patriote* who died with a gun in his hands.

Church intervention in State affairs thus long remained doctrinal in Quebec, where not until 1875 did a law penalize "undue influence" of clergy. Having demonstrated its loyalty during the Rebellion, the Church was rewarded with the legal recognition (i.e., the right to possess goods without risk of confiscation) it had surrendered in 1791. In 1841 it was able to take control of education. The metropolis was content to cede social authority to the Quebec clergy in exchange for its servility to the Crown, ironically leaving the Quebec bishops to fancy that they were free now to apply the ultramontaine doctrine par excellence of making the State subservient to the Church. In reality, of course, the Church was in the State's pocket, free only to preach and teach the alliance of throne and altar and to denigrate popular sovereignty as a "sophism." Meanwhile, the liberal professions had to organize schools outside the university in the absence of a French institution in Montreal.

Although the *patriotes* now belong to an official mythology of nationalist aspiration, Papineau and his confederates were exponents of pro-Britishism, seeing the Conquest as a transition from absolutist violence to the rule of law and justice. Even as he opposed the union of Upper and Lower Canada in 1848, Papineau wanted a democracy rather than an ethnic enclave. He boasted that Lower Canada was "the first of all the English colonies to pass a

naturalization law applicable to all men, without distinction of religion or country of birth." Lord Durham's report trivialized a political conflict as a "contest of races" in order to obscure the democratic objectives of the reformers.

The Union of Upper and Lower Canada and a generation later Confederation, were vindicated with majorities for the Conservative parties in Quebec that had endorsed them. Eventually Sir Wilfrid Laurier was able to become the first French Prime Minister of Canada (his mother was Scottish) by forging a moderate liberalism that was not anticlerical. Laurier insisted that Quebec modelled its liberalism not on revolutionary Jacobins but on British Members of Parliament tabling reforms by constitutional means.

Between the Union and Confederation a francophone "spirit of union," Lamonde argues, "reached a sort of apotheosis in the commercial union of a market economy involving the exchange not only of goods, but also of information and ideas." This spirit was buttressed by associations that consolidated a liberal civic alternative to ultramontaine society through public lectures, publications, and their libraries. The library of the most important association, the *Institut canadien de Montréal*, circulated many books on the Index, especially fiction.

Reviewing the catalogues of early nineteenth century bookstores and the records of lending libraries, Lamonde notes the emerging popularity in the 1840s of Romantic fiction extolling nature, primitivism, and the exotic and newspaper serials, by e.g., Balzac, Hugo, and Dumas. Although France was vilified as impious and regicidal, its novelists, and the Catholic Romanticism of Chateaubriand's *The Genius of Christianity*, exerted a great influence. The Quebec novel meanwhile arose painfully in the face of clerical vilification and legal non-existence. Copyright was only legislated in 1832 and not applied for many years. Québécois novelists published excerpts to raise interest from subscribers. Few novels were published in book form before Confederation. Poets meanwhile contributed to the politicization of print culture with partisan and patriotic verse.

One unavoidable liability of Lamonde's emphasis on print is that, disseminated primarily by elites in the liberal professions and the clergy, ideas circulated among a small, though certainly growing, literate French population. Confident that their religious institutions were under no threat from the Crown, *les Canadiens* continued throughout the period to identify themselves without contradiction as francophone Catholics and British subjects. Under a Church holding a monopoly on francophone education in the confessional school system and intractably hostile to rational inquiry, industrial training, and secular humanism, *les Canadiens* remained under a formidable intellectual liability. To his credit, Lamonde traces elements of dissent in non-literate society, e.g., through turns of phrase and expressions that entered the language in conjunction with political crises. During the Rebellion the peasant charivari was transformed into a political demonstration; the *carré rouge* student demonstrators of 2011 adopted the clanging *casseroles* of the pro-*Patriotes* to bring down the Charest government.

Although critics of the original *Histoire sociale des idées au Québec* rebuked an apparent "exclusion" of anglophone culture, Lamonde discusses throughout the British influences on French culture and society, noting, for instance, the importance of Daniel O'Connell's leadership of reform in Ireland. Papineau's supporters urged the parallel, while in Parliament O'Connell himself rallied for Lower Canada's rights.

Like it or not, the authority of the Church established an assured basis for francophone culture, and though itself

contemptuous of nationalism, incubated a national identity. It was not a *patriote* or a liberal but an ultramontaine journalist and novelist, Jules-Paul Tardivel, who in the final years of the century first argued the necessity of separation, based on the then-popular providentialist poppycock that *les Canadiens* were a Christian elect placed on earth to counter the grasping commercial materialism of Anglo-American life. His 1895 novel *Pour la patrie* converts religious zeal into ethnic radicalism to imagine such a Catholic republic. Yet, as Lamonde notes, two years later francophones joined fervently in the celebration of the sixtieth anniversary of Queen Victoria's reign. Prime Minister Laurier could plausibly declare at a Jubilee in Paris: "We are loyal to the great nation that gave us life, we are loyal to the great nation that gave us liberty," and insist that "Canada is a nation, although it is still just a colony."

The second volume of Lamonde's indispensible history extends to the threshold of the Quiet Revolution, and its English translation is to be eagerly awaited. Quebec certainly continues to live out its social history of ideas. When the last Parti québécois government tabled legislation to deprive religious minorities of certain enshrined civil liberties, paradoxically on the ground of a universalist secularism, Premier Pauline Marois and her minister Bernard Drainville inadvertently revived the Catholicism of Bishop Bourget, otherwise so despised by sovereignists. Religious toleration was once again a contested principle. Until the party's defeat in the 2014 general election, veils and yarmulkes had taken the place of offending Victorian paeans to accommodation.

Of Bodies (Politic)

Heather Latimer
Reproductive Acts: Sexual Politics in North American Fiction and Film.
McGill-Queen's UP $29.95

Kathy Page and Lynne Van Luven, eds.
In the Flesh: Twenty Writers Explore the Body.
Brindle & Glass $24.95

Reviewed by Tina Trigg

Bodies of influence, bodily injury, gendered bodies, idealized bodies, tortured bodies, political bodies, and many other forms of body are the subject of scrutiny in two new bodies of work. Heather Latimer's *Reproductive Acts* is a carefully constructed interdisciplinary study, infusing feminist socio-political history with literary-cultural capital. Working chronologically from the 1980s to the early 2000s, chapters analyze seven texts (pairing Canadian and American authors) and one film by a Mexican director. Latimer clearly defines reproductive politics, "the struggle over who has the power over women's fertility," as a broader issue typically manifesting as the abortion debate. The main premises of this text are threefold: there is an increased anxiety about reproductive politics; the pro-life/pro-choice dialectic is a reductive lens; and fiction, as part of the cultural imaginary, reflects, engages, and helps produce reproductive politics.

As these premises reveal, Latimer's style is clean and direct, providing excellent transition cues and making her nuanced argument accessible to a wide audience. In addition, *Reproductive Acts* posits a rare dialogue between the United States and Canada in law, politics, and social change. The US is situated as the dominant power, with Canada and (to a lesser extent) Mexico as privileged hybrids offering unique perspectives. While one might question the paucity of postcolonial theoretical engagement, Latimer skillfully articulates a broad

feminist basis, weaving complex theories into the landscape under investigation. Clearly unsympathetic to the pro-life movement—as her decidedly one-sided negative diction reveals—she nonetheless concedes its discursive and socio-political power and necessarily so, since the pivotal role of language in constructing a society is, in fact, foundational to Latimer's own argument.

The text thought-provokingly unpacks the question of what it is to be human by interrogating assumptions of a (male) singular, stable self through the role of the fetus. Ultimately, Latimer presents a constructionist argument, asserting that the historical trajectory of reproductive politics in North America is not primarily a moral or ethical question but is, in fact, a social one. In this view, literature, like Canada and Mexico, occupies a hybrid position that allows examination of a society from a remove. This overarching assumption of fiction's powerful social role is refreshing: literature responds to and shapes culture by enabling a populace to imagine alternatives to their actualized social structures and to individual roles therein—often by depicting acts of resistance. Society is assessed *in toto* here without precluding the role of the individual citizen, thereby enhancing the relevance of this text.

For all its laudable features, this ambitious work has a few weaknesses. The introduction is lengthy and so detailed that some of the ensuing sections seem repetitive. Some of the analysis wavers, even in the primary areas of linguistic power and feminist discourse. For example, the assessment of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* includes an insightful evaluation of "freedom," but ignores the Resistance movement entirely and glosses over the potent role of language itself in Gilead. Such exclusions produce an uneven result. Similarly, the contemporary focus of the text has a mixed outcome: a compelling parallelism of illegitimate/artificial life and text/hypertext is followed by a less convincing focus on 9/11 terrorism and its results. Finally, and most problematically, the analysis of a single film in the culminating chapter oddly skews both the scope and the subtitle. That the film is by a Mexican director, based on a British novel, and set in England further undercuts the focus on American representations, despite the many justifications offered for the film's importance to the argument. Overall, however, Latimer's interdisciplinary study of reproductive politics and of literature's pivotal role in the cultural imaginary is engaging and timely. It deserves to be read widely.

Equally deserving of attention for vastly different reasons, *In the Flesh* rewards readers with intimate morsels of memoir. Clustered in reader-friendly groups of two to five entries, each labelled for body parts, the collection enables meandering, lingering, or straightforward reading. Kathy Page and Lynne Van Luven's editorial introduction is clear, concise, and even comical. Their focus on postmodern dualism, tensions, and the constant flux of both words and bodies nicely sets the tone for the varied collection that follows. The titillating power of language, highlighted as allowable frivolity in the introduction, surfaces to differing degrees throughout the entries. The impetus of their project is an absence of writing about what bodies—in their pervasive, if oft-ignored, presence—feel. And, while careful to acknowledge the gaps, Page and Van Luven highlight the very adaptability and unknowability of bodies as being equally applicable to their text. Fair enough.

As with any collection, its variety is both a strength and a weakness. Kudos to the editors for the sheer range of perspectives: entries explore dis-ease and rare diseases, bulimia, disability and fertility, big-breast-complex, the Auschwitz Hair Museum, tattoos and scars, body types, and organ donation, among others. Several entries

posit cross-generational links or insightfully contextualize their fragment within larger spheres of community and relationship, thereby resisting the inherent potential for self-absorption or "navel-gazing." Of course, reader tastes will necessarily dictate favourites, but perhaps the most regrettable aspect of the whole is a predictable over-emphasis on the vagina. While assigning a male author here seems a strategic editorial decision to provoke controversy, André Alexis' piece positioned mid-collection is the longest by a wide margin and seemingly enacts its own fixation. Conversely, a gem in this collection is Margaret Thompson's unexpectedly rich and allusive musing on, of all things, "The Covert Ear." Such range is admirably arranged and caters to disparate palates; *In the Flesh* is a welcome addition to a bookshelf, offering bits of the body—just a taste here and there—and stirring readers' awareness of what they, too, feel in the flesh.

What Is CanLit?

Annabel Lyon
The Sweet Girl. Random House $29.95

Linda Spalding
The Purchase. McClelland & Stewart $22.00

Reviewed by Lee Skallerup Bessette

When the 2013 Governor General Literary Award for Fiction was announced, there was an immediate backlash against the choice: should *The Luminaries*, a book set in New Zealand written by a woman born in Canada, but raised and still living in New Zealand, be eligible for one of our top literary awards? As the CanLit canon has expanded over the years, so too has our definition of Canadian literature, but the shift has not been easy or comfortable. Linda Spalding, who won the GG award in 2012 for her novel *The Purchase*, could easily have sparked the same debate; Spalding was born in America, and the book itself takes place entirely in Virginia during the American Civil War. And while Annabel Lyon is more obviously "Canadian" based on her biography, her novel *The Sweet Girl* also takes place in a setting far removed from our traditional "home and native land": Ancient Greece.

Of course, this shouldn't make any difference; over half of the books selected as finalists for the 2013 Canada Reads event are set outside of Canada by authors not originally from here. This is an accurate reflection of the diversity of people who make up Canada in the twenty-first century. What is all the more interesting about the two novels reviewed here is that they are historical fictions not concerned with the history or myth-making of our nation, at least not directly. I find it reassuring that these two authors force us to look at our shared histories from periods and places we often assume far removed from our own nation-building exercises.

The more provocative question is, in regards to Spalding's book: does a main character have to be likable? The author is a direct descendant of Daniel Dickinson, the protagonist of the novel. Spalding reimagines the moment, in 1798, when Daniel takes his family and leaves their Quaker community to settle in Virginia after the death of his wife. She is trying to make sense of the events that followed. The purchase of the title is Daniel's purchase of a slave, something that goes directly against his Quaker values and beliefs. We are privy to Daniel's attempts to justify this decision and all subsequent decisions stemming from this initial compromise of his core values. The purchase will haunt him and his family over the course of the entire novel.

