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Editorial

"Sustaining the Humanities"

Laura Moss

I work at a university that strives to be the greenest on the planet in the self-proclaimed greenest city. The rhetoric around sustainability at UBC was on my mind in the spring of 2013 as I prepared for a think tank called "Sustainability, Mentorship, and Intellectual Production: The Present and Future of Emerging Scholars in Canadian Literary Studies." Participants were asked to brainstorm on practical ways to address problems in the humanities caused by funding cuts, a scarcity of jobs, and the low morale among graduate students, former students, post-docs, the under-employed, and faculty. Although we all study Canadian writing, the problems laid out extended well beyond the field. Struck by the word sustainability in the think tank title, I decided to press this metaphor and draw on the language of environmentalism to reconsider the state of post-secondary education and the post-post-secondary job market. In doing so, I asked a number of questions. What if, instead of thinking of the humanities as in a state of crisis as we so often do, we think of the humanities as an ecosystem that is failing to thrive? How do we sustain the humanities as part of a system of diverse communities both within universities and in the public arena? In the face of resource undernourishment, how can we prosper? How do we promote biodiversity (or a rich variety of communal life, research, and teaching in all its forms and combinations)? How do we protect educational habitats that are endangered by the damaging effects of human populations (be they administrators or voters)? Finally, how can we productively change the climate of graduate training in humanities faculties to create an environment more conducive to intellectual growth, healthy life, and the maintenance of productive ground for future generations? How green and

forward thinking could UBC actually be if the institution, alongside others in Canada, opted to work more equitably?

Adapting my framing categories from Washington State's Department of Ecology "Supporting Sustainable Communities and Natural Resources" webpage, I propose seven ways to improve educational resources in the metaphorical ecosystem of the humanities: 1) recycle, 2) waste reduction, 3) create green jobs, 4) green development, 5) retrofit industry, 6) reduce toxicity, 7) prevent pollution. My conclusion is that to thrive, we need to protect the local environment and acknowledge that we are part of much larger diverse ecosystems.

1) Recycle

Worry about the humanities is certainly not new. As Marjorie Perloff wrote well over a decade ago, "[o]ne of our most common genres today is the epitaph for the humanities." Perhaps the best way to recycle is to historicize. This needs to be done at the level of individual departments and programs, at the level of institutional cultures, at the level of provincial departments of education, and at the metalevel of the disciplines.

To highlight the ongoing contributions of the humanities in culture and society, it is useful to turn to books as diverse as *From Humanism to Humanities: Education and the Liberal Arts in Fifteenth and Sixteenth-Century Europe* by Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine; Bill Readings' *The University in Ruins*; "Out of the Ruins, the University to Come" special issue of *TOPIA,* guest edited by Bob Hanke and Alison Hearn; *The Fall of the Faculty: The Rise of the Administrative University and Why It Matters* by Benjamin Ginsberg; Stefan Collini's *What Are Universities For?*; Louis Menand's *The Marketplace of Ideas*; and *Retooling the Humanities* edited by Smaro Kamboureli and Daniel Coleman. The point of such a reading list is to remind us of centuries old conversations about the humanities and to consider the challenges of continuing changes. In the field of Canadian literature, we often study the role of culture in the development of ideas about community, public spaces, the environment, systems of power, citizenship, and social justice. We do so most profitably when we remember that we are not the first generation to address such issues, even if differently stated.

By placing debates in historical and social context, we can rethink, repurpose, and reimagine the contributions of humanities scholars to conversations about the public good. Recycling here is closer to W. B. Yeats' notion of the spiral staircase than Wilson Harris' notion of infinite rehearsal.

2) Waste Reduction

In his 1999 article proposing solutions for the crisis in the humanities, Robert Weisbuch wrote: "[a]s doctoral programs in the humanities proliferate irresponsibly, turning out more and more graduates who cannot find jobs, the waste of human talent becomes enormous, intolerable" (qtd in Perloff). His proposal to eliminate such waste was to impose a kind of "birth control" on doctoral programs whereby fewer PhDs would be conceived and delivered. Fifteen years later, it is quite clear that his proposal for population control was not taken up with vigour.

I am not surprised. A few years ago at a faculty retreat, in response to a discussion about placement numbers coming out of our graduate program, I rather rashly proposed a five-year moratorium on admitting PhD students. The proposal was not met favourably. I was reminded that not all fields are equally well-covered in terms of graduate training and it is difficult to predict what areas will be in demand and when. It is also difficult to know at an early stage (after a BA or MA) who might become an original researcher, a strong teacher, and a good departmental citizen. It would further place an unfair burden on those in graduate programs to have to continue, even if they decided on another career path. Perhaps most significantly, such a moratorium could lead to an unproductive generation gap in knowledge and perhaps stall the development of ideas across generations. Finally, with funding tied to student numbers, it would be potentially dangerous for a departmental ecosystem to decrease programs based on attention to an international ecosystem problem. And yet, even acknowledging the drawbacks, I think that grad programs in the country should consider either downsizing (instead of growing as many administrations would prefer) or redesigning their programs for a wider range of outcome options.

I think we could also reduce the perception of waste if we were to rethink the importance and applicability of humanities degrees. The value of the bank of skills developed over the course of a graduate career should not be underestimated. Humanities graduates have skills in critical, creative, imaginative, and analytical thinking, in big picture analysis and close reading, in oral and written communication, in problem solving, in reasoned argumentation, in lateral application of expertise, and in working to deadlines and constraints on space and time. Humanities graduates also have immense amounts of knowledge useful for historicizing and nuancing the complexities of everyday life around the world.

The UBC English Graduate Chair, Patsy Badir, proposes the following: "I would like to see SSHRC-funded research at the highest level; I would like to see surveys of government, of communications networks and services, of business, of the entertainment industry etc. that look at the qualifications of employees; I would like to see census data that collates employment, salary and graduate degrees." If we had better metrics on placement of students with humanities graduate degrees outside academia, I suspect we would find that there is less "waste" of human talent than is rumoured. Better numbers might help us acknowledge the value of the contributions graduate training has made to culture, government, NGOs, publishing, research, communication, the arts, and so on. Such comparative statistics might support the humanities (as anecdotes about baristas are currently used against it) to funding bodies and might help bolster arguments about public accountability concerning the value of university degrees. Or, they might prove that there is a problem and that too many people are finishing graduate degrees and working in positions for which they are not reasonably compensated or are overqualified.[1] By shrinking programs across the board and by emphasizing the alternatives to academia, we might reduce the creation of a next generation of exploitable labour and avoid waste in that regard as well.

3) Create Green Jobs

As former UBC Faculty Association president and my colleague in English, Elizabeth Hodgson, argues, "on the employment side, what we as TTF, department heads, and national lobbying organizations must do is understand once and for all that we can ONLY protect tenure and academic freedom by insisting that part-time, sessional, adjunct faculty are properly paid. As long as adjuncts are a two-for-one or three-for-one deal (especially on the teaching side), universities will continue to choose these positions." So, unless the exploitation of graduate, part-time, and sessional labour is addressed adequately and all colleagues are valued and paid in reflection of their training and experience, the system will remain untenable for all but a few emerging scholars.[2]

I wonder if we might think of the corporatization of the humanities as akin to the introduction of an invasive species with the imposition of standards from outside the humanities on the research and work we do. The biological diversity of our research has been threatened as funding decisions for post-secondary institutions have relied more heavily on endowments and corporate sponsorship than in the past, as cuts to university budgets have

disproportionately hit arts faculty budgets, as classroom sizes have grown and shiny new MOOCs have been introduced, and as the culture of overwork becomes the norm.

This is where the ecosystem analogy is most relevant. For a healthy ecosystem, we need radical change to the university system of employment, class size, and course offering. We currently have a hierarchical system of stars (CRCs and endowed chairs), faculty, instructors, sessionals, adjunct instructors, and graduate students. Administrators rely on the hierarchical meritocracy to perpetuate the inequities. I understand that CRCs and SSHRCs are a way for the federal government to fund education beyond provincial mandates and they certainly support excellence and originality but they also reinforce the hierarchy and raise expectations. They destabilize the ecosystem.

4) Green Development

Being a university professor is a job and not a vocation and we must think of green development accordingly. As the graduate placement officer in my department from 2011-13, my basic guiding question was this: How do we train students for the realities of today's job market? How can we be transparent about our students' need to engage in their own risk assessment upon entering a degree and how do we build risk management into our programs? We know that the chance of securing a job in the academy remains slim even when a student checks all the right boxes and performs the now-standard extra work (beyond requirements for the degree)—attending conferences, publishing reviews and articles, teaching classes, and serving on departmental committees. How do we retain support and optimism for the students we have in the face of such a precarious future? What are the ethics of training here? One of my doctoral students recently told me that he would prefer not to be reminded of the dismal prospects for the future at every turn (after having been clearly told once) as it is difficult to proceed through the program with intellectual excitement (and arduous hoop jumping) under the shadow of an always dark cloud. I take his point. I think we are obligated to spell out the thin possibility for academic employment after graduation to grad students as they enter the program and to facilitate forms of education for other meaningful and productive careers to come out of graduate education. If students continue, knowing the risks, then it is their choice.