All of the characters in the story are richly drawn, from Daniel's new young wife, to his older, bitter daughter, all making poor decisions based on their own desperation and loneliness, particularly as they manoeuvre unfamiliar territories between race, class and gender divisions. It is a hard

novel to read because their choices to us contemporary readers, seem so wrong, so short-sighted, so terrible, but because of that, the novel also stays with us. It is difficult to watch this family unravel because of one purchase, but this difficulty is a reminder of the tenuousness of those values we hold.

The Sweet Girl is also based on a real historical figure, one we know little about: Aristotle's daughter Pythias. We meet Pythias as a girl, smart and beautiful, beloved by her father. But when Aristotle dies, she is forced into a society that does not value women for their intellect. She has a series of encounters and adventures in her search for her place and herself. Unlike *The Purchase*, it is never clear if Lyon's story of Pythias will end in tragedy or triumph; will this reimagined history be kind or cruel to the heroine? Throughout, we are confronted with limitations on women at the time, but we also meet women who are thriving. Pythias is so vivid a character that I feel frustrated and stymied right along with her in her efforts to make her life her own. Eventually, she garners the attention of a god, further complicating her attempts at independence on her own terms. Ultimately, we are forced to question what larger forces push Pythias further and further from her goal.

Both books are haunting reminders of the inequities and cruelties of times past. Both also remind us that these inequities were enforced by real people, often ordinary people. Neither novel makes it easy to judge the characters based on our contemporary values. They stand as reminders of the choices individuals have always made in the face of powerful societal forces.

Standing at the Nexus

Leslie A. Robertson and Kwagu'l Gixsam Clan

Standing Up with Ga'axsta'las: Jane Constance Cook and the Politics of Memory, Church, and Custom U of British Columbia P $39.95

Reviewed by Andrew Cienski

Standing up with Ga'axsta'las is an exploration, or even an expression of a nexus, where conflicting cultures, belief systems, and perspectives cross. It is the story of colonial and Christian agendas not so gradually restricting First Nations rights, traditions, and access to resources. The book is unique in its portrayal of British Columbia's colonial history from the perspective of a First Nations woman standing at that nexus.

Ga'axsta'las, Jane Constance Cook, was a bicultural woman in every way possible. Cook was born in 1870 of a noble Kwakwaka'wakw mother and a European father and raised by missionaries. She was a powerful figure, both within her community and on provincial and national stages. She advocated for the rights and needs of her people with bishops, Indian agents, and legal authorities, seeking justice in land claims, fishing and resource rights, adequate health care, and women's and children's rights. She was an organizer and member of the Allied Indian Tribes of BC and the Native Sisterhood of BC (a branch of Native Brotherhood), to name a few. She was a midwife and mother to a large family. Most notably, she was an official interpreter at the McKenna-McBride Royal Commission to negotiate reserve lands and access to resources.

However, Cook is mostly remembered for her stand against many aspects of traditional Kwakwaka'wakw culture, especially concerning marriage and the potlatch system. She wrote key colonial authorities, encouraging them to outlaw potlatches in British Columbia. Her opinions were so

strong many felt her role in the commission was a conflict of interest. Her reasons were many, complex, and ultimately only personally known. What is clear is that aspects of traditional culture conflicted with her Christian upbringing. The potlatch system was experiencing transition around the turn of the century. In addition to loss of territory, freedoms, and livelihoods, West Coast nations had lost whole communities to smallpox and tuberculosis. Many struggled to gain or retain status through strategic marriages and extravagant potlatch gifting. Cook believed retaining the potlatch would keep her people economically poor and politically separate from the rest of the country.

The potlatch is more than a religious ceremony: it is a means by which authority is expressed and established, a cornerstone of economic and political ties, and a venue for creative and spiritual expression. The anti-potlatch law (1885-1951), and other assimilationist legislation devastated core identities of the nations affected.

In the early 2000s, the Cook family hired Leslie Robertson, an anthropologist, to investigate the story of their ancestor in order to reconcile themselves and their community with her legacy. The process of collaboration with the family creates an interesting layer of intertextuality to the research. Weaving archival and historical information with contemporary oral interviews, the work takes on an immediate quality, concluding with a poignant discussion of reconciliation and cultural revival.

Lamenting Ignorance

Paul Martin

Sanctioned Ignorance: The Politics of Knowledge Production and the Teaching of Literatures in Canada. U of Alberta P $49.95

Reviewed by Neta Gordon

In his foreword to *Producing Canadian Literature*, Jeff Derkson draws attention to the way the interviews with authors reveal "the astonishing set of forces that shape the literature even before it reaches a public." Paul Martin's study of how Canadian literary studies is variously situated within university programs contributes to the increased critical attention to such "forces" among scholars aiming, as Diana Brydon puts it in her paper "Metamorphoses of a Discipline" published in *Trans.Can.Lit*, to be "active in documenting and re-evaluating dimensions of [Canadian Literature as a] system." Such activity includes everything from the publication of Robert Lecker's *Keepers of the Code*, an analysis of English Canadian literary anthologies, to the now annual CWILA count, which seeks to interrogate the gendered review culture in Canada. Thus, Martin's project of compiling data associated with the teaching of Canadian literature across the nation's universities is well-positioned within the rising tide of scholarly concern for how Canadian literary studies has been institutionalized. Martin's book begins with a history of teaching literature in Canada, comparing scenarios at Anglophone and Francophone universities throughout the twentieth century. He suggests that, while Canadian literature in English has tended to be positioned in curricula as a minor subfield of the British tradition—a state of affairs that Martin argues persists even into the twenty-first century—Quebec universities have enjoyed greater scope to place *littérature canadienne*, especially Québécois literature, at the centre of university programs since at

least the 1960s. After referring to the work of Pierre Bourdieu and Jacques Dubois, whose 1970s and 1980s theoretical work on the literary institution Martin uses to conceptually frame his research question about how national literatures are "(pre) determine[d]," the author proceeds to assess the field via an analysis of course outlines, calendar descriptions of program requirements, and interviews with professors, drawing on data he collected during the 1997-98 academic year. Martin also collected course outlines from 2007-08, and in chapter 5, offers a reading of how course offerings changed after a decade. His principal argument is that a survey of such data shows English Canadian universities constructing a kind of "sanctioned ignorance" of Québécois literature, thus reproducing the timeworn idea that English Canadian literature has more in common with British and/or world English literature than with Canadian literature written in French.

As worthwhile as Martin's project is, it is difficult to consider his work as "timely": in its best moments, *Sanctioned Ignorance* operates as a historical snapshot, offering baseline data as opposed to a survey of the current situation. Even the syllabi data from 2007-08, gathered for comparison with the older data, seems dated when one considers the huge shifts in the field since that time. Further, both Martin's methodology—which he explains meticulously, and with wonderful candour about proceeding with work that, at the time, was unusual for the discipline—as well as the data analysis itself, produces a sense of temporal dislocation. Concerns about not being able to determine the contents of a "photocopied" course package, not to mention references to the "predictability" of a single-author-focused course on the likes of Margaret Laurence or Robertson Davies, jar against the present moment. While it is provocative to consider Martin's whirlwind cross-Canada tour to interview practitioners—and the contrast, as he puts it, "between [his] state of perpetual motion" and "the comparatively static role of the university professor"—one is also confronted with the fact that such work might proceed more efficiently and with a higher rate of participation in today's age of Skype, just as the incompleteness of Martin's hard-won data set might be easily augmented in the digitized world of open access. Furthermore, in a work that begins by advocating strongly for the use of empirical data in such field surveys, Martin's choice to exclude data about literature courses taught in French at francophone universities (apparently because there is too much of such data) is surprising and makes for uneven analysis.

Even more problematic than Martin's somewhat outmoded description of a state of affairs, however, is the often contradictory and perhaps overly polemical positioning of the book, which leads the author to make any number of rhetorically charged laments about "simple, yet foundational questions that, conveniently, remain unasked" or about the way institutional agents might purposefully "hinder any attempts . . . to further our understanding of the literatures of Canada in any truly significant way." On the one hand, Martin critiques the way English-language Canadian literary studies programs are "organized (and deeply compromised) by the premises of Romantic nationalism that were so fundamental to their founding," while on the other hand extolling that "in Québec, the important role of literary production . . . in this process of [national] self-identification has been much more overt." Such uncritical commendation of the way French-language universities undertake "the *projet national*" seems tone deaf to prevailing scholarly questions about the role of the nation as an institution, not to mention to the current political moment. The sense that Martin's work is outmoded is also due to his scholarly framing; while the

use of Bourdieu and Dubois is appropriate, the author draws attention to theoretical considerations that are hardly news to current scholars of literature (Canadian or otherwise). The statement, for example, that "many of the agents that make up the literary institution itself continue to envision the author as a solitary and autonomous genius whose work is entirely the product of his or her own mind," shows a baffling lack of regard for the current state of the field, and an analysis of Martin's Works Cited section bears out the study's limitations in this respect. Of the one-hundred plus works referred to, only fifteen were published after 2000 and, of those, four are publisher websites and three are literary anthologies. Martin's chief premises—that systemic practices related to the teaching of the literatures of Canada must be thoroughly interrogated, and that productive conversations between francophone and anglophone scholars must necessarily proceed if "the walls" between "the two solitudes" are to be broken down—are, however, important opening propositions.

The Debt

Valerie Mason-John and Kevan Anthony Cameron, eds.
The Great Black North: Contemporary African Canadian Poetry. Frontenac $21.95

Joseph Pivato, ed.
Africadian Atlantic: Essays on George Elliott Clarke. Guernica $15.00

Reviewed by Clint Burnham

These are two important books, important for how they map out the poetry being written today by African Canadians, as well as for showing readers—and writers—how that poetry could be treated better.

The title of *The Great Black North* makes me think it's too bad we don't have a dub version of Bob & Doug McKenzie's '80s hit "Take off!" But this is a great anthology, not least because of how it includes, in addition to "page poetry," a section (the larger section) of "stage poetry," including dub, spoken word, and slam. D'bi.young Anitafrika's dub offering, "dis is a warning," is a standout; a gnarly jangled jungle of patois and politics:

> a time fi wi decolonize
> oomaan and man seh we really really must realize
> is a broken legacy we a legitimize
> when we keep our eyes closed and act surprised
> di likkle fella pon di street
> him a pack a likkle neat oozie
> a ghetto yout wid few options

Now—isn't "oozie" the best variant term ever for the Uzi submachine gun? A word that, well, oozes the wound, the blood, caused all too often by such guns. Certainly we can see this poem as an answer to dub pioneer Lillian Allen's call:

> to you young poets who stand up
> and voice
> crafted vision, sight-up into
> lines
> set alight the energy in words, image, vibes
> Say wey yu haffi say fi nuh buss' up, fi self-define, don't walk blind

There is some great poetry in the "Slam" section, as well—Marlon Wilson's "hip hop is" frames misrecognition of the essence of hip hop in a romantic encounter:

> Without the gesture of a kiss
> I ventured to ask her
> What hip-hop songs would make your ultimate play list
> Of course I'm guessing Nas "Rewind"
> Or KRS-1's "Sound of the Police"
> I mean a woman this refined
> I could only be intrigued.

Of course the "refined" woman doesn't like the cussing and we're off to a battle over what makes up hip-hop: profanity and Black violence or wordsmithing and a "modern day negro spiritual?" Too,

elsewhere in this section El Jones calls on Black folk to "be more like Selassie instead of selling asses," and Greg "Ritallin" Frankson asks the Shadow

> why you melted away
> like my Dickie Dee popsicle under the heat
> of another Scarborough summer.

Or, in a "spoken word" contribution, Komi Olafimihan A.K.A. Poetic Speed offers this tart rejoinder to the war on drugs:

> Baby
> They say smoking is a drug
> I say 'not smoking' is a drug
> I 'not smoked' until I began to hallucinate.
> Then it came to my attention,
> There is something grotesquely beautiful
> in the art of washing dishes,
> The careless soaking of the sponge,
> The intricate structure of the foam as it
> rises to the top of the sink

Against the tongue-torquing fireworks of the oral selections (an accompanying CD or MP3 downloads would have been awesome), the "page" poets come off as a little staid, either paraphrasing moments from Black Canadian history or revisiting such jazz and blues masters as Billie Holiday and Charlie Parker. But there are some gems here too, as in Michael Fraser's "underground," which offers what could be a coda to Steve McQueen's *12 Years a Slave* in its fine evocation of runaways following the Northern Star:

> even near the border,
> they were always one cough
> away from the familiar
> clinking chain bracelet,
> the scalding half-tone whip
> boiling bumps onto their backs
> like a firebrand fresh from
> blue hot fire

George Elliott Clarke offers an introduction to *The Great Black North,* and certainly he is the colossus of Canadian poetry—Black or otherwise—with a dozen books of poetry, as well as fiction, librettos, essays, and anthologies to his credit. And so it comes as no surprise that there should be a collection of essays on his work. But it is a surprise that the papers in *Africadian Atlantic* should be so amateurish as those in this book edited by Joseph Pivato and published by Guernica. This weakness may be a case of "uneven development" in our critical apparatus: Clarke deserves, surely, a proper academic anthology from one of the country's university presses, where funding and standards would have not only led to a more rigorous collection—one perhaps in dialogue with contemporary scholarship—but also one with such essential features as an index.

The problem (I have) with *Africadian Atlantic* can be summed up in two ways: first of all, many of the contributors mistake uncritical adulation for critical engagement. Then, the all-too-necessary historicization that some of the critics bring to their essays (providing contextual background for Black history in Nova Scotia, from the history of slavery in Canada, or the arrival of Black Loyalists, down to crime narratives from the 1940s) is not, unfortunately, matched by critical or theoretical frameworks for *reading* the poetry itself.

No doubt it is cruel to call out any one of the authors in this collection—my argument is structural, not personal—but I will mention H. Nigel Thomas' essay on "Some Aspects of Blues Use in George Elliott Clarke's *Whylah Falls*." When not clumsily throwing around "diachronic" and "synchronic" like a freshman, or offering up semi-digested histories of jazz and blues that quote all too liberally from Sterling Brown, finally Thomas has nothing to say about the poetry itself. Thus he quotes "Jordantown Blues," a harrowing take on dysfunctional love that accomplishes its work with bracingly compressed lines like

> While life sags to extremes, blood
> streams, pinched, squeezed,
> By his diet of white Tory rum, pig tails,
> And her diet of fear, tea, and aspirin.

At this point, Thomas is able to say little more than how "uncompromising" the poem is, as if he were writing a high school book report and was not, in fact, a retired English professor.

Women's Public Voices

Mary Novik
Muse. Doubleday Canada $22.95

Reviewed by Terri R. Baker

In a recent lecture, Mary Beard discussed the ancient history of men silencing women's public voices: from Telemachus telling Penelope that speech was for men only to today's under-representation of women in politics. In Novik's fiction—*Conceit* (2007) and *Muse* (2013)—women who live in the shadow of a canonical poet also find their public words silenced.

Francesco Petrarch's love sonnets have secured his place in the literary canon. In them, he describes the frustrations of his unattainable love for Laura. Conversely, John Donne's place in the canon derives from love sonnets in which the speaker and his lover unite in physical and spiritual love. Whereas much has been written about these two pillars of the literary canon, virtually nothing has been written about the women they loved. Mary Novik has entered into this unexplored space through her fiction, reimagining the public and private voice of the unnamed mother of Petrarch's two children in *Muse*, just as she did for Donne's wife and daughter in *Conceit*.

Muse shares the idealization of love found in Petrarch's poetry, just as *Conceit* shares the grotesque language and sustained conceits of Donne's poetry. *Muse* is grounded in the first person point of view of Solange Le Blanc, the physical love, scribe, and editor of Petrarch, whereas *Conceit* has a non-linear timeline and diverging points of view. *Muse* moves from the squalor of a whore's apartments to a nun's cloister to the Pope's palace in Avignon, whereas *Conceit* firmly grounds itself in the bourgeoisie of London. Novik's use of first-person point of view for Solange and for Ann indicates that we can never really know their stories. Despite this ambiguity, *Muse* is less complex and, at times, more frustrating than *Conceit*, such as when Solange forgives Petrarch for yet another betrayal. It would be easy to dismiss *Muse* as the lesser of the two novels—too accessible, too sentimental. However, the intertextuality of Novik's prose and Petrarch's poetry serves to remind us that the author is in dialogue with that poetry and claiming a voice for medieval women in a prose form that, given her first novel, echoes the sonnet cycle.

Timeless feminine cycles also form a critical part of both of Novik's novels. Solange's journey begins with her own birth, pauses over the awakening of her sexual desire on meeting Petrarch, and culminates with her rejecting the world of men for the seclusion of a convent. Petrarch's ambition—for a career, for his poetry—comes at the expense of his love for Solange, forcing her to navigate her own way in the corrupt and avaricious world of Avignon during the Babylonian Captivity. Drawing unwanted male attention is Solange's gift of prophecy from the moment of her birth. This means that *Muse*'s Solange, who loses control of her body and voice during her visions, must take control of her legacy as a prophet for the sake of her daughters. The novel's ending, with Solange beginning her own chronicle, reinforces Beard's reminder to readers of how women were silenced in the past—no such chronicle exists—and of how women today must still be wary of being silenced.

To Paradise or Elsewhere

Kathy Page
Paradise & Elsewhere: Stories. Biblioasis $18.95

Reviewed by Amanda Leslie-Spinks

The 2014 short story collection by Kathy Page, *Paradise & Elsewhere*, takes readers on fourteen extraordinary journeys. Each story holds a mystery that unfolds for the reader only as it unfolds for the characters, and we are drawn with them from a known world into eerie experiences of premonition, retribution, transformation, and insight.

Page's characters are drawn quickly but with clarity and immediacy—they are you or I, our children, or our lovers—the merchants we deal with. They include a waitress in the Midwest, a university student, a nineteenth-canturry lighthouse keeper, trekkers in a foreign land, a shape-shifter, and the original residents of a version of Eden.

They are interesting, and we seem to know them easily, but they soon fade as individuals. Their narratives are driven instead by forces beyond the grasp of the characters themselves. With cool authority, Page invites the ancient laws of fate, hubris and retribution to surface in her characters' lives. Sometimes they perish, and sometimes they understand what they have done and what has happened because of it. Then we are hopeful for them. Sometimes they are left, as we are left, on a sharp edge of understanding.

The genius of this book is the way magic seeps into the stories. It seems so inevitable. Somewhere deep in the ancient part of our brains, there must still be a grasp of the connectedness of all things, of the endless flux of creation and destruction. The thin veneer of human progress and mastery tears away easily and the fates we read of here are frighteningly familiar. The sense of being watched makes us shiver. We are easily unnerved by dark forests and trackless deserts we encounter in these stories. We are shocked by the trickery or weakness of our companions. In these moments it is clear that there is no safety.

So, readers should not expect to step briefly into a Harry Potter world of mysterious empowerment, and step easily out again. The tales speak too directly to us for that. They make for unsettling reading. Our vulnerability is getting ever harder to forget.

The effect of the book is to open new sightlines onto the disasters we are courting by refusing to listen to other voices, by allowing ourselves to be deceived, by never questioning the violence of our ways. Our little victories are clearly temporary and our failures much longer lasting.

Page is never didactic, though. She lets a sense of urgency and foreboding come to us only through the words and actions of her characters. The narrator of one story realizes, "Even the miles of burning desert and thorny scrub that separated us from whatever else there might be were a blessing of sorts, for we sensed that there was an else and an other, and also that we should not rush to meet it."

In another extraordinarily moving story "We, the Trees," the reader is confronted with an act of deep heroism that is futile and pathetic and yet somehow also a model for how humans could be. If we could shrug off the certainty of our own importance, perhaps we could awaken in time to sense the workings of the living world and its gifts.

My only disappointment was to find that four of the stories in this book appeared in Page's 1990 collection *As in Music*. From such a sharp-eyed observer of our lives and times, I want more stories and fatter books. I want to find more liminal selves shimmering behind the facades on display, and new paths broken in the limitless space leading towards heaven or elsewhere.

As one of her characters says, "A careless or malicious guide can ruin a trip like this, can leave you with nightmares and a very bitter taste in your mouth." But Page

is a gentle guide. The strangely familiar omniscient voice in which she writes seems almost to be speaking to itself. And yet there is no escaping the mirror she places before us. It reflects the close kinship of idealism and greed, of triumph and loss, but it is only showing us what, in fact, deep down, we already know.

It is uncertain what if anything can turn us. We face complex disasters that are implacable, brutal, no one's fault. The imminence of some sort of cosmic payback is written everywhere, and, as Leonard Cohen put it: "Everybody Knows." But we can imagine things otherwise. And therefore there is hope, "curled like a bug under a stone," waiting.

Macmillan's Legacy

Ruth Panofsky

The Literary Legacy of the Macmillan Company of Canada: Making Books and Mapping Culture. U of Toronto P $45.00

Reviewed by Misao Dean

I remember wondering what all the fuss was about when Macmillan Canada was sold to Maclean-Hunter in 1973. Wasn't Macmillan just another foreign publisher? And wasn't it good that they were being sold to a Canadian company? Ruth Panofsky's book explains that no, Macmillan wasn't just another foreign-owned publisher, and it wasn't necessarily a good thing that they were sold to Maclean-Hunter. Macmillan was the company that originally recognized the importance of Adele Wiseman and Ethel Wilson, that published Hugh MacLennan and Grey Owl, and they were presciently and boldly committed to Canadian authors, right from their establishment in 1905.

Macmillan's parent company, Macmillan UK, prided itself on the seriousness of its literary titles, and described itself as a publisher of high quality, morally conservative, and beautifully produced books. Macmillan Canada, like many "branch plant" publishers in the early and mid-twentieth century, was intended by its founders to function primarily as an "agency" publisher to distribute Macmillan's British and US books, and to exploit the Canadian textbook market. However, the first manager of Macmillan's Canadian branch, Frank Wise, recognized that Canada had unique qualities as a market, and that a successful Canadian publishing house needed to be wary of treating Canadians merely as consumers of foreign culture. While he remained committed to making money for Macmillan Canada's owners, and to the parent company's emphasis on high quality and morally improving fiction, Wise sought out Canadian manuscripts that he thought would appeal to a Canadian public, sometimes at the risk of the wrath of Macmillan's head office.

Ruth Panofsky focuses her history of Macmillan Canada on its five reigning directors, providing interesting portraits of successful publishers in an era in which the industry was dominated by energetic larger-than-life figures, who drank whiskey and smoked, and who provided authors with the services of a combined bartender, editor, and hand-holder. As Panofsky points out, this atmosphere was unabashedly sexist; the one woman who fought her way to the top, Ellen Elliot, was unceremoniously dumped at the end of the Second World War with no pension. Despite her work as head of the editorial division throughout the war, she was never acknowledged by the British directors of the company as anything more than a glorified secretary.

Macmillan Canada was also home to two legendary editors of modern and contemporary Canadian fiction: John Gray and Douglas Gibson. Gray joined the firm in 1930 as a textbook salesman, quickly rising to head of the educational division. Panofsky documents how his energy and success as a salesman drove his rise to the

editorial division. When he returned from the war in 1946 he usurped Ellen Elliot's place and, with the support and assistance of the British Macmillan, became General Manager and Director of the firm, a position he held until 1969. Scholars of Ethel Wilson, Hugh MacLennan, Robertson Davies, Adele Wiseman and Robert Kroetsch will already know Gray as these authors' editor, publisher and friend, but Panofsky focuses on aspects of his career that might be less well known, such as his negotiations with the British "head office" representatives Lovat Dickson and Daniel Macmillan, and his presentation on behalf of Macmillan to the Massey Commission in 1949, in which he advocated the restriction of the importation of Book Club titles and the establishment of a national library. He presided over an expansion of Macmillan in the fifties and was inaugural president of the Co-operative Book Centre, a publisher-owned co-operative designed to expedite book sales to Canadian libraries. His successor Douglas Gibson joined Macmillan in 1974 after serving as managing editor at Doubleday Canada. As head of the trade division Gibson valiantly struggled to defend Macmillan's traditional literary publishing program from the commercial imperatives of Maclean-Hunter, who owned the publisher from 1973-1980. He worked with established Macmillan authors MacLennan, Robertson Davies and W. O. Mitchell, and recruited Mavis Gallant, Alice Munro, and Jack Hodgins to Macmillan's list before moving to McClelland & Stewart under his own editorial imprint, "Douglas Gibson Books."

Ruth Panofsky's history of Macmillan Canada is meticulously documented with extensive reference to Macmillan papers in Canada, the US and the UK, as well as interviews with surviving Macmillan employees. It is pleasantly readable, focusing on creating Macmillan's leading executives as "characters" by following the trail of correspondence that says so much about each man's personal style. While the book is perhaps not exactly something you'd read for pleasure, Panofsky has done much to enliven the material and make it accessible; given the central importance of the material to the history of Canadian publishing, and indeed Canadian literature, *The Literary Legacy of the Macmillan Company of Canada: Making Books and Mapping Culture* has held pride of place in my bedside reading, and is certainly an important addition to the growing literature in the history of Canadian publishing.

Counting the Cost

Kathryn Para
Lucky. Mother Tongue $21.95

Linda Svendsen
Sussex Drive: Inside the Backrooms and the Bedrooms of the Nation. Random House $22.00

Reviewed by Jodi Lundgren

Literature and politics have long had an ambivalent relationship, sometimes mutually repellent (as in "art for art's sake"), sometimes unilaterally exploitative (as in propaganda). Falling between these two extremes are engaged novels such as Linda Svendsen's satirical *Sussex Drive,* which exposes the repressive bonds among the Canadian Prime Minister's Office, the military, and the media and Kathryn Para's *Lucky,* which laments the human cost of the Iraq War.

Set in 2008-09, *Sussex Drive* is told through two alternating point-of-view characters: Becky Leggatt, the Whitehorse-raised, twice-married wife of Prime Minister Greg Leggatt, and Governor General Lise Lavoie, a francophone native of a small African country named St. Bertrand. Spending half the book immersed in the consciousness of the hypocritical, manipulative, anti-feminist Becky will tax the average reader (no pun intended).