So how might we broaden the chance for meaningful employment? One way is to facilitate graduate training in settings beyond academia. My department

is in the pilot year of a Co-op PhD program (we already have an undergraduate Co-op program). In it, in addition to our current training in English Language and Literatures, we offer placements within a variety of professional work settings for three stints of four months over the course of the degree. Students gain professional experience attractive to future employers (both academic and non). While co-op programs are conventional in disciplines like Engineering, they are still unconventional in a field like English. So far the experiment has been going very well with employers as eager to place students as grad students are to get wider experience.

While some might argue that such a program could dilute the degree, sacrifice intellectual rigour, or mean that we have succumbed to the corporatization of the university, I believe that it will realistically develop options for students who have invested one to two years for an MA and five to seven years for a PhD. It will not make us a service department for a professional degree. Elizabeth Hodgson, one of the program founders, notes that "If we facilitate our grad students' move from the academic ghetto to a larger neighbourhood of research, communications, and expert-administration positions in non-academic or academic-admin, we will likewise both attract students and limit the supply of cheap labour for our institutions."

For the past three years I have been part of a team at *Canadian Literature,* led by Margery Fee, developing the *CanLit Guides* project (see canlitguides.ca). This is a good example of the kind of placement that would be useful for an English Co-op student. We have worked with five graduate students writing, producing, designing, building, and coding the guides. Along the way, we have shown the graduate students how a journal operates, how to edit, how to navigate the mechanics of a journal, and how we approach Canadian literary history. Reciprocally, and sustainably, we have relied on their expertise and training (their knowledge of digital humanities and visual poetics certainly outweighs mine). Working together is a form of green development.

We are not alone in thinking that we are obliged to open the scope of graduate education. In 2011, historians Anthony T. Grafton and Jim Grossman attacked the notion that non-academic employment for history PhDs be considered a Plan B and advocated a change in language to reflect a necessary change in attitude. They write, "we tell students that there are 'alternatives' to academic careers. We warn them to develop a 'Plan B' in case they do not find a teaching post. And the very words in which we couch this useful advice make clear how much we hope they will not have to follow it—and suggest, to many of them, that if they do

have to settle for employment outside of academe, they should crawl off home and gnaw their arms off." Grafton and Grossman convincingly argue that students entering graduate programs need to see that they are being offered an education that faculty "believe in, not just as reproductions of ourselves, but also as contributors to public culture and even the private sector." For these former executive members of the American Historical Association, "alternative" careers (or "alt-ac") "should have as much legitimacy as the traditional PhD-to-tenure-track trajectory." I support such an attitude shift in how we *think* and *speak* about graduate training. We need to integrate training for non-professorial jobs and meaningful careers outside academia—not as second choices, plan Bs, or fall back jobs, but rather as opportunities that parallel teaching and academic research.

5) Retrofit Industry

This is not my area of expertise but it seems to me that the Canadian system of provincial funding of education is flawed. It seems incredibly inefficient. Surely we are due for an overhaul of the system of educational jurisdiction. I suspect we could eliminate waste, reuse ideas across provincial borders, conserve the energy used to replicate programs in each province, share funding, share resources, and create a greener educational program if more national coordination was in place.

We also need to think of ways to make institutions and governments remember that they are accountable to us. My colleague Dina Al-Kassim suggests that students need to take this on themselves. As she says, "ethical and political scrutiny of university administrations by grads and alums . . . politicizes their connection to the institution and has the effect of reminding all that these institutions are to serve the public good; this represents a return to values before the neoliberal takeover or drift to the right and to corporate values." Those in power need to realize that their growth and success depends on a successful ecosystem that begins at the level of the student and that they must retain public accountability.

6) Reduce Toxicity

We need to recognize the stress on those already employed in academic ecosystems (increased class size, many supervisions, large amounts of service, few research dollars and minutes) alongside those who want into the system (too few positions, uncertain futures). In short, we need to reduce the toxicity that comes from the culture of overwork to create a more healthy

workplace environment for both faculty and students. I imagine it would lead to better scholarship as well.

It is time to guide public perception on the value of the work we do as we reduce toxicity in public rhetoric about the waste of a humanities degree. As Michael Bérubé memorably states, "I do want to say one thing about the fields of expertise we have created and validated in the humanities over the past 30 or 40 years. They have been, on the whole, pretty awesome." He argues the absolute relevance of postcolonial, feminist, deconstructive, queer, and ecocritical theories in the study of culture. Questioning everything and maintaining incredulity to master-narratives of all kinds allows us to recognize the need for a more equitable and sustainable society.

7) Prevent Pollution

We can prevent air pollution by acknowledging the problems but also focusing on the good news. As Patsy Badir argues, "Graduate degrees in the humanities are as ubiquitous as air, yes, but also as essential and potentially powerful." Graduates of humanities programs populate government, the entertainment industry, communications, information technology, business, and the not-for-profit sector as well as education. We *have* public impact.

To thrive, we need to protect the local environment and acknowledge that we are part of much larger diverse ecosystems, as we clean up the rubbish of some public rhetoric, conserve energy, reduce waste, improve air quality, reduce toxic exposure, and hopefully increase sustainability. In 1969, Ben Metcalfe, the journalist / environmental activist / and early member of Greenpeace, paid for twelve billboards in Vancouver that declared "ECOLOGY? LOOK IT UP! YOU'RE INVOLVED!"[3] Let's extend Metcalfe's imperative and consider how we—here and now—are all involved in ecology.

One way to do so is to read articles like the ones in this issue. The authors consider works of art that complicate conventional understandings of refugee lives, spousal sponsorship, labour unrest, multiculturalism, nationalism, tourism, war, memoir, and ghosts. They are as "relevant" to reading the world around us as they are to the artistic production of ideas.

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Institute at the University of Guelph, April 2013. I am indebted to Erin Hurley for suggesting, in conversation, that I look at the crisis in the humanities through the lens of ecology and ask what humanities would need to thrive. I also want to acknowledge and thank my colleagues at UBC for generously engaging in an online conversation about the questions asked for this think tank in preparation for this paper. I have quoted several of them but the comments of all have informed my points here. Thank you to Larissa Lai, Mary Chapman, Patsy Badir, Sian Echard, Elizabeth Hodgson, Dina Al-Kassim, Jeff Severs, Vin Nardizzi, Sandy Tomcs, Sneja Gunew, Deanna Kreissel, Robert Rouse, Margery Fee, Alan Jacobs, and Mark Vessey as well as my students Brendan McCormack and Christina Turner for their feedback. Thanks especially to Larissa Lai for joining me at a departmental research colloquium to present our work-in-progress on March 8, 2013: "The Crisis in the Humanities: Two Practical Responses." Finally, thanks to Tiffany Johnstone for timely editorial input.

NOTES

1 Consider the findings of the StatsCan report "Overqualification among recent university graduates in Canada" by Sharanjit Uppal and Sébastien LaRochelle-Côté issued in April 2014 that concludes that a large number of graduates of humanities undergraduate programs are overqualified for the jobs they are employed in, ages 25-34. They note that the number has not changed considerably between 1991 and 2011.

2 Concern about the changing job market is not limited to academia. Indeed, academia mirrors what I understand has become standard at tech companies, banks, and other high level businesses. As William Poundstone notes in *Are You Smart Enough to Work at Google*? "hiring at today's selective companies is predicated on the disappointment of many" (19). There is no question that the hiring climate at universities is predicated on a similar degree of disappointment.

3 Thanks to Graeme Wynn for this wonderful reference in "Navigating a 'Wasting World': Perspectives on Environmentalism and Sustainability in Canada." UBC McLean lectures. 7 Mar. 2013.

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Erratum

In issue 218 of *Canadian Literature,* a book review by David Leahy of Deborah Kirshner's novella, *Mahler's Lament,* stated that in the book the character of Gustav Mahler raped his sister Justine. This does not happen in the narrative. *Canadian Literature* and David Leahy apologize for this error and misrepresentation.

Weyman Chan

Venn Diagram

1
What happens when control of the flesh doubles as the State.
Duality aligns our union of suspect gatherings.
Polar to rectangular space, the curved plane
Begets the word. Word as h = m/v
The stone hammer
Isn't the sentence
But the conscience
Each sentence grows
To begin to
Rewrite time as
Its end must surely meet its opposite

2
Scatterings join again this land
To myself whom I meet in the director's chair
Hey there, I say, extending safe union and exclusivity
To my ghost
That can't penetrate its frame. Whose image
Attaches like a dalliance. But
When someone explodes
my limbs converge. Let
The field principle apply to all rationals.
Terror
Isn't a dirty word.