Although it is a relief to shift into the more cosmopolitan and arts-friendly perspective of Lise, she is hidebound by diplomacy and can rarely speak her mind. Both women interact with a key secondary character, RCMP Corporal Taylor Shymanski, an amputee who has survived an undercover operation in Afghanistan and who develops a relationship with the Leggatts' devoutly Christian, eighteen-year-old daughter, Martha.

Sussex Drive follows recent political history closely: from the hasty election that gave Stephen Harper's Conservative party a second minority government in October 2008; to the short-lived coalition among Opposition leaders six weeks later; to the prorogation of Parliament that forestalled a confidence vote. While the main characters and events are easily recognizable, some of the allusions are considerably less evident, making the book's ideal reader a news junkie with a steel-trap memory. On occasion, Svendsen plants a playful surprise, such as the Queen of England's having abdicated, leaving the throne to King Charles (the "Green King"), who tells Lise that "in the instance of your own prime minister, Vampire Leggatt, I'd like to stab a silver crucifix into his anti-environmental heart."

PM Leggatt himself has a physically violent streak: not only does he throw a heavy pewter picture frame directly at his wife from close range, but he also kicks a cage containing his sons' pet gerbils, killing one of them and alienating his children. The PM's distance from his family steadily increases until Becky attends a "First Lady event" in Britain, at which she meets a "Children's Book Author." The "CBA" (resembling J. K. Rowling) proceeds to lambast Canada's PM:

> I've been watching Canada very closely since he came to power, and the country's gone totally wacko. You've abandoned AIDS initiatives in sub-Saharan Africa, slashed budgets, and told your provincial leaders to privatize medicine, water and education, and you're inflating your military budget, and your surplus—that amazing buffer built by the previous administration—has been splurged on, quite frankly, cheap vote-bribing wanks.

Although she rebuffs the attack, Becky later admits that "the CBA's assessment of her husband and his policies rang true-*ish* to her. For the first time." Indeed, by novel's end, Greg Leggatt is revealed as truly villainous—especially through his role in the mysterious subplot involving Shymanski and Afghanistan—and is recognized as such by both his wife and his children, not to mention Lise Lavoie. Although satire generally ridicules a subject in order to deflate it, Svendsen's narrative contains enough dark (indeed, tragic) elements to leave readers feeling as troubled as they are amused.

Darker still, *Lucky* is a novel about survivor's guilt told from the point of view of a thirty-five-year-old Canadian photojournalist named Anika Lund (Ani). Set in the Middle East in 2004 and told in the third person, the main plot concerns Ani's friendship with Viva, a Syrian woman whose journalist husband has disappeared. When Viva's search for the man who has abducted (and likely killed) her husband leads her into Iraq, Ani accompanies her, concerned about her friend's revenge fantasies, but consumed as well with her own quest to take a photograph that will "stop the war." With the help of a distant cousin of Viva's husband and of a Danish journalist who is an ex-lover of Ani's, the women eventually travel to the centre of the conflict in Fallujah. Ani, who attempts to sway members of varying factions by saying, "We can get your side of the story out," captures much of the ensuing horror on film.

Alternating chapters told in the first-person depict Ani at home in Vancouver two years later. The division between third and first-person points of view creates a dissociative effect that highlights Ani's PTSD, also apparent in her hallucinations, flashbacks,

diet of vodka, and trips to the psychiatrist for "Pams" (antipsychotics said to be deadly if mixed with alcohol). What has happened in Fallujah is suspensefully withheld until the book's closing pages, when the severity of Ani's PTSD is fully accounted for.

The narrative frequently references truth and representation in contradictory claims that, taken together, are questioning rather than polemical: Ani reflects that "[i]mages are so powerful it would be easy to think they're truth, but they're not, only an argument," while Viva claims that her husband was "a journalist who told the truth" and was "killed" for it. Similarly self-sacrificing, Ani informs her psychiatrist that, "the story's everything. It can't ever be about us," to which the doctor counters that Ani's personal story also needs to be told.

Lucky does tell that personal story, though, like Svendsen's novel—and as if to justify its individualistic focus—it is packed with political and historical information. While its own pages might seem to question how any genre can compete in value or significance with documentary realism, the book excels as literary fiction, especially in its trenchant exploration of Ani's interior landscape. Indeed, the narrative reveals that even with acute senses and a discerning consciousness, a journalist must necessarily filter (rather than directly record) events—and that trauma shatters the ability to filter. While Svendsen delivers a targeted attack on the current federal government, Para remains nonpartisan, drawing attention to the suffering that armed conflict causes on all sides.

The Nothing That Is

Steven Price
Omens in the Year of the Ox. Brick $19.00

Jan Zwicky
Forge. Gaspereau $19.95

Reviewed by Andre Furlani

In *Forge* Jan Zwicky restricts her vocabulary, prosody, and themes while Steven Price, recipient of the Gerald Lampert Award for *Anatomy of Keys*, in his second book of poetry is verbally expansive, metrically venturesome, and thematically various. *Forge* is centripetal, gingerly ascending the brittle rungs of a spiritual and sexual transport (the terms become reciprocal); *Omens in the Year of the Ox* is centrifugal, avid for new subjects, including infanticide, Gaudí, joyriding, relics, Icarus, seabirds, Dr. Johnson's table talk, and the curses of a midwife, a blind man, and a gardener.

Zwicky's object is a mystical apprehension that by definition defies language, and so her diction is ascetic even where the sexual analogies for spiritual rapture are wanton. Price by contrast thirsts for verbal rapture, permitting language to exceed its objects to become the primary pigment. He wants to strike all the registers, while she strives for that single, sustained note that might disclose, as a precipitate, an ineffable insight.

In her faux-commonplace book *Lyric Philosophy* Zwicky defines "lyric philosophy" as "informed by both profound intuitions of coherence and the desire for clarity"; an attunement of intellect and feeling where the rhythmic coherence of the thought is attuned to the Pythagorean integrity of the world. The book's themes of a "resonant" non-propositional order of truth recur here: thus the "wisdom" of Bach's "resonant" music consists in "its tempering lyric passion by domesticity, its grounding of the flash of lyric insight into domestic earth."

The forge of Zwicky's title is not a discursive entity but a tentative metaphor for

love: "and if the forge was love." In poems that echo San Juan de la Cruz and Teresa di Avila the love is eros and charis. The forge is also a matrix, literally a womb, and children move wraith-like through these verses like the children of Rudyard Kipling's "They." Schumann's "Kinderszenen" instigates two poems haunted not by scenes of children but by their absence. The poet has intimations of children so strong they seem to touch her and even to masquerade as memories, "because we cannot bear to say / the longed-for that did not come to pass."

The dwellings these poems occupy are thus childless, the rooms filled instead by a beloved who is both an erotic partner and a spiritual avatar—a true vicar. As in Freud, "the resonant ground of sex and death" determines human experience, and in *Forge* Eros *is* Thanatos. The Bach partita inspires reflections on the need to improvise in a world where beauty is "rimed / with death." In "Transit" the angel is as *schrecklich* as those Rilke glimpsed dimly from the high Adriatic ramparts of Duino (she has a poem, "Admetos," that follows Rilke's "Alkestis"): "and the god, slick, dripping, / stepped out from the darkness. Entered you." The language of penetration is sacred and profane (the *penetralia* is a temple's innermost shrine or *cella*). From the second person singular she graduates to the first: "And this that breaks inside me: you." Their union is equally apophatic and priapic.

Emptiness in *Omens in the Year of the Ox* is threatening, Price fearing that his verse is vacant. According to the castigating choir of superegos who reappear in the collection, the "voices" of his verse "just vowels jarred to clattering"; they chide: "You are not haunted. Nothing is in you." Meanwhile, beside her lover, Zwicky lives out a paradox of negative theology, that dissolution reasserts the body, language, and world.

As in *Lyric Philosophy*, so in the philosophical lyric of *Forge*, Zwicky is committed to what Wittgenstein calls perspicacious presentation (her preferred synonym is "clarity") combined with his axiom that value eludes nomination. The basis of human meanings is unutterable, shown forth only in the spaces between utterance. In these poems of mystical congress along a *via negativa*, love penetrates the "cloud of unknowing" and divines a beatific object that cannot be an object of knowledge yet consents to be adored and reciprocally graces the adorer.

Zwicky's sources are exalted yet lightly borne, from Counter-Reformation visionaries, Christian neo-Platonism, and Julian of Norwich to Julian's admirer T. S. Eliot. Price's are necessarily more diverse and audible, in part because his verse is still in the process of metabolizing the canon. "Memory rakes its rocky / earth, sets everything / to echoing," he says, and could just as well be talking about the Daughter of Memory who is the muse of poetry.

The precursor poets mutter the book's surest omens. His "Bull Kelp" supplements Marianne Moore's menagerie, and "Odysseus and the Sirens" mingles Moore's "Fish" with Homer's mermaids. Although a prose poem, "The Tyrant's Physician" bears the influence of Cavafy. Donne's Holy Sonnets reverberate, as in the injunction "Break us / to make us bright." "Vagrancy Blues" draws on the acerbic melancholy of Langston Hughes' blues poems. His "Magi," reduced to being "rags on sticks under westering skies," owe as much to Yeats as to Eliot. "Jarred Pears under Dust" revisits Theodore Roethke's cellar armed with Wallace Stevens' "Study of Two Pears" and "Anecdote of the Jar." Stevens' alogical negations impel several poems: "I was an eye and was not"; "what you hear / is the nothing that nothing announces." The swifts darting by the poet's Spanish window are as insistent as Stevens' blackbirds: "*this-this-this* their quick turnings urged"—or is this the threshing of Philip Larkin's tree?

The opening poem, "The Crossing," audaciously begins with the notorious

word Seamus Heaney chose to render the *Hwaet* that launches *Beowulf*, before summoning the opening of Dante's *Inferno* (passages from which Heaney translated): "So. At the end of the middle of your life / you wake." The tutelary spirit of "The Crossing" is one of the earliest students of Anglo-Saxon metrics, Gerard Manley Hopkins, and throughout the book Price pays homage to the guttural muse of sprung rhythm. "The world in its shook foil shone," he declares under an arbutus that possesses "rootmuscles."

Price makes fine tongue twisters, too: "see its slow molten dreep dap low"; "A weird eel unwinding windward in the lee," the last noun reversing the first one. His Hopkinsian word-hoard, replenished with dialect terms, is exact but ostentatious: "plicks," "smoke-glarred," "stogged," "noonspackled," "scup," "wind-amped," and "screeled" appear within four pages.

Zwicky's high-cultured solemnity can sound precious, while Price's virtuosic exuberance can sound wearyingly precocious, yet their very different kinds of audacity sustain their books. Both are committed to "lyric" intimations of an aesthetic and ethical order immanent in nature and the world. "Lyric knows the world is whole," she writes in the essay "Lyric, Memory, Narrative," "that every part of it is integrally related to every other part." "It outstrips itself as it grows," Price writes of the arbutus, and this will likely prove true of his own development. It is already true of Zwicky's.

Ice and Identity

Jay Ruzesky
In Antarctica: An Amundsen Pilgrimage.
Nightwood $24.95

Pete Sarsfield; Kim Mann, illus.
Glacial Erratics. Your Nickel's Worth $19.95

Sean A. Tinsley and Rachel A. Qitsualik
Ajjiit: Dark Dreams of the Ancient Arctic.
Inhabit Media $14.95

Reviewed by Shane McCorristine

The Antarctic tourism industry thrives on people's sense of enchantment. In visiting the huts of Shackleton or Scott, the tourist can become a polar explorer; going to an otherworldly and pristine realm that most will never be able to visit. Given the role that the race for the South Pole still has in forging our imagined geography of Antarctica, it is no surprise that tourists are obsessed with the past, with literally walking in the footsteps of dead explorers. Jay Ruzesky's *In Antarctica: An Amundsen Pilgrimage* emerges from this context and is part travelogue, part memoir, and part narrative recreation of Roald Amundsen's successful journey to the South Pole in 1911. Ruzesky, a poet and professor of Creative Writing, is a distant relative of Amundsen's and was motivated by the centennial of the Norwegian explorer's achievement to set off on his own journey on a cruise ship to Antarctica in the company of his brother—ironically named Scott. Ruzesky weaves together memories from his childhood with reflections on the trip south through Brazil, Chile, and Argentina. Vignettes from Amundsen's triumphant Antarctic expedition provide the connecting thread in what is a well-written and well-illustrated book. Ruzesky does rehash some of the old dichotomies that haunt historical research on polar exploration (the egalitarian Norwegians learned from the Inuit; the class-ridden British ignored Indigenous knowledge) but his ecstatic engagement

with Antarctica is infectious. At times, this risks becoming overbearing: "my own quest to Antarctica is not just a following of footsteps, it is a pilgrimage to the place where epic struggles played out, where heroes were made and died, and where the gods had announced their presence in the form of unknown and indescribable wonders." Still, Ruzesky does tap in to the magnetic attachment that many Western men have with Antarctica. There is no questioning of this enchantment and what it might hide, but as a polar dreamer the author probably has more in common with explorers like Shackleton and Amundsen than with academics interested in Eurocentric ways of seeing.

Ajjiit: Dark Dreams of the Ancient Arctic by Sean A. Tinsley and Rachel A. Qitsualik is a wonderfully phantasmagoric collection of fantasy tales inspired by traditional Inuit stories of transformation and struggle. This promising collaboration paints an Arctic landscape inhabited by spirits, animals, humans, and non-humans—all of whom share certain needs and desires. In the opening tale "Elder," Pigliq, a member of the Inugarulliit, or Humble Folk, is unable to dream and is therefore marginalized and bullied by his people. But in a dramatic turn of events, the sleepless Pigliq is the only one who can resist the onslaught of the Sinnaktuumait, the monsters from the sea who have come to steal the dreams of his people, leaving them soulless zombies. After rescuing the Humble Folk, Pigliq, recognizable as a kind of universal folk hero, becomes an Elder and leaves the community in search of others like himself.

I was lured into the world created by the authors because of their gentle introduction to the concepts and dramatis personae in Inuit cosmologies. These include the *inuunngittut*, or non-human beings like the Qallupiluq, a shape-shifter who resists the shackles of a single form but is fascinated with humans. In "The Qallupiluq Forgiven" one of these chimeras leaves its watery darkness to claim a human child who had violated a taboo at the sea ice. But far from showing any fear, the child sings from the hood of the Qallupiluq and prevents its returning beneath the ice:

> *The calf!* The Qallupiluq screamed within its mind, even as the chimera's mouth loosed a true scream; for the blue light, the flame that emanated from the child, was a *qaumaniq,* the aura wielded by the Some Seen. This child, then, was an *Angakkuq*. A Shaman.

The child forces the Qallupiluq to face up to a past injustice and thereby shares the concept of forgiveness, a type of strength it had not respected before. Other highlights include "Oil," a sensuous and delightful revenge tale about a wife and her unwanted husband and "Slippery Babies," a Lovecraftian nightmare about the feverish dreams of a woman who may or may not be a mother to two babies who wail "Ti, ti, ti. . . ," "Taaq. . . ." This is a collection about what it means to be human, about the *innua* or core spirit that lies beneath the social masks of all animals and spirits in the Arctic.

Identity is also a concern in Pete Sarsfield's wintry collection of poetry, *Glacial Erratics*. Encouraging the reader to dwell on the title ("n. A large block of rock carried by a glacier and deposited some distance from where it was formed"), Sarsfield's poems speak of dislocation and of people who are lost or out of place. Watched over by Kim Mann's photographs of snowy landscapes, frozen streams, and alert deer, the poems seem designed to inspire tension. There is a deep loneliness in the collection that is drawn from a sense that humans are a strange species. In "unwelcome company," a spooked person wanders the docks afraid to even be alone with a rat. Elsewhere, "this one" concerns a suicide, removed from consecrated ground and dropped into an unsheltered harbour. Throughout, Sarsfield ponders the distance that remains between

people who are near each other. The person who sits beside us on a plane is "separate, a reader, / head down in the dark aisle seat, a welcome stranger in her solitude" while the hotel rooms we claim from previous occupants become remote, "they absorb and deflect / leaving minimal trace or clue / unless excavated, with care."

Graines de logique

Lori Saint-Martin

Mathématiques intimes. L'instant même 14,95 $

Compte rendu par Catherine Parayre

Dans *Les Portes closes* (2013), Lori Saint-Martin met en scène un couple d'artistes, Philippe, peintre célèbre, et Catherine, mangée par le silence et avec un goût prononcé pour la transparence des objets et les incendies de ses toiles. Avec *Mathématiques intimes*, sa quatrième œuvre de fiction, l'auteure prend le parti de Catherine et nous livre des « microrécits » dont la longueur varie entre quelques courts paragraphes et une phrase brève au centre d'une page blanche. Tels de petits poèmes en prose, ils éclairent, en traits rapides mais porteurs de larges pans de vie, des vécus inavoués. Les personnages se succèdent dans la ronde de l'amour, de la solitude, de la vieillesse, des demi-mots, des petits bonheurs et des grandes tristesses du quotidien. Simples esquisses qui s'évanouissent peu après leur apparition, ils sont réduits à une intimité inaccessible aux lecteurs.

Furtivement, on aperçoit des tranches de citron sur une table de café, une femme qui confectionne une délicieuse confiture de fraises, une maison qui s'écroule, une autre qui est à vendre, des princes fatigués qui veulent redevenir grenouilles et des princesses qui se réjouissent à l'idée de reprendre leur liberté. On y rencontre un garçon portant un bidon d'essence, un vieux garçon et sa sœur dans une demeure en feu, des couples qui souhaitent moins d'intimité, un vieil homme bousculé dans la foule, un couple silencieux qui ne se supporte plus, des mères et des filles. On ressent la douleur de se regarder dans un miroir, l'émoi de l'adolescence, l'isolement de la foule dans la station de métro, « le ravissement du vide », des pensées brèves et secrètes, banales ou existentielles. On trace sa propre silhouette dans la rue comme sur la scène d'un crime et on prend des photos – à dix-sept ans, à vingt-cinq ans et à l'automne de la vie.

Ces microrécits nous rappellent que la vie est moins individuelle qu'on aimerait le croire. Les scénarios suggérés, les bribes de réactions exprimées et un style lucide donneront aux lecteurs une déroutante impression de déjà-vu ou de déjà-vécu sous l'effet d'une étrange poésie. Parmi les plus beaux passages, retenons ceux qui se résument à une délicate transparence dans les objets et dans l'air qu'il fait, pour mieux rendre compte de la clarté désabusée de la pensée et de l'émotion. Partout, des zones lumineuses sont reflétées par le verre, l'inox, la neige, les cernes sur une nappe blanche, la pleine lune, la feuille blanche, l'argent fin. On pensera à *Diapason* (2009) de la franco-canadienne Anne Sechin et à la mélancolie translucide de ses personnages, êtres qui se rencontrent sans jamais se libérer de leur solitude. Les microrécits forment un almanach des petites aventures de la vie; leurs secrets nous invitent à un joli jeu poétique.

Reading CanLit in Spain

Pilar Somacarrera, ed.
Made in Canada, Read in Spain: Essays on the Translation and Circulation of English-Canadian Literature. de Gruyter $126.00

Reviewed by Cynthia Sugars

In a 1987 interview with Geoff Hancock, Margaret Atwood notes the uncanny feeling of knowing that her work is translated into over twenty languages, only two of which she reads. As Atwood puts it, "I have no idea what those other versions are saying to the people who read them." Pilar Somacarrera's confirmation of the importance of Atwood's cautionary insight is true of the now internationally renowned status of Canadian literature and more broadly, of the traffic of literature across national borders. "[W]riting acquires a new life once it has been translated into another language and exported into a different culture," writes Somacarrera, "a process which requires favourable economic, sociological, and political conditions." In other words, the popularity of particular writers and literatures outside of their domestic contexts is intertwined with the kinds of cultural work that these texts end up doing within various national and global contexts. Atwood's and Somacarrera's comments suggest that this issue is complicated by the multiple levels of mediation that are an inevitable part of this cultural translation. But as Somacarrera also demonstrates, these forms of mediation are not reducible to the ideological level of cultural priorities and tensions; they are also bound up with more institutional and sociological questions about the kinds of infrastructure—whether in terms of publishing, education, or diplomatic support—whose influence can be as strong as it is easy to overlook.

The timing of *Made in Canada, Read in Spain: Essays on the Translation and Circulation of English-Canadian Literature*, edited by Somacarrera and containing the work of seven Spanish academics, is important in all of these ways. It offers a challenging and theoretically nuanced assessment of the selection, translation, and reception of Canadian literature; why certain authors have been translated, promoted, and taught in Spain; why certain genres are favoured; how these texts have been constructed in ways that speak to Spanish concerns; and just as importantly, which Canadian writers, texts, and genres have been excluded. The chapters address these questions, not only in terms of the perceived content of these literary texts but by broadening their focus to consider "the role and influence of institutions (political and commercial), publishers and their marketing systems, literary critics, reviewers and academics, as well as the significance of new technologies and different types of media." The result of these multiple levels of inquiry is an impressively developed understanding of how these questions play out within the context of a highly complex field of cultural production.

Intriguingly, what makes the Spanish context so interesting is not the prominence of Canadian culture there, but the opposite: the fact that until fairly recently, in the minds of most Spaniards Canada was a "'terra incognita,' not only unknown, but also unknowable," a situation that makes Canadian literature's more recent rise in stature a fascinating test case. As many of these chapters shrewdly suggest, this recent rise in popularity has a lot to say about the power of interpretation. As Somacarrera argues, the "fanfare of multiculturalism" which describes the favourable reception of so much of Canadian literature in Spain touched an important chord with local audiences. Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, for example, "found a warm reception in post-Franco Spain." Belén Martin-Lucas argues that South-Asian Canadian writers have been celebrated as important evidence of this multicultural ideal. These works, she

argues, have been used to promote a form of "nation branding," obscuring antiracist activism taking place in Canadian contexts. These convergences play out in other ways, as, for example, in Isabel Alonso-Breto and Marta Ortego-Sáez's analysis of the popularity of Québécois literature in Catalonia, a region that shares Quebec's status as a distinctive nation with a minority language. Eva Darias-Beautell explores the introduction of Canadian literature into the Spanish academy in the early 1990s on the coattails of post-colonialism. In being subsumed under the umbrella of Commonwealth Literature, and circumscribed within subsequent institutional and curricular demands for comprehensiveness, the specificities of Canadian literary contexts risked becoming lost. Additional chapters focus on the promotion and reception of such international icons as Atwood and Munro, and Mercedes Díaz-Dueñas offers an intriguing study of the ways that Douglas Coupland's work struck a chord with authors and readers who shared his concerns. Who knew that the term "Generation X" was widely applied to the generation of young people who came of age during the severe Spanish recession in the 1990s?

Canadian government initiatives in the 1980s led to the founding of the Spanish Association for Canadian Studies in 1988. Since then, Canadian literature's international status has been embraced within the national media, academy, and mainstream opinion—a perspective that was reinforced not only by Michael Ondaatje's and Margaret Atwood's Booker Prize victories in 1992 and 2000 respectively, but most dramatically, by Alice Munro's winning of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2013. But all of this is strangely at odds with the disturbing news of the Harper government's short-sighted decision to withdraw support for Canadian Studies programs around the world; a decision that will have detrimental effects, not just on the international prominence of Canadian literature (and Canada) as an object of study elsewhere, but also on the global exchange of ideas and debates about Canadian literature across borders. At a time when Canadian literature finds itself positioned at a global crossroads—more popular than ever at the very moment when a withdrawal of government support threatens the academic development of this interest—Somacarrera's collection is an important and challenging intervention. As Darias-Beautell points out: "the development of the field to the present has been largely the result of the work of individual teachers" who have had to operate in the midst of institutional resistance. One goal of this book is to recover the complexity of Canadian cultural discourse. The essays in this volume offer a counterpoint to the ways Canadian controversies risk being contained by what Nieves Pascual terms the "fantasy of modernity" or a "tranquilizing" cosmopolitanism; a move that is often complicit with the institutional promotion of Canada abroad. Pascual concludes her analysis by identifying an inescapable dilemma: "are cultural thresholds always sites of violence?" *Made in Canada, Read in Spain* offers an instructive, timely, and multifaceted response to this dilemma of transnational reception; a tug-of-war between the familiar and the foreign inherent in the project of translation itself.

History and Erasure

Eva Stachniak
Empress of the Night: A Novel of Catherine the Great. Doubleday $24.94

Harry Karlinsky
The Stonehenge Letters. Coach House $17.95

Reviewed by Maude Lapierre

Eva Stachniak's *Empress of the Night* and Harry Karlinsky's *The Stonehenge Letters* are historical novels that examine how narratives can not only be easily erased but can

also unveil unexpected surprises. These two novels also present radically different ways to explore historical figures, suggesting once more that history is shaped by those who choose to tell it.

Empress of the Night, a follow-up to Stachniak's earlier novel on Catherine the Great, *The Winter Palace*, explores Catherine's life and rise to power in a way that questions the narrative Varvara presented in the first novel. Focalized through Catherine's perspective, *Empress* initially retells the events that occurred in *Winter*, but mostly focuses on the later years of her reign. Yet, because the novel opens with the events that immediately followed Catherine's death, wherein the "thirty-four glorious years of Catherine's reign have been erased with a wave of her son's hand," readers are constantly aware that the world Catherine is building is precarious. Stachniak returns several times to Catherine's final moments, as a stroke which has left her paralyzed and seemingly unconscious leads her to recall her past. In this novel, Catherine is not the innocent and unskilled German princess Varvara perceived her to be in *Winter*. She is rather a calculating and deceitful aristocrat skilled at manipulating the Empress and her husband, who knows that "a game of chess is a game of choices. Sacrifice a pawn to capture a knight. . . . Or let your opponent cheat and think himself invincible." While a novel that takes such a powerful historical figure as its subject might focus on politics and power, Stachniak's text dedicates most of its energies to the personal, such as Catherine's relationships with her lovers and family. By doing so, it showcases the extent to which political strategies and victories are shaped by the private sphere: both Russia's military victories and its great political humiliation are caused by her lovers. In this novel, power and love are intertwined, but the lesson Catherine must learn throughout the narrative is that she cannot have both at once.