Vinh Nguyen

Refugee Gratitude
Narrating Success and Intersubjectivity in Kim Thúy's *Ru*

Revisiting Success

After recounting a narrative of warfare, migration from Vietnam, and resettlement in Canada through a series of impressionistic vignettes, Kim Thúy ends her semi-autobiographical novel *Ru* with an image of rebirth and renewal: a phoenix rising from its ashes. The narrator writes, "all those individuals from my past have shaken the grime off their backs in order to spread their wings with plumage of red and gold, before thrusting themselves sharply towards the great blue space, decorating my children's sky, showing them that one horizon always hides another and it goes on like that to infinity, to the unspeakable beauty of renewal, to intangible rapture" (140). In addition, she reflexively draws attention to the existence of the novel as a document that attests to the possibilities of reinvention and immigrant "success." The novel's overarching theme of personal and collective resilience in the face of struggle, and triumphant final note, makes it an emblematic case of the Vietnamese refugee success story. Indeed, various glowing reviews in national newspapers have hailed the author as "the perfect immigrant" (Barber n. pag.) and praised her story as one following the path "from riches to rags to riches" (Bartley n. pag.). In turn, the resultant critical and commercial success of the novel reinforces the image of Kim Thúy as a model refugee.

The narrative of social, economic, and psychic "success," as seen in a text like *Ru*, is a hallmark of *mainstream* Asian North American literature—literature that is, according to Viet Nguyen, "most likely to be read by non-Asian [North] American readers and critics" (147-48). As many scholars have pointed out, the in-text narration of success by minority and immigrant writers can play a crucial role in the mainstream reception of such texts. Read as public

demonstrations of success performed by those who have been rescued by and/or allowed entry into Western democratic nation-states, these narratives help to confirm liberal ideals of freedom, democracy, and equality. They function as proof of the inclusive, tolerant, and fundamentally non-racist constitution of the Canadian and American national space. Thus the immigrant's success can be construed as the nation's own success at multicultural, collective-building projects. Because of their ideologically reaffirming function, stories of immigrant and refugee success are often more palatable and easily digested by mainstream readers and state structures alike.

Yen Le Espiritu identifies the discourse of the "good refugee"—deployed by mainstream society and Vietnamese Americans themselves—as one that coalesced during a historical conjuncture that saw the thirtieth anniversary of the end of the War in Vietnam and the emergence of renewed American imperial ambitions. She writes, "otherwise absent in US public discussions of Vietnam, Vietnamese refugees become most visible and intelligible to Americans as successful, assimilated, and anti-communist newcomers to the American 'melting pot.' Represented as the grateful beneficiary of US-style freedom, Vietnamese in the United States become the featured evidence of the appropriateness of the US war in Vietnam" (xv). The figure of the well-assimilated and successful Vietnamese refugee not only allows for the revisionist casting of America's role in Southeast Asia as defender and savior, but it is also appropriated as justification for present and future US military interventions overseas. The collapsing of refugee success with American "victory" in war has dangerous consequences for past, present, and future understandings of war and militarism. Espiritu's analysis contributes to an ongoing critique of the model minority myth that has shadowed popular discussions of Asians in North America, and rightly warns us of the potentially dangerous implications of their success stories. The success narrative can become regulatory and punitive and, as a result, easily lends itself to appropriation by revisionist, nationalistic, and neo-imperial forces.

While structural critiques of Asian North American success and how it gets deployed are both crucial and urgent, they often neglect the nuanced subjective and contextual specificities that accompany instances of "making it." I turn, thus, to a reconsideration of the success narrative by meditating on how these stories are integral to the intertwined processes of survival and subject formation for those who have experienced intense struggle, loss, and trauma. More specifically, I want to ask: What is the purpose and value of narrating various forms of success for individuals who have lived under

the conditions of war and its aftermath, surrounded by both the imminent threat and immediate reality of destruction, disappearances, and death? How does the attainment of socio-economic prosperity—including educational, professional, and artistic success—signify for war survivors and refugees who have known incredible material lack and deprivation? Are celebrations of success, and affirmations of resilience and survival, different kinds of political statements in contexts where physical survival and livelihood has never been guaranteed?

The aim of this essay therefore is not to dwell on how narratives of refugee success are produced for and deployed by the state and its apparatuses, but to seek a way of examining stories of struggle and triumph beyond the determining frame of liberal-democratic nationalism. I wish to momentarily remove immigrant success stories from the mainstream (white) context, not to suggest that this removal is ever entirely possible but to change the point of emphasis from how these narratives function as "capital" within dominant hegemonic structures to how they might serve the subjects who produce them. Such a shift will work to complicate Asian North American critiques of success and of figures like that of the model minority, and in doing so push for a more nuanced consideration of the complexity and heterogeneity of Asian North American subjectivities, particularly those borne out of the violence of empire.

Commenting on the radical, leftist tradition of Asian American studies, Viet Nguyen points out that Asian American intellectuals "prefer to see themselves and the objects of their critical inquiry as bad subjects" (144). Eve Oishi defines these "bad" Asian subjects as "any Asian who makes noise, acts nasty, or in any way flouts the expectations of racist stereotype . . . Bad as in 'badass.' Bad as in anyone who does not covet white patriarchal approval; anyone who challenges racism, class oppression, sexism, homophobia" (221). This ideological predisposition to idealize socially and politically resistant subjects leads many in the academy and beyond to disregard narratives of success as automatically and uncomplicatedly playing into nationalistic, multicultural, and assimilationist agendas—that is, to accept the common perception that success breeds compliant, normative "good" subjects, and vice versa. I contend that we need to pause before equating financial, social, and artistic success with absorption into neoliberal forms of capitalist citizenship, with consent to nationalist principles, with a desire for the status quo. An alternate mode of analysis, coexisting with a trenchant critique of ideological structures, could make room for consideration of the complicated niceties of Asian North America in discussions of success and failure, of the

facts of war and other historical atrocities and the ways they imprint themselves on the bodies and psyches of the human remainders, and of the pain, as well as beauty, in the everyday struggle to live and survive.

To this end, I analyze Kim Thúy's *Ru* as a text that reorients the question of success to return the discussion to the specificities of embodied experience and subjectivity. This return, however, is not towards a privatizing discourse of the individual, identified by David Palumbo-Liu as marking model minority discourse; instead, it seeks an investigation of the particularities of experience that views individuals and individual negotiations as indexes of a larger sociality. Unlike theories of post-identity that try to do away with the notion of subjectivity—such as Kandice Chuh's "subjectless discourse"—my approach insists that the problem of subjectivity remains a pertinent concern for constituencies who emerge in the wake of war and atrocities, for whom a whole and healed subjectivity might still be a desired and as yet unfulfilled hope.

In its depiction of a movement towards an intelligible, articulable, and coherent subjective self, *Ru* addresses a problematic central to the study of diasporas: how to conceive of the self when some segments of that self seem so incongruent and incompatible with other segments. Put otherwise, the novel raises the question of how it is possible for former refugee subjects to embody and live multiple, oftentimes discrepant meanings, memories, and histories. It is a question of how to occupy that interstitial space—theoretically celebrated but materially vexed—where the legal designation of refugee has dissolved but a sense of *refugeeness* still lingers. The manner in which *Ru* works through or "resolves" these issues provides an occasion to contemplate the meaning of success, especially as it manifests through expressions of gratitude. This essay takes the idea of success not as the teleological destination of the American Dream, but as a node in the continual process of survival and subject formation for refugee Asian North American subjects. Focusing on the context of the Vietnamese diaspora, I argue that for refugee subjects, success can become a narrative device, a rhetorical strategy, and a mode of articulation for working through and understanding *their* experiences and memories.

The Grateful Refugee

Thus far, I have framed *Ru* in an Asian North American and Vietnamese diasporic context by employing American-centered criticism. This is due mainly to the fact that the bulk of literary and cultural productions as well as theoretical and critical scholarship by and on the Vietnamese diaspora have

come out of the United States. I do not wish to elide the particularities of the Canadian context or to appropriate the novel as an "American" text, as has been done in the past with works such as Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*.[1] I draw on scholarship that focuses on Vietnamese American experiences because many of the arguments, insights, and claims can be extrapolated and applied to other parts of the diaspora, such as Canada, where similar scholarly activity is only just emerging. Considering that the origin of mass Vietnamese migration at the end of the twentieth century is a direct result of American military presence in Southeast Asia, it is also difficult to speak of Vietnam and its diaspora in isolation from the US. Thus, in the novel, Kim Thúy explicitly references the "American Dream" as a master discourse guiding the desires of refugees who have landed in Canada, and Quebec no less, where questions of sovereignty and separatism have long been contentious issues. Kim Thúy's usage of the blanket phrase "American Dream" in a French-Canadian context not only points to the way American culture and ideology have become transnationally pervasive in the era of globalization, but it also reveals how Vietnamese scattered across the globe continue to remain connected to America through both a backward- and forward-looking gaze.

At the same time, this unique Quebecois Canadian context also complicates many of the arguments that have been made by scholars regarding refugees of the War in Vietnam. Mainly, it poses the question of how those in places *outside* the United States relate to the socio-political-historical specificities of their respective national contexts *in addition to* dominant American discourses surrounding the war and its afterlife. For instance, Canada as a nation did not officially participate in the War in Vietnam, and thus the terms on which it took in Vietnamese refugees are different from those of nations like the US, France, or Australia, which fought, at one time or another, in a country with a defined agenda. In stressing this difference, my intention is not to reinforce what Jason Ziedenberg calls the "peaceable kingdom" mythology of Canadian benevolence and innocence or to diminish its complicity in a war that needs to be understood as a global racial project. In fact, it must be remembered that while Canada did not join the fighting effort, it acted as the chief arms supplier to the US, providing resources and materials that fueled combat and drove the war economy. This implicates Canada not only in the military-industrial complex, but also in a global war machine directed at racialized peoples during the Cold War era.