The Stonehenge Letters takes a completely different form, as it is presented as research rather than as a conventional narrative. Its unnamed first-person narrator, a psychiatrist, begins by explaining his research into the reasons why Freud never won a Nobel Prize despite having been nominated thirty-three times. This area of research soon proves unfruitful, and the rest of the narrative focuses instead on the so-called "Crackpot file" the narrator consulted while doing his research. This file, which he retrieved from the Nobel Archive, contains every unsolicited nomination for a Nobel Prize the Foundation has received in the course of its history, as well as five letters, four of which were written by Nobel Prize laureates, concerned with solving the mystery of Stonehenge. This unexpected discovery leads the narrator to fully investigate the origins of the secret Stonehenge Prize that was opened to Nobel laureates from 1901-1910. In this novel, Karlinsky weaves facts and fiction in such a skillful way that the line between the two continuously blurs. Since the narrative is supported by archival material, such as photographs, extracts from correspondence, and numerous footnotes, the information it contains always seems real, especially the well-documented entries submitted to the Stonehenge Prize. At the same time, Karlinsky's novel offers a thoughtful reflection on the nature of scientific research and the Nobel Prize, suggesting that with hindsight, research and narratives that seem flawed can "be recognized as the significant achievements they were." This observation is initially applied to the five entries submitted to the Stonehenge Prize and then banished to the Crackpot file because they were deemed unworthy, but his argument can also be extended to Freud, whose research was "too advanced" for its time. The irony at the heart of *Stonehenge* is that despite having declared his prior research into Freud's Nobel Prize history a failure and focusing

instead on an unrelated subject, the narrator's entire investigation is filtered through Freudian thoughts which allow him to ultimately answer his initial question.

Despite the fact that Stachniak's conventional novel and Karlinsky's experimental multi-genre work choose extremely different ways to investigate the past, both texts contend that fictional narratives can provide valuable insights into history's unanswered questions. While Karlinsky's novel proposes that we should be open to "crackpot" solutions, the dialogue Stachniak creates between her two novels about Catherine the Great emphasizes that single, limited perspectives can shape historical facts into radically different narratives.

Indians, Women, and War

Cheryl Suzack, Shari M. Huhndorf, Jeanne Perreault, and Jean Barman, eds.
Indigenous Women and Feminism: Politics, Activism, Culture. U of British Columbia P $34.95

Timothy C. Winegard
For King and Kanata: Canadian Indians and the First World War. U of Manitoba P $24.95

Reviewed by Lindsey Catherine Cornum

The *Indigenous Women and Feminism* collection, edited by four women and with sixteen contributions by women both describes and is itself an instance of Indigenous feminist practices. It takes care, however, not to collapse Indigenous women's struggles into feminism. The obvious bifurcation in the title highlights "the fraught historical relationship between Indigenous women and mainstream feminism." As Huhndorf and Suzack argue in the introduction, even feminist debates relating to "women of colour and postcolonial feminism" fail to account for the specific ways in which Indigenous women have been disempowered by settler colonialism. The overarching concern of this collection therefore is not how Indigenous women fit into feminism but how feminism can be put to work to ensure the survival of Indigenous women and their communities.

For many of the contributors, the central project of Indigenous feminism is re-establishing Indigenous women as leaders in their communities in the wake of colonial policies that have sought to disempower them. One of the most incisive and provocative essays on the issue of Indigenous women's roles in their nations comes from Kim Anderson. Anderson makes the excellent point that much of the power ascribed to Indigenous women's roles as mothers of their nations and keepers of traditional knowledge often forecloses conversations about Indigenous men's responsibilities and keeps women tied to a notion of a static past. Motherhood in particular is an important issue, especially given the histories of "enforced sterilizations, residential schools and child welfare intervention"; however, as a framework for exploring Indigenous feminism it is entirely too exclusive. Anderson then might agree with fellow contributors Rebecca Tsosie and ann-elise lewallen who locate Indigenous womanhood not in biological notions of sex and gender but in ethical relationships with land and community.

The "Culture" section of the collection is the longest, highlighting how important artistic expression is to Indigenous women and their political struggles. Often unheard or unrecognized by governments, legal systems and political movements, Indigenous women have found creative ways to express their truths through literature, film, theatre, and the visual arts. Indeed some of the most damning critiques of settler colonialism and its ensuing patriarchy come from cultural artifacts and these contributors' engagements with them. Shari Huhndorf and Katherine Young Evans in their respective pieces bring to light the subversive politics of Native women's theatre, especially in Spiderwoman Theatre, a group born

in the 1980s out of frustrations with the male dominance of the American Indian Movement. A more contemporary theatrical production, Rebecca Belmore's *Vigil*, allows Elizabeth Kalbfleisch to provide the collection's most prolonged examination of the violence directed at Indigenous women in Vancouver specifically, but also across North America.

Despite the range of pieces from the contributors to this collection, there are several noticeable absences. Queer, trans, and two-spirit histories are completely overlooked and the critique of Western gender roles still embraces the male/female gender binary. While truly a crucial addition to the political and cultural history of Indigenous women, *Indigenous Women and Feminism* leaves many questions open, specifically when it comes to imagining an Indigenous feminism outside Western, colonial conceptions of gender.

Timonthy Winegard's *For King and Kanata* is focused overwhelmingly on Indigenous men's experiences during World War I, starting with the uncomfortable fact that they were not originally sought for military service because "consolidation of the Canadian settler-state was ongoing, and the potential for armed Indian resistance still existed." Winegard unfortunately eschews an examination of how that consolidation occurred in order to focus on the transformation of Indigenous men from rebels to national patriots.

While the book excels in its archival research into government policy and military strategy, the motivations and consequences of wartime decisions are under-analyzed perhaps because Winegard does not have a unifying argument. He wants to support First Nations participation in the Canadian army while also criticizing Canada's colonial project. This leads to certain contradictions. For instance, while the dedication refers to the "shared interests of our national forces," the conclusion much more combatively states that for Indigenous peoples "the war for cultural, territorial, and socio-economic equality and recognition is still being fought today."

Indigenous Women and Feminism clarifies that this war continues with particular severity for Native women, while *For King and Kanata* focuses more on a military history of Indigenous men. The former is required reading for anyone engaged in Critical Indigenous Studies and/or Women's and Gender Studies while the latter may only appeal to military history buffs.

Family Matters

Miriam Toews
All My Puny Sorrows. Knopf Canada $29.95

Richard Wagamese
Medicine Walk. McClelland & Stewart $29.95

Reviewed by Tina Trigg

Autobiographical novels by established Canadian authors concerning untimely deaths of family members, the new releases of Miriam Toews and Richard Wagamese seem uncannily similar; most gripping, however, is their mutual ability to examine community for its sheer necessity and spectacular failures. Simultaneously tender and brutal, the novels scrutinize illusions of self-sufficiency by representing a variation of quests that highlight storytelling and expose (false) assumptions about the heroic.

In Toews' *All My Puny Sorrows*, the heroic is doubly undercut by the Van Riesen sisters, Elfrieda and Yolandi (Elf and Yoli). Elf is the epitome of contemporary success: an internationally renowned pianist, married to a handsome, supportive professional, she is intelligent, quirky, outrageously thin, and stunning. She is also suicidal, depressive, and utterly unable to cope with life. Yoli, the younger sister, seems by all apparent standards, including her own, vastly inferior: she writes young adult rodeo fiction but is hopelessly stalled on her "real book"; she is

in the throes of a second divorce and struggles with weight, parenting, low self-esteem, and drinking. However, she is also comical, self-deprecating, and dependable. In short, Yoli is utterly believable and the thread of life—both for Elf and for readers.

Having survived their restrictive Mennonite upbringing and beloved bookish father's suicide, Yoli feels charged with keeping Elf alive, wrestling with her plea for legally assisted suicide at a Swiss Clinic. The darkness of this plot, however, is shot through with glimmers of light and laughter, inevitably linked to Yoli's fiascos, folly, and fierce love. Toews' portrayal of the siblings is raw, complex, and apt; their mutual affection transcends the tedium of hospital room visits in arguments, memories, and candour, underscoring the titular allusion to Coleridge's sister and confidante of "all my puny sorrows." Yoli "lives *hopefully*" in spite of it all.

Such allusion signals one of the novel's unexpected pleasures: liberally sprinkled throughout are literary allusions, quotations, and intelligent musing about culture, art, music, books, dance, politics, and (inadequate) psychiatric care. Characters temper each other, pointing out excesses ("You're such a snob") and creating a subtle self-mockery. Providing no easy answers, the characters' suffering is tangible, but following Elf's suicide, extended musing about life choices and guilt is oddly partnered with a too-tidy closure of Yoli, her mother, and daughter residing together in Toronto. Compared to *A Complicated Kindness*, a tinge of maturity colours the sisters' middle-aged perspective—though blunt, it is less acerbic. Despite the failures and pain, family and roots (though flawed) are formative and indispensable; theirs is a story that needs telling.

In Richard Wagamese's *Medicine Walk*, storytelling is imbued with redemptive qualities and, interestingly, the most accomplished storytellers in the novel are women. Wagamese underscores the need for stories, particularly their brutal honesty. The plain advice that "[w]hen you share stories you change things" applies equally to stories that are wrenched out and those that enchant. Things need to be spoken, not to be perfect; for Eldon Starlight, this means entrusting the story of his life to his son.

Raised by "the old man," his non-Native guardian, to respect Native traditions and culture, Franklin Starlight, "the kid," is an outsider everywhere except in Nature. While Toews admirably brings Winnipeg to life, especially through the ice break motif and startling green of spring, Wagamese's lyric descriptions of the BC interior are breathtaking and abundant, an enactment of life. This sensitive rendering of wilderness provides a necessary counterpoint to the raw, psychologically violent encounter between Frank and his estranged, dying father.

Eldon's plea for a warrior's burial in the wilderness is as painful (and unwarranted) to Frank as Elf's death-wish is to Yoli. Frank, however, concedes and during their slow, tortured journey, Eldon haltingly recounts his story, including Frank's origins. Although Eldon's early life is compelling, the narrative pace emphasizes the difficulty of his unaccustomed (though possibly heroic) disclosure. In a CBC interview, Wagamese terms the lack of a parent "a profound sorrow"; thus, like Toews, he provides no easy answers to suffering and hides no scars. As the losses accumulate, the respite of Nature becomes as necessary to readers as to Frank. And the novel's closure fittingly affirms family, heritage, and identity, situating the kid alongside the old man in knowledge and in Nature.

Wide-ranging and provocative, these novels present quests for validation and perspective which hinge on suffering as integral to love between flawed human beings. Community, largely defined by family, irrevocably fails and yet sustains these characters, and as Toews and Wagamese compellingly remind us, family matters.

Relentless Torture

Janice Williamson, ed.
Omar Khadr, Oh Canada.
McGill-Queen's UP $24.95

Reviewed by Tim Blackmore

Reading editor Janice Williamson's *Omar Khadr, Oh Canada* is like having an endless wisdom tooth extracted—*no anesthetic*. For that and a number of other reasons this superb collection deserves a wide readership and long life. It trains all available instruments on the Khadr case as Williamson and her authors walk the hermeneutic circle.

Williamson has divided the text into five related sections (e.g., "The Saga of Omar Khadr," "Omar Khadr, Child Soldier," and so on) each of which has an attendant intermission that Williamson calls "Reflections," places for poetry, art, informal writing and responses to the case. After a while these sections prove vital to maintaining the reader's attention—the material and Khadr's dreadful reality are fittingly relentless. Each section, each article, gives a brief account of the Khadr saga. The book is sympathetic to Khadr: if you're looking for the dominant narrative about Khadr provided by the half of Canada that wanted him to rot in Guantanamo, tune into any big-box media site and be reminded.

The book is first clear about the facts of the case, and even lays out a timeline for the Khadr family. There is a long, excellent discussion of some key issues that undoubtedly went into the making of this particular legal, diplomatic, policy and human rights disaster. One may have forgotten the so-called "Khadr effect": the Khadr family's relationship to the Canadian media and public (the word "hostile" doesn't adequately express the jets of mutual loathing that spewed in every direction), and the fate of the other Khadr children. Williamson has handled these issues thoughtfully and well. By the time the reader is half a dozen articles into the collection the picture of what happened has become a series of images of what possibly might have (perhaps) occurred. This is a complex collection reflecting an urgent and equally agonizing subject.

Some of the best texts include ex-Consular director Gar Pardy's diplomatic images of Khadr across a fifteen-year period; author Charles Foran's painfully honest assessment of the two worlds his middle-class daughter and Omar Khadr represent; Judith Thompson's superb one-act play "Nail Biter" about a lost soul who once was an interrogator; law professor Audrey Macklin's clear-headed view of the surreal events at Khadr's military "trial," which bears as much resemblance to a trial as Kraft Dinner does to food; lawyer Dennis Edney's highly charged discussion of how systemic and normalized racism naturalizes Khadr's abuse; and legal historian Grace Li Xiu Woo's stark assessment of how the Canadian Supreme Court ducked its duty to a citizen.