Further, historians like John Price have begun interrogating the triangulated connections between Canada, the United States, and Great Britain that have

facilitated the circulation of shared racial discourses and imperial logics between these "Atlantic" nations.[2] Though never having possessed an overseas empire, the Canadian nation has a long history of restricting Asian immigration based directly on racist and imperialist ideologies. Canada's relation to its immigrants and refugees is directly shaped by its relationship with empires. These colonial values have also undergirded its foreign policy matters. Yet, a fine distinction needs to be made between the direct ways in which the US waged war in Vietnam and Canada's supporting or peripheral involvement. The point I wish to emphasize here, and will return to later, is that texts, narratives, and subjects from other parts of the Vietnamese diaspora may not fit neatly into some of the theoretical and interpretive frameworks that have been put forward by American scholars to date.

First published in French in Quebec in 2009 to critical acclaim, *Ru* went on to receive a host of prestigious prizes, including Canada's Governor General's Literary Award for Fiction (French language), France's Grand prix littéraire RTL-Lire, and Italy's Mondello Prize for Multiculturalism. While the novel's narrative arc and details resemble those of Kim Thúy's own life story, the book was marketed not as a memoir but as a work of fiction, making it the first novel by a self-identified Vietnamese Canadian. Written in a structure that mimics short recollections of memory, the poetic fragments oscillate in both space and time, weaving together the narrator Nguyễn An Tịnh's childhood in and escape from Vietnam and experiences of settling in Canada with reflections on diverse subjects such as motherhood, autism, prostitution, and Amerasians. Pieced together into a narrative, however, the novel's story follows a conventional trajectory in which war disrupts the comforts of middle-class life, forcing migration and resettlement in a new country. After enduring numerous struggles, the narrator and her family successfully rebuild their lives through hard work, sacrifice, and the kindness of those around them, rising from the poverty of refugee migrants to the socio-economic success of model minority citizens.

It is undeniable that written into *Ru*'s narrative is a sense of thankfulness, a belief in the benevolence and generosity of the Canadian nation for providing the opportunities and the conditions for the possibility of life and "success." How that belief circulates in Canadian society, while extremely important to understanding the cultural politics of gratitude, is not my primary concern here. The very fact that *Ru* received the kind of national and international recognition that it did reveals how liberal multicultural ideology responds to such minority voices, as well as the political stakes

involved in official acknowledgement. Countless scholars, including Himani Bannerji and Sunera Thobani, have convincingly critiqued official state multiculturalism in Canada as a discourse that contains and manages "difference" in a way that maintains white privilege and hegemony. The ideological ends and implications of the mainstream exaltation of a refugee narrative like Kim Thúy's is but one side of the multifaceted story; I am interested instead in thinking through how the refugee subject herself constructs a narrative of intersubjectivity that is able to integrate such beliefs into the formation of a "post"-refugee identity. Kim Thúy has said that the novel is an homage to Canada and to the heroes of her past. *Ru* itself reads like a catalogue of gratitude to the people who have made the narrator's present a reality. The task at hand is to read the novel *alongside* the interpretation whereby the refugee's achievement of success and feelings of gratitude constitute a model minority discourse celebrating the goodness of liberal nationalism and multiculturalism.

Ru's narrator represents what I call a grateful refugee. The figure of the grateful refugee is closely related to that of the highly assimilated and successful "good refugee." The "good refugee" is often also constructed as a model minority, who is perceived as hardworking and resourceful and, through both innate and cultural qualities, is able to achieve educational, economic, and social success with no or very little assistance from the state. Model minorities are made visible as exemplary ethnic citizens and as disciplinary cases marginalizing other, less compliant minorities who speak out against racism and classism, and refuse to evince seeming independence from social structures for their livelihood.[3]

The grateful refugee, as I conceive of it, can occupy the discursive and ideological positions of both the "good refugee" and/or the model minority simultaneously. In that way, it is vulnerable to the same critiques that have been launched against both these other discourses. The grateful refugee, however, provides us with a different lens, one less conditioned to liberal judgment, with which to consider the complicatedness of refugee experience. While the "good refugee" is a construct that ultimately directs us to the contours of the nation-state, the grateful refugee allows us to focus in on the lives of refugees themselves. As a figure, it carves out a critical space for the expression of various forms of immigrant success and for feelings of gratitude to those peoples, institutions, and nations that have in one way or another provided the opportunity for such successes to materialize without being necessarily or automatically regarded as fodder for ideology

or ideological maneuverings. What *Ru* demonstrates is that the articulation of success through gratitude can be a powerful tool in making sense of traumatic pasts, and permits—as a technology of the self in the Foucauldian sense—a critical process of self (trans)formation.

Gratitude and Intersubjectivity

Kim Thúy presents us with a model of subjectivity predicated on gratitude, in which gratitude enables the refugee who has had the stability of meaning pulled away—home, nation, family, property, rights, dreams—to reconstruct a life and a sense of identity, and to link that self with others to create an understanding of the individual and individual success as mutually constitutive, shared, and collective. In this way, an expression of thankfulness towards Canada is a fundamental component of the biographical narrative that accounts for her present existence (as a Canadian citizen), one which came into being against the odds, in situations where survival and success were not in the realm of expectation or even possibility. Thus, in the novel she expresses gratitude to the Canadian nation through its nearest representatives, the small Quebec town of Granby and its inhabitants. Granby is described as a "warm belly" (21) and "heaven on earth" (25), while its people are characterized as "angels" who were sent down to earth to care for the refugees: "By the dozen they showed up at our doors to give us warm clothes, toys, invitations, dreams" (22-23). Employing maternal metaphors and images, the narrator characterizes the white Canadians who initially guided her and other refugees in their early days as mothers and caretakers. Marie-France, the narrator's first teacher in Canada was "like a mother duck": "she walked ahead of us, asking us to follow her to the haven where we would be children again . . . She watched over our transplantation with all the sensitivity of a mother for her premature baby" (9). Jeanne, another teacher, "liberated my voice without using words . . . It was thanks to [her] that I learned how to free my voice from the folds of my body so it could reach my lips" (97). This picture of a nurturing and inclusive Canada neatly aligns with official state multiculturalism; it also rehearses the common belief in Canada's "white civility."[4]

Yet, through narrating gratitude, what also emerges are formative moments in which an inchoate idea of self, being, and futurity began to crystallize for the narrator: Jeanne's example taught the silent refugee how to utilize her voice; the sway of Marie-France's full bum gave the angular narrator her "first desire as an immigrant" (9) and the "power to look ahead, to look far ahead" (10); the kindness of Granby's residents reaffirmed hope

and the possibility of livelihood. Underscored here is the idea that Canada did in fact give her the chance to begin anew. Her present understanding of "successful" self thus requires an account of these moments through the form of thankfulness, especially because self—existence, livelihood, being, identity—was not a given, but was, at one point, on the brink of vanishing. The importance of gratitude, then, must be read in the context of the narrator's experience of "nothingness" and "emptiness," one of material and existential uncertainty, that threads through her narrative of refuge.

Analyzing Vietnamese refugee narratives, Sucheng Chan identifies "immense suffering, deprivation, loss, and violent uprooting" (251) as common features of migration experiences. Many oral narratives and life stories, like those collected in *Voices of the Boat People* and *The Vietnamese American 1.5 Generation* recount political persecution under a Communist regime that uses imprisonment, indoctrination, torture, and execution in re-education camps; social and economic oppression, like racial discrimination (in the case of mixed-race Amerasians and ethnic Chinese); the confiscation of property and the restriction of access to education and employment; and poverty and lack of future opportunities in underdeveloped, postwar Vietnam as reasons for fleeing the country. For those who escaped, the dangerous journeys often involved illness, starvation, and death, and many boats encountered deadly storms and pirates, who plundered the passengers and raped women and children, on the South China Sea.

Ru's narrator provides a description of a boat journey, relaying in hauntingly sensuous and visceral images the paralyzing fear felt and lived collectively by herself and her fellow passengers as they sit waiting, drifting in the hold of their boat:

> Heaven and Hell embraced in the belly of our boat. Heaven promised a turning point in our lives, a new future, a new history. Hell, though, displayed our fears: fear of pirates, fear of starvation, fear of poisoning by biscuits soaked in motor oil, fear of running out of water, fear of being unable to stand up, fear of having to urinate in the red pot that was passed from hand to hand, fear that the scabies on the baby's head was contagious, fear of never again setting foot on solid ground, fear of never again seeing the faces of our parents, who were sitting in the darkness surrounded by two hundred people. . . . fear was transformed into a hundred-faced monster who sawed off our legs and kept us from feeling the stiffness in our immobilized muscles. We were frozen in fear, by fear. . . . We were numb, imprisoned by the shoulders of some, the legs of others, the fear of everyone. We were paralyzed. (4-5)

This terrorizing fear expressed by the narrator also reveals a suspension of subjectivity, where fear of the many threats to life forecloses futurity,

constricting and petrifying the self in a physical, psychological, and affective hold. The stunting of hope or a "turning point," a "new future," and a "new history," part and parcel of the migration process, is a necessary frame within which to read the narration of gratitude and success recounted in Kim Thúy's novel. The expression of gratitude for a second chance at life and the narration of how that chance gets utilized need to be understood against a backdrop of an affective and material experience of absence and impossibility. Early in *Ru*, the narrator recalls how this condition of suspended self is exacerbated when the "empty" refugee comes into contact with the newness of Canada in another paralyzing moment—this one of arrival. Upon landing in Quebec, she writes, "I was . . . unable to talk or to listen, even though I was neither deaf nor mute. I now had no points of reference, no tools to allow me to dream, to project myself into the future, to be able to experience the present, in the present" (8).