All authors have worked around the same core texts: Agamben's *Homo Sacer*, the NFB documentary *You Don't Like the Truth: 4 Days Inside Guantanamo*, and the Khadr family's history. The cloud around the shared texts is that the repetitions become numbing. The thick bright lining to that cloud is that one could take any article and successfully pull it out of the collection: each article and its potted history stands alone—a true gift for a teacher who wants to use some but not all of this epic.

Hardest to grasp is how human beings could have interrogated and played power games with a child suffering physically and emotionally. The cold brutality of the CSIS interrogators in the near-black site prison is matched by the Harper government's refusal to acknowledge Khadr as a citizen with any rights. In struggling to wrap my head around just how so many could have acted

so badly to this child, it became clearer to me how Mackenzie King's Liberals denied entry to so many of Europe's fleeing Jews. For governments that profess to put family above all else, racism can be easy. If Others don't belong to the family, they are to be shunned and punished. It's not complex. What happens to the incarcerated body is immaterial to the family because that body doesn't factor in the family's accounting. What Williamson's collection makes clear is just how bad Canada can be, especially when we measure our behavior under duress: we're hardest on the weakest, cruelest to the helpless, murderous with the Other. Williamson's book shines a dazzling beam into the prison of atrocity and helps us understand how hatred drives legal, governmental, and social policy, sanitizing it all the while. When we look away, Canada becomes as ugly as any extant torture state. Keep your eyes open and use them to read this book.

Narrating Motherhood

Sheena Wilson and Diana Davidson, eds.
Telling Truths: Storying Motherhood.
Demeter $34.95

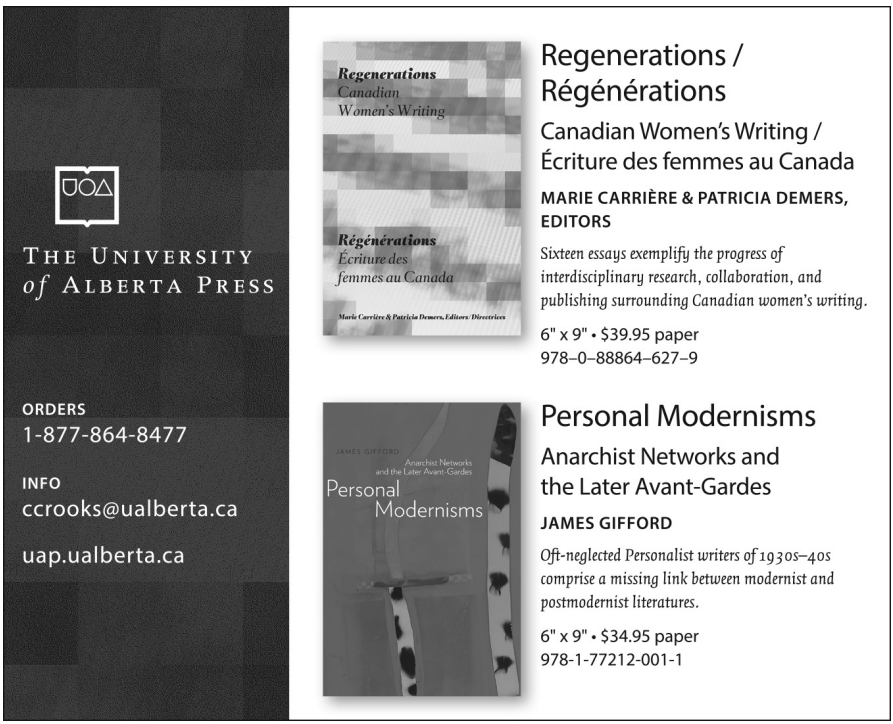
Reviewed by Asma Sayed

In *Telling Truths: Storying Motherhood*, Wilson and Davidson bring to readers a rich tapestry of motherhood experiences that collectively illustrate the complexity of mothering. With thirty-seven creative non-fiction essays and one contributing visual artist, the collection contributes to an unravelling of the pervasive and damaging definitions of the "good mother" that confine women's ability to mother as an extension of their multifaceted lives and identities as twenty-first century women. Furthermore, the narratives highlight the joys, the love, the anger, the pain and the trauma that motherhood involves. These creatively told, yet truth-baring stories, offer insights into what it means to struggle to become a mother or to lose a child, to adopt or give birth, to stepmother, to mother through divorce and become a single mother, to mother a disabled child, to mother in an uncertain world changing environmentally, and many more variations on mothering. These stories expose the intimate lives of women, most of them Canadian, who range in age and who come from a diversity of cultures, ethnicities, and religious backgrounds.

The stories each tackle difficult questions. How does a mother explain to her little child the meaning of racism when she is confronted by racist remarks on a bus? How does a mother convince her adopted daughter that she means a world to her irrespective of blood ties? How does a mother come to terms with the fact that her daughter died in a car accident and that she will never be able to touch, kiss, and hug her? How does a mother explain to the world the trials of raising a daughter with severe developmental behavioural issues? What does a child feel when he has to start calling his mother "dad" because "mom" has decided to "come out" and embrace her transgender self? How does a mother, petro-mama as she calls herself, help her asthma-struck child when she is raising him in a culture and economy driven by the politics of oil? These and such other complex mothering issues are explored in this book. Ultimately, what the reader gets are narratives of empowered mothers—mothers who have endured, resisted, cherished, loved, and survived their parenting journeys. Collectively, the contributing authors—mothers, grandmothers, stepmothers, adoptive mothers, working mothers, stay-at-home mothers—bring stories of mothering in the last three decades, and resist "imposed definitions of motherhood." The stories are emotionally engaging; at times the reader may shed a tear or two as she reads accounts of mothers who have

suffered, lost much, yet gained plentifully.

In a lyrically written introduction to the book, Wilson argues that traditionally, writing about experiences of motherhood, and in a creative non-fiction format, may be considered a "transgression"; but that is why there is all the more need for such a collection. As Wilson suggests, one ought to move away from "a long silencing tradition that removes mothers from the spotlight, denying [their] own central role in the narrative of family." In fact, socially and culturally motherhood has been glamourized for centuries. And yet, narratives of mothering remain unexplored and under-researched. Consequently, the institution of motherhood has not received the kind of creative and scholarly attention it deserves. For now, Wilson and Davidson address the existing chasm. We can only hope that this collection will inspire many more because as our fast-paced globalized world keeps changing, and as more women take on multiple roles in and outside the home, mothering becomes more nuanced and challenging. *Telling Truths*, a meticulously edited and pleasant read, may also be a valuable resource for teaching courses on creative writing, women's writing, and motherhood.



A World Apart and Kindred: M. Wylie Blanchet's *The Curve of Time*

Maleea Acker

In the fiftieth anniversary edition of *The Curve of Time*, published in 2011, Timothy Egan refers to Muriel Wylie Blanchet as "a wonderful ghost" (vii). His choice of words is perhaps more apt than he realized. Blanchet creates a poetic narrative of substance and depth. Through alternations between a "lyric" and a "domestic" construct of time, Blanchet integrates landscape and the natural world with her own lived experience, creating—with an unruffled, measured tone—a surprising world of beauty. Analogous to British water narratives such as Arthur Ransome's *Swallows and Amazons* series and Kenneth Grahame's *Wind in the Willows*, Blanchet's pragmatic competence on water breeds a fearlessness and kinship with the natural world rather than a sense of wilderness as hostile threat, and imbues each scene with an otherworldly grace. In this, Blanchet's narrative departs from those of many of her BC contemporaries, by creating a paean to the coastal landscape.

Situating the Narrative

In *The Curve of Time*, Blanchet gathers her young children and embarks on fifteen summers of cruising through Vancouver Island's Inside Passage on a 25-foot boat, after her husband's unsolved disappearance in 1927. *Curve* is one of a trilogy of books written by women on mid-century West Coast cruising life. Kathrene Pinkerton's *Three's a Crew* first appeared in 1940, and Beth Hill's *Upcoast Summers* appeared in 1985. All three books are accounts of events that take place between 1924 and the outbreak of the Second World War. *Curve* first appeared in the United Kingdom with Blackwood & Sons in 1961, but its publication, due to poor publicity, went almost unnoticed in Canada (Campbell xiv). Blanchet died later the same year, while in the midst of a second book. *Curve* was first published in 1968 in a Canadian edition (which included the material from her new manuscript) with Gray's Publishing (xv). The book was well received, has been reviewed several times, and was revisited by Cathy Converse's biography of Blanchet, *Following the Curve of Time: The Legendary M. Wylie Blanchet*. Critical writing about *The Curve of Time*, however, aside from Nancy Pagh's multi-author examination in *At Home Afloat: Women on the Waters of the Pacific Northwest* (2001), is non-existent.

The Curve of Time is superior in style and sensibility to both Pinkerton's and Hill's narratives. Partially, this might be due to the cast of characters in each; *Curve* is distinctive in that it is essentially the journal of a single woman; no spousal relationship mediates her interactions. Blanchet obviously spends a great deal of time in her own head. Her children are not developed as significant personalities; rather, they seem to be part of the natural

world she travels through and are often referred to as "somebody" (98). Thus, there is little to interrupt the relationship she fosters with landscape. This allows Blanchet's natural world observations to shine, without long narratives on social matters to dilute the immediacy of the text. Pinkerton, conversely, spends much more of the narrative discussing her husband and daughter and describing their social encounters with other cruising folk. Landscape is background to her more human-centred vignettes. Hill's *Upcoast Summers* is a compilation of the journals of Francis Barrow, which gives the account of his coastal boating with his wife Amy between 1933 and 1941, and thus reads more as a collage than a constructed narrative. Its reportage style lends itself much more to an account of the trials and successes of the islands' European settlers.

Blanchet draws from the adventures of each summer on the water to create an episodic reverie; the permeability of each summer's separation from the next is bolstered by the text's first account: "[W]e thought of that year as the year we wrote down our dreams" (8). The descriptor suggests not only that each year had a dream-like quality, but also that she was, predominantly, too spellbound or occupied with life on the water to distinguish one year from another. In conjunction with Blanchet's explanation of the title—an envisioning of time as a curve along which "our consciousness roves" (8)—the sense is of entering a different dimension, one made of mutable, tangled reveries, of bendable time; where the multiplicity of memory renders each scene that follows with a sense of otherworldliness and beguiling beauty. In thus beginning the narrative, a spell is cast; we learn to expect the unexpected, to expect shifts and change, very much like the tides and currents that affect this family on a daily basis. We are, she seems to hint, at the mercy of larger forces.

Lyric and Domestic Understanding

In the first chapter of *Curve*, Blanchet employs an interesting juxtaposition, skipping back and forth between passages of lyric and domestic experience in order to establish an alternative understanding of coastal life. She repeats this technique throughout the narrative. I take notions of lyric and domestic understanding from Jan Zwicky's work in *Lyric Philosophy*. Lyric experience, for Zwicky, is experience set free from time; it is a direct, unhindered connection with the world, which occurs outside of mortal and bodily experience. Domestic experience, conversely, is life lived within the constraints of mortality, time, and relation. The domestic is our daily existence, the pedestrian, lovely sighs of a dog while one is reading on a sunlit afternoon in a warm room; lyric is our exceptional existence, the profound, shiver-inducing sense of timelessness upon hearing the varied thrush's song in an otherwise silent forest. We cannot, argues Zwicky, live in lyric, but we can visit. The domestic is where we predominantly exist.

The effect of these shifts in attention between lyric and domestic time is one of mercurial wandering—wandering with deftness and awareness; Blanchet's light touch and loose grip on her subjects heightens the complexity of landscape and her relationship to it. In Jervis Inlet, one of the long, narrow fjords that winds its way into the BC interior from the mainland coast, Blanchet lyrically describes a stream in which she fishes for trout, having left her children at the shore's edge. Blanchet's descriptors in this passage are mesmerizing: sunshine "drift[s]" through the alders; light "flicker[s] on the surface of the running water"; and "somewhere deeper in the forest," beyond our understanding, a thrush calls its "single, abrupt liquid note" (9). "All [is] still," as if time itself has stopped; Blanchet uses a huckleberry to bait her hook, employing what is at hand, as if she

herself has become a part of the spell the forest casts (9).

With a deft turn, however, this lyric world is left behind with Blanchet's sudden panic: she remembers her children are alone on the beach. Domestic time—with its necessities, pedestrian desires, and banal dangers—floods back in. The "man in black" (10) on the beach drops to all fours minutes after her return, and the family's timeless world of gathering, fishing, exploring, and wandering is reduced to the frantic count of the seconds it takes them to return to the dinghy and the safety of water. Domestic experience—the real, the tangible—tumbles forward in the shape of a bear, who finding them unreachable, eats their fish while they gaze on from the safety of the *Caprice* (10).