The sense of physical and psychic disorientation is directly shaped by the time spent in the refugee camp. In a RCI radio interview, Kim Thúy describes the experience of living in a camp as a life-altering event in which "everything went down to zero" and thus "everything else came as a gift afterwards." She continues, "after that four months of emptiness, of nothingness, you don't compare with what you have before, you're just, I'd say, thankful that you have a new life, that you have a new beginning. Starting over, you're just thankful." The characterizations of the camp as "empty" and the new life after the camp as a "gift" are two tropes in conventional articulations of a refugee affect of gratitude. Mimi Thi Nguyen calls this the "gift of freedom" that America confers on refugee subjects—indeed it produces a kind of un-being or "poisonous" subjectivity—as a debt to liberal empire. The grateful Vietnamese refugee, who is born from this gift of freedom, first through war then by refuge, is enshackled in an endless debt-payment relationship to the state and its imperial logics. Here, because recompense through gratefulness is always incommensurate to the gift, it compels obligation by tying the debtor to the debtee, binding the refugee to liberalism's governance and its past, present, and future empires of freedom. Among other things, Nguyen demonstrates how gratitude dangerously slips into indebtedness.

Though illuminating in the way it reveals the complex forms of power and violence at play in obliging the refugee to give thanks, Nguyen's analysis does not account for the situation whereby the state power in question is *not* "an uncontested superpower on the world stage" that "instrumentalizes

an idea of human freedom . . . to reinforce a politics of war, terror, and occupation" (xi). In other words, the concepts of debt and gratitude take on different significations outside the United States, for instance, in contexts like Canada—a nation that is not a global military power committed to a politics of defending the free world against terrorism, a nation that did not directly bring about the upheaval and displacement of Vietnamese populations but did play an important role in their rescue.[5] Much of the ally guilt and what Gil Loescher and John A. Scanlan term "calculated kindness"—the strategic rescue and admittance of refugees directed by a Cold War anti-communist ideology—woven into US policy is missing from Canada's decision to admit Vietnamese asylum seekers.[6] To be clear, I am not simply advocating a position of Canadian moral superiority or global benevolence. My suggestion here, and *Ru* provides a good example, is that a different relationship between the Vietnamese refugee and the state arises in the Canadian context. For a grateful Vietnamese-Canadian refugee like *Ru*'s narrator, gratitude does not necessarily bind her (or him) to liberalism's empire of freedom, because the nation did not extend, in the first instance, that violent "gift" to the refugees it took into its care. Thus, one of the major contradictions of refugee gratitude—that it elides the historical forces that created the conditions of flight and the need for asylum-seeking in the first place—is ameliorated when the recipient of that gratitude did not directly and actively create those very conditions.[7]

But, as *Ru*'s public reception demonstrates, gratitude towards Canada affixes the refugee, like a piece of a puzzle, into the hegemonic mosaic of Canadian multiculturalism. The "stickiness" of gratitude that Nguyen culls out in her analysis remains, and this adhesion bears further critical elaboration. At the end of her book, Nguyen takes a turn from her line of argument to gesture at alternate attachments to debt that have the potential to trouble the oppressive force of freedom. She writes,

> [a]gainst the commodity logic of race, gender, or property, can we think of debt as producing another economy of intense contact with all the multiple, heterogeneous, not-same strangers . . . Clearly we cannot acquit the debt (indeed, we cannot but default), but, moreover, we can refuse to be circumscribed by the horizons of significance or obligation brought to bear on us . . . Debt points toward a different social order, keeping us in contact with alternate collectivities of others who bear the trace of human freedom that falls apart, or seizes hold, in its giving. (189)

Here, Nguyen opens up different possibilities and directions for debt attachments. The debt incurred by the gift of freedom may in fact become the very basis for the emergence of alternate forms of resistance, solidarity,

and sociality; it may facilitate contacts and engagements that are unintended byproducts of violent freedom. My contention that gratitude—as a kind of debt repayment—can also facilitate the formation of "post"-refugee intersubjectivity builds on Nguyen's prompt, but is in no way an adequate response to her complex treatment of the "subject" under the layered envelopments of freedom. What I suggest, however, is that gratitude can engender the kinds of multiple attachments that constitute diasporic refugee subjects.

In my formulation, gratitude can be regarded as an affect or social feeling—as theorized by Sara Ahmed and Teresa Brennan, among others—produced in moments of contact and exchange between the refugee and the state and its extensions—that is, as a "structure of feeling" in Raymond Williams' sense, both produced in and constitutive of social moments. As such it exists in the interstices as a binding agent, linking subjects and institutions together within a larger socio-political and cultural field. Yet, gratitude's ability to attach also allows the refugee to exist as part of a larger sociality and think of the self and its successes beyond terms of individuality. If gratitude is a binding agent, functioning to secure the refugee to the state in an interminable relation of debt-repayment, as in the American context, or to position the ethnic immigrant as an included and participating member in a multicultural mosaic dominated by a white, Anglo-Francophone dyad, as in the Canadian case, it can also facilitate the fastening of the refugee to *other subjects*—kin, lovers, teachers, kind strangers, benefactors, communities—and thus provide a potential model of subjectivity based on relationality, connectivity, and sociality.

Ru instantiates the various ways in which gratitude can be directed, as well as its multiple receiving objects and/or subjects. Feelings of gratitude are not solely directed at white Canadians or the Canadian nation, but also at other refugees and survivors. Thus, in addition to a celebration of Canada, the novel makes room for telling of the generosities, wisdoms, and altruisms of those "small" individuals who have had a hand in saving the narrator's life and in shaping the contours of her subjectivity. For example, she pays tribute to Anh Phi, a family friend who found and returned the lost taels of gold the narrator's family eventually used to pay for their passage out of Vietnam. His selfless and heroic act during postwar Vietnam's "chaotic peacetime," where "it was the norm for hunger to replace reason, for uncertainty to usurp morality" (89), established the condition of possibility for any kind of physical existence for the narrator and her family. Her aunt Six, who labored in a chicken processing plant in Quebec, enabled the narrator to form her

own dreams of the future. By giving the narrator a simple gift of ten pieces of paper, each containing a different profession, her aunt showed her that there were other options besides medicine, a career that many refugee parents expect their children to enter into because of both its professional prestige and its perceived stability. She writes that, "[i]t was thanks to that gift . . . that I was allowed to dream my own dreams" (76).

Furthermore, the narrator describes how Monsieur An, a survivor of the communist re-education prisons, taught her about the important notion of nuance. His tale of facing the barrel of the execution gun and surviving through a defiant upward gaze to search for the sky's blue colour is a lesson in the importance of life's subtleties and the niceties of meaning. Monsieur Minh, another re-education survivor, who had "written" many books in his mind, "always on the one piece of paper he possessed, page by page, chapter by chapter, an unending story," during his incarceration, was "saved . . . by writing" (88). He gave her the "urge to write" (88) and the gift of words, showing the narrator the power of stories and storytelling in the struggle to stay alive. In addition, the narrator reveals how her parents, who were "unable to look ahead of themselves" because of the opportunities closed off to them in Canada "looked ahead of us, for us, their children" (10). She emphasizes, "[f]or us, they didn't see the blackboards they wiped clean, the school toilets they scrubbed, the imperial rolls they delivered. They saw only what lay ahead" (11). The gratitude expressed establishes her parents' hard work and sacrifice as the foundation for the narrator's own success, and renders the "gifts"—material and immaterial—from various individuals as fragments that fit together to create a conception of a future self.

Vignettes of intersubjectivity such as those mentioned above are littered throughout *Ru*. Taken together, they sketch and constellate a subject whose boundaries are expansive, whose constitution is based on multiplicity, whose presence is built on the sediments of others. It is possible, then, to view the narrator's act of writing as a cataloguing or indexing of gratitude, one that actively gathers moments of self-emergence and -creation. In doing so, writing generates the self through the citation of others. Hence, the fragmentary and elliptical structure of the novel not only mimics the nature of everyday storytelling and memory, something Kim Thúy has said she tried to capture during the writing process, it also reflects the narrator's method of self-construction. From this perspective, the self is an assemblage of others, an archive of, in the words of Judith Butler, the "enigmatic traces of others" (46). As a refugee who started with next to nothing in a foreign

place, the narrator relies on individuals around her to provide the dreams, lessons, and material foundations for the formation of a wholly unique and legible self. In other words, the impression of others gives shape to the self, which becomes a network of interpersonal contact and relations. Gratitude, as an affect or emotion that has the potential to catalyze this process of intersubjectivity, enacts Ahmed's understanding of emotion's role in the social arena: "it is through emotions, or how we respond to objects and others, that surfaces and boundaries are made: the 'I' and the 'we' are shaped by, and even take the shape of, contact with others" (10).

Oblivion and the American Dream

Intersubjectivity, performed in the novel through narrativization, presupposes remembrance in order to establish a complex, hybrid presence. As a constructivist modality, intersubjectivity is generative, drawing on and creating memories, subjectivities, and relations. Also part of the process, however, is the role of forgetting. In *Ru*, forgetting is a fraught process, both crucial to survival and reinvention and lamented as a kind of loss. The erasure of the past contrasts starkly with the accumulative pursuit of the American Dream. *Ru*'s narrator characterizes this dream, this ideal of success, which sits on the horizon for new immigrants, as something material and tangible that can eventually be grasped, put on (to the body), and occupied.

To become the dream, or to have the dream become a part of you, means to be indelibly changed, to gain an addition or extension, but also to lose something in the process. She tells us that "[f]or many immigrants, the American dream has come true" (74); "[o]nce it's achieved, though, the American dream never leaves us, like a graft or an excrescence" (77). Here, the attainment of success, the accumulation of social, cultural, and economic capital latches onto the body and weighs the subject down even as it propels her "upward." In a scene of (mis)recognition, the narrator describes how a waiter in a Hanoi restaurant was taken aback when she, on a return trip, spoke Vietnamese to him. Explaining his surprise, the waiter tells her that she was "too fat to be Vietnamese" (77). She then goes on to reflect: "I understood later that he was talking not about my forty-five kilos but about the American dream that had made me more substantial, heavier, weightier. That American dream had given confidence to my voice, determination to my actions, precision to my desires, speed to my gait and strength to my gaze. That American dream made me believe I could have everything" (77). Revealed in this encounter are the physical and psychic ways in which

the American Dream alters those who come into contact with it. Success functions to mould the refugee into another guise of being, one that may not be identifiable or reconcilable with past versions of the self: "the young waiter reminded me that I couldn't have everything, that I no longer had the right to declare I was Vietnamese because I no longer have their fragility, their uncertainty, their fears" (78).

Success thus creates gaps—distances between experiences, or elliptical spaces in the continuity of identity. For many refugees who have succeeded, present prosperity and past suffering become points of contradiction. In the novel, this condition of tension and incongruity is poignantly elucidated in an episode where the narrator points to the irony that accompanies success through the example of her Aunt and Step-uncle Six. Describing how they currently lead a comfortable life in Canada, especially in comparison to their refugee past, she writes: "Nowadays . . . [t]hey travel first class and have to stick a sign on the back of their seat so the hostesses will stop offering them chocolates and champagne. Thirty years ago, in our Malaysian refugee camp, the same Step-uncle Six crawled more slowly than his eight-month-old daughter because he was suffering from malnutrition. And the same Aunt Six used the one needle she had to sew clothes so she could buy milk for her daughter" (74). The disjuncture that the American dream brings about necessitates a way of negotiating differing realities that press against the limits of a coherent conception of self. Forgetting, in the way that it mitigates these contradictions, offers the possibility of a subjectivity that is legible to the subject who must negotiate and live it herself.

In her analysis of Vietnamese diasporic popular culture, Nhi T. Lieu argues that "the formation of contemporary Vietnamese American identities . . . rests simultaneously on resisting the refugee image as well as constructing a middle-class ethnic identity under consumer capitalism" (xvii). Lieu's formulation pivots, on the one hand, on the shedding of a past life, whether that refugee life was experienced first-hand or inherited through immersion in a diasporic social field, and on the other hand, on the assumption of a new idea of life and social existence. This project of identity formation through hybrid cultural forms that define a new, bourgeois Vietnamese ethnic identity within multicultural America is described as a translation of the "American Dream" to Vietnamese. The larger arc of Lieu's argument posits forgetting as a means of subjectivity, one that attempts "erasure" of the impoverished refugee image that circulates widely and has the potential to constrain Vietnamese (diasporic) subjects.

While *Ru* does not resist the refugee image—in fact, it reproduces refugee experiences as a means of visibility—it speaks to Lieu's argument in the portrayal of oblivion, the conscious forgetting of a refugee past, as a strategy that allows the former refugee to exist in the present moment of success without mental torment, psychic split, and affective guilt or shame. In one narrative fragment, the narrator brings us into a "smoky lounge," where she socializes with friends and strangers, exposing herself as she regales them with bits of her past "as if they were anecdotes or comedy routines or amusing tales from far-off lands featuring exotic landscapes, odd sound effects and exaggerated characterizations" (136). The narrator is aware, in this candid moment, of how her past becomes a spectacle for white, mainstream consumption. As she performs this ethnic minstrelsy, however, she is not only catering to the desires and expectations of a particular audience hungry for stories of trauma, but also rendering the traumatic past for herself in a particular way that can be accommodated by the present. Put differently, the "selling-out" or "bastardization" of her past allows the narrator to forget, or, to let forgetting shape memory. She admits:

> I like the red leather of the sofa in the cigar lounge . . . When I sit in that smoky lounge, I forget that I'm one of the Asians who lack the dehydrogenase enzyme for metabolizing alcohol, I forget that I'm marked with a blue spot on my backside, like the Inuit, like my sons, like all those with Asian blood. I forget the mongoloid spot that reveals the genetic memory because it vanished during the early years of childhood, and my emotional memory has been lost, dissolving, snarling with time. (136)

It is this critical work of forgetting, which may be seen negatively as assimilation, that enables the "post"-refugee subject to accommodate the profound contradictions, the existential ironies, and the complications that make daily life difficult or impossible to live. Most importantly, forgetting, rather than creating the breaks and fractures of identity, makes critical space for them to occur—in a less devastating way—within the conception of a coherent and livable self.

The narrator goes on to explain how forgetting permits actions in the present that may seem foreign and unexplainable in the context of the past. She tells us that the fissures of forgetting, what she calls "estrangement," "detachment," and "distance," "allow me to buy, without any qualms and with full awareness of what I'm doing, a pair of shoes whose price in my native land would be enough to feed a family of five for one whole year" (137). A Marxist critique might view the narrator's explanation as a neoliberal rationalization of middle-class capitalist consumerism, but I suggest that

this statement pinpoints a *difficult moment of living*, a moment knotted with contradiction and irony for the subject who was once a refugee, who still retains the memories of that experience but is also distanced from it, who has known impoverishment and has been touched by the hands of success. To "forget" in such moments is not simply a matter of a newly (recovered) middle-class self effacing its un-middle-class components for continuity. Rather, the novel presents us with a theory of selfhood that demonstrates how "impossible" versions of oneself must be actively "forgotten" or remembered differently in order for the self to experience itself as a reality. In buying the pair of shoes, the narrator is participating in capitalism, replacing a past of deprivation through an act of opulence, claiming an existence without guilt—she is both forgetting and remembering to *become*. For the narrator, these difficult moments are lived, experienced, and contained "[w]hen we're able to float in the air, to separate ourselves from our roots—not only by crossing an ocean and two continents but by distancing ourselves from our condition as stateless refugees, from the empty space of an identity crisis" (137).

The Persistence of Memory

Yet, what the quotidian requires one to "forget" in the act of living and survival the body remembers. Even as she speaks of the necessity of forgetting, *Ru*'s narrator recounts a transcendent moment of recognition in which the sight of an immunization scar—one that many immigrants acquire as a prerequisite for border entry—precipitates a kind of communion, a conjuring, a (re)kindling of memory. She writes:

> I was approached in a gas station by a Vietnamese man who had recognized my vaccination scar. One look at that scar took him back in time and let him see himself as a little boy walking to school along a dirt path with his slate under his arm . . . One look at that scar and our tropical roots, transplanted onto land covered with snow, emerged again. In one second we had seen our own ambivalence, our hybrid state: half this, half that, nothing at all and everything at once. A single mark on the skin and our entire shared history was spread between two gas pumps in a station by a highway exit. (132)

As a shared history, a common experience of homeland and migration is remembered as a new sense of identity is revealed for the narrator and the anonymous man: the diasporic state of "half this, half that, nothing at all and everything at once." The painful history of displacement, interlaced with nostalgic joy, is condensed in the bodily mark of citizenship. The retention of such memories in the form of a scar, no matter how painful, allows both refugees to accommodate the disparities, differences, and ambivalences that

constitute the self. In other words, memory in conjunction with oblivion permits a kind of complex personhood, where, according to Avery Gordon, "people . . . remember and forget, are beset by contradiction, and recognize and misrecognize themselves and others" (4).

Khatharya Um writes, "[w]hen refugees cast their sight onto the past, it is not simply nostalgia but a way of reconnecting with the many parts of their selves, of bridging this present that still shocks them with its foreignness, with a past that is familiar even in its painful reveal, and inspiring *because* of its painful reveal" (847). For the refugees of America's war in Southeast Asia, memory acts as a connective, as a way of being so that existence is simply possible, to survive in a present impregnated with the past and a still uncertain future. Remembering, then, is not an act that indulges in a bygone era or one that longs for that which has been lost, but an active practice that pieces together the broken shards of selfhood. In its "painful reveal," memory facilitates an emergence in the present, a legible subjectivity not necessarily burdened by a pathological splintering.