Here, however, Blanchet sets up a pattern she will repeat again and again, and which will serve to strengthen rather than unhinge her connection with the natural world. Instead of dwelling on the adventure between human and animal, instead of positing the consequences of an encounter, or even detailing her or the children's sense of fear and awe, Blanchet concludes the incident quickly, with an almost pre-emptive understanding. The narrative immediately turns from the beach, the bear, her cubs, and the retreating boat to focus on the surrounding landscape, Marlborough Heights, which rise above them and sink below them and "nobody knows how deep" (11). We are curtailed from fixating on the danger; Blanchet has better, more interesting, and it could be argued, more beautiful places to go.

Much of the commentary on Blanchet as a person centres on her pragmatic, no-nonsense attitude; good-humoured, she nevertheless does not suffer fools gladly and keeps her emotions in check (Converse 184). What this curtailing of emotional excess surprisingly allows, however, is a deeper connection with the world through which she sails. As the narrative unfolds, the juxtaposition of lyric and domestic experience continues. A domestic encounter ensues with an unfortunate red snapper and its exploded swim bladder (Blanchet 12); immediately afterward, we are returned to a lyric description of the Jervis Inlet winds—wind being another natural phenomenon that dictates their travels. Similarly, Captain Vancouver's desire to locate the mythical northwest passage is countered with Blanchet's own musings on what actually surrounds them: rather than focusing on the unattainable connection to the Atlantic seaway, she sees the mile-high cascades and notes Vancouver's pedestrian dismissal of the entrance to Louisa Inlet (15). With a little less lyric blindness, she seems to hint Vancouver might have discovered something not sublime, but perhaps as valuable.

By minimizing her personal drama, Blanchet heightens the impact of lyric moments, until the resonance of these moments literally spills over the edges, allowing for an occasional integration of both lyric and domestic into a whole. The *Caprice* and the passage she passes through seem to "dash" toward one another, not with threat of catastrophe but "equally delighted" with one another, as though in love (16). In the final chapters, Blanchet's home on Curteis Point is described using the body as metaphor: in the hollow between thumb and palm nestles "Little House" (249). The land is drawn and depicted on the self: self is world; lyric world is domestic self.

Messing About in Boats: A World Apart and Kindred

The juxtaposition of lyric and domestic experience creates a world apart in Blanchet's narrative. Her story exists separate from urban society and the constraints of money and urbanity; no mention is made of the obligatory rental of Blanchet's "Little House" during the summers she is cruising. A separate hierarchy of values also exists in this world. Highly valued

are the personal qualities of perception, imagination (storytelling), inventiveness (jerry-rigging), humour, and independence. In this, Blanchet's book is kindred to British water-based narratives from the turn of the century, including Kenneth Grahame's *Wind in the Willows* and Arthur Ransome's *Swallows and Amazons* series. All three texts employ the same magical combination of deep pragmatism and practicality on the world of water, combined with a spiritual acknowledgement of otherworldly elements. As Rat remarks dreamily to Mole in *Wind in the Willows*, "There is *nothing* . . . half so much worth doing as simply messing about in boats" (Grahame 6). In Ransome's books, characters pride themselves on preparing lanterns and matches before darkness falls (Ransome 202); they are teased, like Toad, for "splashing badly and rolling a great deal" while rowing (Grahame 14); and they want never to be idle, like Blanchet's son, who disconsolately notices, "[E]verybody's doing something but me" (90), while the family navigates Kingcome Inlet in the fog.

In keeping with the British literary tradition of Ransome and Grahame, and in opposition to many of Blanchet's contemporaries—adventure narratives centering around the BC wilderness—Blanchet's relationship to the natural world is not one of fear and incomprehension, but of respect and curiosity. Wilderness to her is not hostile; its power, including the strength of tides and wind and the suddenness of fog, is simply acknowledged. Travelling through each landscape, Blanchet regards herself as another creature, neither separate and unwanted, nor dominant and power-wielding. When a "straight wall of rock" (Blanchet 91) materializes out of the fog ten feet in front of the boat in Kingcome Inlet, Blanchet does not direct our emotions (through use of adjectives as Captain Vancouver employs, such as "frigid," "gloomy," or "dreary," [13]) in order to pit explorers against nature. Instead, the relationship is closer to kindred: the wall of rock "rises out of the sea"; Blanchet does not cower, but "step[s] out on the after-deck to get a better look." The wall, hundreds of feet high, contains nesting seabirds, who "[peer] below at the danger that [has] suddenly loomed up out of the fog" (91). Troubling the traditional understandings of wilderness as alien and dangerous, the unknown element in this scene, if anything, is their boat, not the wilderness. And yet the birds do not flee. Thus, the qualities of personality needed to survive on water—pragmatism, caution, level-headedness, and a spirit of flexible adventure—help reinforce this close-to-kindred relationship with what she encounters. Neither fear nor an attempt to dominate serve any useful purpose; Blanchet accordingly gives them little time.

Blanchet's sense of landscape as kin also finds its echo in the physical setting. The world, like the notion of time she borrows from Maeterlinck (Blanchet 7), is something one moves through that contains eddies, whirlpools, calms, backwaters, and shoals. Blanchet's infrequent moments of fear while travelling, as when she is waiting to traverse Nakwakto Rapids (96), are often sparked by stories of fellow sailors. Commenting on their safe passage, she reflects on her irrational fright: "just because we had seen a smashed-up boat, and heard a first-hand account from a worn-out man who had had a bad experience." Her self-castigation recognizes how she has slipped from her usual aplomb: "[W]eren't we sillies!" she comments to her son (99). The language she uses to describe the man is pejorative and stands in stark opposition to the adjectives *she* chooses when describing landscape, as when she is set loose after a tug takes its log boom in the middle of the night. She and the children are "left forsaken and drifting in the dark." The next phrase begins self-pityingly—"[w]ith a boat full of sleeping children . . ."—but quickly subverts expectation. She solves the problem by moving the

boat to a nearby piling, to which she can tie: "it is easier to tow the boat than start up the engine" (162). Only ill-prepared sailors who tell unnecessarily frightening stories breed fright of the water; in her own version, competence breeds calm and positive affiliation.

The practicality needed for life on the water comes paired with an openness to delight and caprice; Blanchet's boat is appropriately named. Her ability to whistle a wild duck into her palm is unmatched (158); her midnight encounters with tugs who want their log booms back (159) are whimsical, light-footed adventures that hearken to Toad's mishaps in *Wind in the Willows*, where everything turns out right in the end. More than once, Blanchet's children waken, unperturbed, to a different cove than the one they anchored in the previous night (109), or in a puddle surrounded by the reefs of Mistaken Island (204). Like Titty's midnight theft and re-anchoring of the Amazons' boat in the middle of the night (Ransome 205), competence breeds a fearless inventiveness: a situation that presents no true danger is an opportunity for open engagement with the world. Blanchet's prose, in these moments, captures the intimate detail of "multitudinous phosphorescent specks of plankton," the "luminous jewels" that drip off her hands as she tightens the anchor line, the "shining serpent" of the line itself and the "luminous glow" of the waves beyond the rocks (207). Her writing opens to embrace the natural landscape, as if these off-kilter adventures far from the city seal her pact with the world through which she travels.

The Problem of the *Imaginary Indian*

Despite Blanchet's intimate engagement with the natural world, a problem exists in her narrative that cannot be ignored even in this short essay. The second section of *Curve* concerns Blanchet and her children's travels north, specifically to see the "Indian villages" (73) that she and the children have studied the previous winter. What follows might have made Franz Boas cringe. Blanchet's aims may be simple—to visit and explore "a past that will soon be gone forever" (74). Her beliefs and her actions, however, betray a tendency that Daniel Francis describes in *The Imaginary Indian*: an understanding of First Nations that "White Canadians manufactured, believed in, feared, despised, admired, taught their children" (5). As they move through the north coast islands, Blanchet describes a "peculiar atmosphere belonging to the Past": "And the farther we penetrated into these waters the more we felt that we were living in a different age—had perhaps lived there before . . . perhaps dimly remembered it all" (75). Blanchet's limited understanding of First Nations' past or present societies cast a pall over her descriptions.

Blanchet records not a single instance of an encounter with a First Nations person during her travels; despite this omission, she suggests that not only is she able to visit their villages, but also that she may have access to "the dim ones" themselves (83). During her explorations, Blanchet also enters longhouses even if they are boarded up with "no trespassing" signs (101), handles and spirits away objects and artifacts (82), helps her children disturb the dead (128), and removes jewellery from grave sites (84). Throughout, she takes a colonial archaeologist's perspective, collecting objects and speculating on what the dead might be saying to her.

Bruce Braun, in his book *The Intemperate Rainforest*, offers an interpretation of adventure travel as a kind of nostalgia, which "produce[s] subjects who experience the present in terms of loss." In Braun's view, "what has been destroyed (primitive cultures, nature) comes to be eulogized by the very agents of its destruction" (111). Blanchet does not escape this indictment. In fact, many of the villages she visits are

deserted only in the summers. Thus, she steals copper bracelets and spindles not just from the vanished peoples of the nostalgic past, but from a village's current inhabitants, who, like her, are engaged in a nomadic existence where time takes a second seat to a history defined by place. For Braun, "adventure travel both imposes and locates an order in the unruly social and ecological spaces of the temperate rainforest" (112). A product of her time and upbringing, Blanchet does not learn about the living people, as opposed to Emily Carr, whose exposure to First Nations communities prepared the ground for a more enlightened engagement (Cole 161). Blanchet's actions demonstrate reasoning that does not progress past cursory recognition of "a *past* Native culture" (Braun 118), and she makes no attempt to eschew nostalgia or to recognize or connect to *present* First Nations.

Blanchet's narrative, despite its imperfections, still represents a living, resonant engagement with the BC Coast. As she alternates between the eddies of domestic and lyric time, her "history" coalesces around places, and her liberty to move between and around them without outside interference. *Curve* is one of the few books of its time to chart a woman's experience through coastal waters while avoiding the time-worn trope of man against nature or the simplistic portrayal of an unforgiving and frightening landscape. Instead, Blanchet creates a paean to place; the waters she travels on grow luminous. In her nomadic journey, time is a curve on which she engages in myriad, complex interactions with the natural world.

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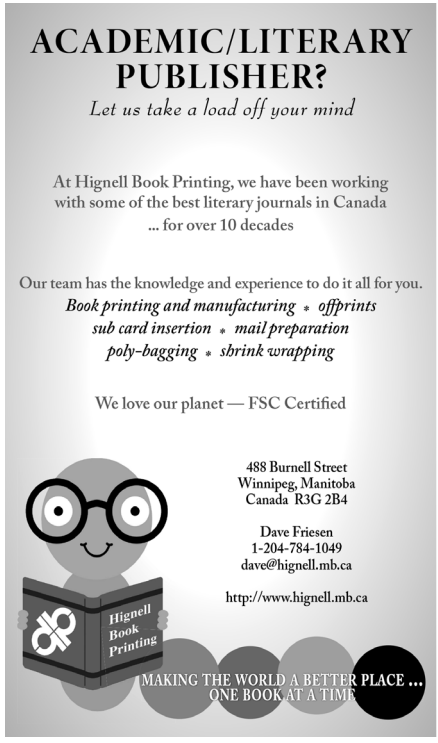

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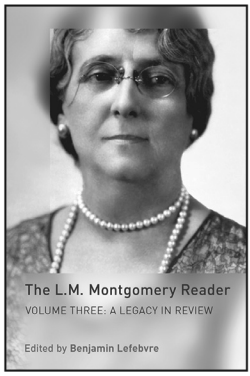

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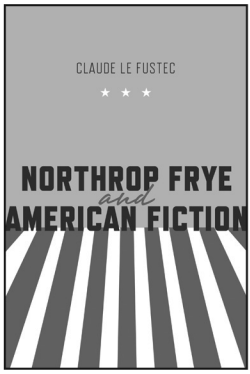

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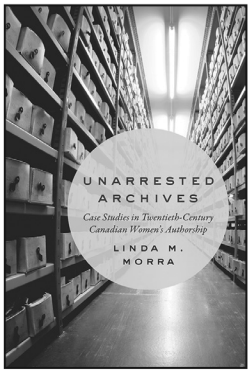

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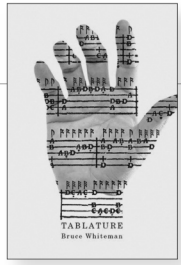

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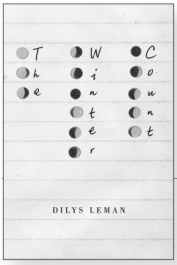

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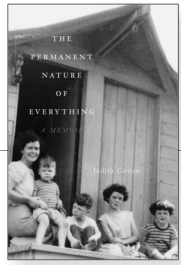

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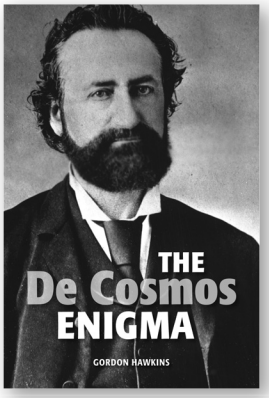

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