The objective of this paper was not simply to rehearse the experiences of loss and trauma that mark Vietnamese refugees—a vast body of literature, including artistic/literary and academic, that does this already exists. My insistence that we consider the trauma in tandem with, or as context for, success and its articulation through gratitude is an attempt to express that the specificity of experience *matters*, that it has material implications and should factor into our interpretations and critiques. That said, the abjection of refugee migration experiences and the sometimes "successful" endings do not justify a kind of patriotic gratitude that can become congratulatory, triumphal, and regulatory. Indeed it only comes to bear partial meaning in an experience that is so complex and heterogeneous, wrought with tensions, contradictions, and elusive or slippery significations. What this paper has tried to do was open up a dialogue on how a different way of approaching and thinking through gratitude and success might be valuable to understanding "post"-refugee subjects who have passed through war and "rescue." Individual and collective success is thus not simply to be critiqued or defended, but engaged in a way that gets to the complexities of experience and positionality.

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NOTES

1 See Sau-ling Cynthia Wong's influential book *Reading Asian American Literature: From Necessity to Extravagance* for a prime example of this appropriation.

2 Price argues that Canada "actively encouraged" US intervention in Southeast Asia, and that, "[i]n an era of decolonization, the Canadian government aligned the country with American imperialism" (804).

3 The term model minority first emerged in the late 1960s in reference to Japanese Americans who managed to "recover" from the ravages of internment, and was later used to refer to other Asian groups and the privatized, ethnic/cultural ways they "overcame" racial discrimination. It gained traction during a time of racial conflict, in which Asian "success" was positioned punitively against African Americans and Latinos. See Osajima.

4 Daniel Coleman uses this term to refer to a British derived gentility that defines a normative, white Canadian identity as progressively and superiorly civil.

5 In claiming that Canada did not pursue overseas empire in the same manner as the US, I am not suggesting that it is without a colonial history. On the contrary, scholars in the fields of Indigenous and Postcolonial studies, among others, have demonstrated the colonial relationship the country had and continues to have in its dealing with and treatment of the First Nations.

6 Canada took in 200,000 Indochinese refugees from 1975-1992, behind the US and China, who took in 1.4 million and 260,000 refugees respectively. See Nghia M. Vo.

7 Other notable Canadians who have publicly expressed gratitude to the nation include Phan Kim Phuc, the infamous girl burned by napalm, and Nguyen Ngoc Ngan, an influential figure in the Vietnamese diasporic culture industry.

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David Eso

Incendiary Landscape

It was a sideways cocktail party
on the bald Prairie
and we were many.

Then Kroetsch was there, too
but nothing like a ghost
and it was sunset.

Did you ever see anything lovelier?
one of the women asked the gathering
though mostly him.

A few vistas stepped forward
from our sliding memory
but nothing stuck.

Kroetsch walked a little way off
to mull it over alone, we thought
but I'll be damned if he didn't
improve the view by half
with his silhouette
grown small and black
against the high line of fire.

The sun descended
into clouds and bobbed
before the whole sky broke with fever.

From the shift of his body's weight
from one shoe to the other
Kroetsch seemed to say:
Alright time, you old codger
you old cog
with your star henchman
go on, ravisher, and take us!

The sol dropped a half-step behind the line
not at his word, surely
though the darkness seemed to spread
from the returning shadow
which spoke, presently, taking up a cup:

How any view survives
the drowning tide of human departure
is a little beyond me.

And he was among those
last to leave the party.

Mariam Pirbhai

The Poetics and Politics of Snow

Re-Orienting Discourses of Gendered Violence and Spousal Sponsorship in Anita Rau Badami's *Tell It to the Trees*

Gendered Violence as Orientalist Discourse

South Asian communities often find themselves featured in the Canadian media for horrific cases of gendered violence. The "Shafia family" murder of Rona, Mohammed Shafia's first wife, and his three daughters is one such case; the slaying of Amandeep Kaur Dhillon by her father-in-law is another.[1] These are shocking instances of violence against women, made all the more disturbing for their apparent confirmation of long-held stereotypes of "Oriental" male tyranny and female victimhood. I offer the following case in point: in a *Globe and Mail* article published in the aftermath of the Shafia trials, Sheema Khan perpetuates the false dichotomies at the heart of Orientalist discourse as follows: "Clearly, there are some who are unapologetic, standing firmly behind such a heinous practice [i.e., honour killings]. Of these, a few migrate with such pathological thinking, unwilling to change. . . . Yet, are they fully aware of the differences between their traditional culture and the freedoms afforded by a liberal democratic society?" (n. pag.). Khan's rhetoric—notice descriptors such as "heinous," "pathological," and "traditional culture"—not only depicts honour killing as a phenomenon that is endemic to non-Western cultures, but also as an "imported" cultural practice in an otherwise untainted "liberal democratic society." In this regard, violent acts perpetrated by non-Western males are attributed to innate religio-cultural "defects" explained away by the purportedly radical ideological differences between a (modern) mainstream Euro-Canadian culture and its (traditionalist) Orientalist other.

Drawing on Edward Said's identification of Orientalism's prototypical villain—namely, the Muslim male or "Mohametane"—Joyce Zonana reminds us that the "Oriental despot" was, throughout the feminist writings of

the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the most popularized metonym for misogyny and patriarchal oppression. Moreover, Zonana argues that "feminist orientalism," which refers to the representation of European patriarchy through Oriental imagery, is a specific brand of early European feminist discourse that served "to displace patriarchal oppression onto an 'Oriental,' 'Mohametan' society, enabling British readers to contemplate local problems without questioning their own self-definition as Westerners and Christians" (593). Chandra T. Mohanty identifies the continued over-reliance, in contemporary feminist discourse, on such colonial constructs to account for gender dynamics in non-Western societies: "discursive categor[ies] of analysis used in Western feminist discourse . . . construct 'third world women' as a homogeneous 'powerless' group often located as implicit *victims* of particular cultural and socioeconomic systems" (23).

One might argue that the kind of discursive Orientalism associated with the Shafia case has served a similar function, both in the entrenchment of colonial constructs and as a strategy of displacement, in the Canadian media. In a critical response to the simplistic attribution of the Shafia murders as "honour killings," criminal law professor Payam Akhavan argues,

> far from being a religious belief, honour killings have their roots in tribal societies—predating Islam, Christianity and Hinduism—where loyalty to the tribe and honour were important cultural practices. . . . When we see something which belongs to a specific religion or specific culture, it's somewhat deceptive and misleading because we create a platform for feeling virtuous . . . and masking the reality of massive domestic abuse in our own culture. (qtd. in Montgomery n. pag.)[2]

Journalist Sue Montgomery adds that while the concept of honour killing has been modernized over time in Western society, it is at the root of its juridical practice, including the English common law and European civil law of "defence of provocation," which has justified a man's right to take the life of an adulterous wife or have a murder sentence reduced to manslaughter when "provoked by rage or anger" (n. pag.).

Khan's reduction of gendered violence to an instance of "pathological thinking" thus amounts to what community practitioners refer to as "an essentialist discourse of 'culture-blame'" (Chokshi et al. 153). Indeed, sociologists Ritu Chokshi, Sabra Desai and Andalee Adamali attest to the way gendered violence is "pathologized" in ethno-cultural terms:

> The current mainstream discourse and media portrayal of abused South Asian women are built largely around the depiction of a pathological community, thus placing the blame for domestic violence within the South Asian community

> as if it is an inherent result of South Asian culture . . . This further isolates the community and absolves the larger Canadian society from responsibility for examining the intersecting issues and finding solutions that mitigate them. (148)

The conclusions of Chokshi, Desai, and Adamali are shared by Indian feminist Geetanjali Gangoli who, referring to the Indian context, has noted that "seeking cultural explanations for violence against women in Third World countries when similar research conclusions are not made for violence against women in Western countries can be dangerous and counterproductive" (100).

Suffice it to say that while this paper does not take issue with the grim reality of gendered violence in South Asia or its diaspora, it does take issue with the representation of gendered violence in South Asian communities as an ipso facto confirmation of Orientalist assumptions. As the previous examples illustrate, Orientalism is alive and well in contemporary Canadian public discourse, but it is particularly "dangerous and counterproductive" when conflated with the policies and practices of immigration and citizenship. In her study of immigration laws as they impact migrant women, Margaret Walton-Roberts writes that "the Canadian legal system . . . easily reproduces and extends patriarchy rather than contemplate more complex gender sensitive rulings that would displace Orientalist assumptions. . . ." (268). When read both as Orientalist discourse and State practice, then, the Shafia and Dhillon cases assume another troubling dimension: while the ethno-cultural or socio-religious factors that *should*, in fact, be examined for having played a role in the particular manifestations of violence in the family, these factors do not become meaningful objects of research and inquiry for their own sake. Rather, they become emblematic of a much larger "immigrant problem." What is left out of this equation is any discussion of the Shafias or Dhillons as "Canadian" citizens—that is, unless they are used as examples to justify punitive or reformist immigration policies and measures—much less any discussion of domestic violence, itself, as a "Canadian" reality.

Between Spouse and State: Anita Rau Badami's *Tell It to the Trees*

Anita Rau Badami's most recent novel *Tell It to the Trees* (2011) seems to confirm, rather than meaningfully challenge, representations of gendered violence as a "pathological" ethno-cultural condition. It has many of the ingredients that are by now quite familiar in writing by or about South Asian women in North America,[3] including the arranged marriage plot, intergenerational familial contexts and conflicts, the immigrant condition,

and the division between East and West as it is commonly reflected in a woman's cultural and social plight against a patriarchal family life. However, I contend that Badami complicates these themes in various structural, aesthetic, and thematic ways. Gendered violence is witnessed through an inverted dual setting in which the female protagonist Suman looks back to a life of relative safety and wellbeing in India—that is, before she finds herself in her new-found status as a battered bride in Canada. Suman's wholly unsentimental recollections of the various circumstances surrounding her hasty marriage further complicate readings of subaltern women as mere victims of a "gendered despotism" that stands as the "defining feature of Eastern life" (Zonana 600). Badami's decision to convey Suman's plight through a framework of multiple perspectives (which include those of her stepdaughter Varsha, her son Hemant, and Anu, the Indo-Canadian woman who becomes her ally), not only positions the "victim" within a dysfunctional household gripped by a history of violence, but also brings to light the issue of domestic abuse within a complex matrix of enabling factors: "individual, institutional and structural" (Chokshi et al. 148), or, put another way, between self, society, and State.

The particular emphasis on Suman's internal and external "states" of being in the Canadian context effectively positions the Occident, rather than the Orient, at the geopolitical and cultural epicentre of Suman's wretched plight. This is further reinforced by the particular aesthetics underpinning Badami's richly evocative and haunting text: namely, what I term to be "the poetics and politics of snow." Suman's extreme dread of and helplessness in the snow-bound Canadian winter is a leitmotif in the novel, such that snow imagery serves as a metonym for the migrant woman's acute disenfranchisement in her adoptive environment. Significantly, this focalization technique draws the South Asian household or ethno-cultural community within the wider frame of the Canadian geo-scape. As a politicized statement, then, this aesthetic trope invites us to critically re-direct our gaze *away* from the "Orient" as the singular marker of an abject and dysfunctional alterity, and encourages us to consider issues of gendered violence as a distinctly Canadian reality, even as it is perpetrated or experienced by the purported "Other" among us.

At the centre of *Tell It to the Trees* is the deceptively straightforward tale of a female migrant who has entered Canada by means of what we can surmise to be spousal sponsorship. Spousal sponsorship involves the legal application by a Canadian citizen to bring a husband or wife from another country into Canada as his/her sole dependent.[4] A policy study by the *Status of Women Canada* attests that the "Sponsored individuals are . . . required to fulfil certain

promises that impinge on their Rights" (Côté et al. 28). At its core, spousal sponsorship can be seen as a quintessential transnational act, and it is certainly a common aspect of the immigrant experience for many South Asian women. (Some 80% of women from the Subcontinent who are sponsored as a family member enter the country under these terms [Sharma 156]). However, while spousal sponsorship has been a common feature of South Asian women's migration histories in Canada, it has not been a common feature in discussions, particularly in literature and criticism, of its interaction with other kinds of social realities, such as arranged marriage, cultural integration, and patterns of female dependence and marital entrapment. In examining a range of Indo-Canadian women poets, Kavita Sharma notes that Indo-Canadian women writers themselves evade "the harsh realities" faced by "the majority of Indo-Canadian women immigrants" (162), and fixate instead on the homeland.

Tell It to the Trees does not break this pattern in any obvious sense. Indeed, spousal sponsorship is neither explicitly named nor tied to the central issue of domestic violence, and the narrative makes only the most fleeting statements about the immigration process itself. Nonetheless, we can safely assume that the central female character, Suman, is a sponsored bride, since her emigration to Canada by means of an arranged marriage could only be facilitated under such terms. This is confirmed by the language and symbols that Suman uses to describe her entrapment and isolation, as they are overly determined by her precarious legal status as "Mrs. Vikram Dharma":

> So here I am stuck in a world full of borders and boundaries, unable to travel because I can't show proof of my identity to the people who guard the entryways and exits. It is not enough to say, I am Suman, daughter of a beloved man, wife of a hated one. I still need a piece of paper with my photograph, stamped by the government of a country. Without that I am nobody other than the wife of a man who is my guardian, my custodian, my prison. (121-22)

As a dependent of her male sponsor, the customary anxieties or, indeed, the benefits of transnational citizenship as they are signified in "a world full of borders," "travel," "entryways and exits," are privileged sites of mobility that have as little to do with Suman's reality as the prospect of escape from her State-sanctioned legal "guardian." Suman's self-made portrait as a prisoner within a male-dominated household also confirms Walton-Roberts' assertion that there is a historical tendency to reproduce the division between the public and the private in the constitution of State citizenship. Examining the various "scales"—from the household to the national to the transnational—

through which State policy has an effect on individuals in incongruent and uneven ways, Walton-Roberts writes: "Gender shapes immigration processes. . . and women who migrate through marriage are subject to increased vulnerability because of their tenuous legal status; something immigration policies often unintentionally amplify by granting control of the immigration procedure to the resident spouse" (268).

As critic Mala Pandurang writes of the transnational South Asian woman, "[i]t is crucial to formulate analytical tools to assess states of subjectivity, at *the point of departure*. It is only thus that we can arrive at any conclusion about shifts of identity and dilemmas of liminality that take place after *arrival*" (89). In Suman's narrative, the terms of departure and the realities of arrival are juxtaposed in unexpected ways. We are first invited to look back to Suman's homeland through a predictable range of geographic and cultural contrasts (the heat vs. the cold; the cramped quarters of an Indian city vs. the sparsely populated spaces of rural Canada; the extended communal family vs. the nuclear family, etc.). However, these dichotomies are quickly divested of their cultural and ideological schisms as we imagine India through a complex character rather than through the language of archetype. In this vein, Suman's seemingly rash agreement to marry a man of whom little is known beyond his status as a "distant relative of our front-door neighbour" (Badami 68), is ironically juxtaposed against a long-standing tradition of romantic idealism: "I too imagined myself a Parvati, or a Mumtaz Mahal, a Juliet or a Laila, the object of a hero's undying love. I too wished to be borne away on horseback, in a train, or a plane, . . . by a man who would allow me to expand beyond my boundaries" (43). As these examples reveal, however, Suman's romantic idealism stems as much from Eastern influences (such as the Hindu sacred epics or the enduring story of the Taj Mahal captured in the references to "Parvati" and "Mumtaz Mahal," respectively), as from Western popular culture (epitomized in the Shakespearean allusion or her earlier references to depictions, "inside the 'glossy covers of magazines,'" of "New York, Trafalgar Square, Down Under" [42]). Orientalist constructs are further derailed by the fact that it is Suman's father who cautions his daughter against what he perceives to be an ill-advised union, which he fears will turn his daughter into a glorified caretaker: "But I am not sure I want you to travel thousands of miles with a stranger to look after his child and mother." The father's counsel, "[t]he decision is yours, but don't do anything at the cost of your own happiness" (73), with its emphasis on Suman's independence and free will, assumes a "feminist" stance that subverts

assumptions about the father's absolute authority as the family patriarch.

Suman also comments on the pecuniary nature of her marriage in a country whose "economy . . . runs on marriages. [And where] [w]eddings are big business" (41), but she seems equally aware that this system has only been reproduced in Canada, where she is similarly "nobody other than the wife of a man who is my guardian (122)." In fact, the "transcontinental" dimension of Suman's arranged marriage would necessarily be facilitated by the cooperation of two sovereign States. On the Canadian side, the financial nature of spousal sponsorship is all too evident in juridical policy and the legislative vocabulary that accompanies it. Notably, the sponsoring member must sign a contract known as an "undertaking" which absolves the Canadian government of financial responsibility for the sponsored individual (Indo-Canadian Women's Association 86).[5] This, as Sharma notes, confirms that the sponsored spouse's "dependence has been sanctioned and even enforced by law" (156). Suman's seemingly insurmountable predicament is ironically contrasted to the speed and ease with which Vikram, her marriage suitor, is able to facilitate the sponsorship: i.e., a total of ten months, from the time of his first wife's death to the arrival of his second wife in Canada.

In fact, when Vikram arrives in India in search of a new bride, he most likely does so through his status as a PIO—a Person of Indian Origin (a foreign national whose parents were born in post-Partition India). While Badami does not overtly classify him as such, her narrative draws attention to all the signs of Vikram's outsidership in his ancestral land. He is shown to arrive in India "for the first time in his life," donning "khaki trousers and T-shirt," and with what Suman dubs "that gloss of Abroad on him" (68). The Punjab State Women's Commission notes that "[i]n India, the foreign-returned man has always had a certain allure, as if he were more polished, more worldly. He also promises in dollars not in rupees" (qtd. in Walton-Roberts 277). Significantly, Suman's community is awed by what they fancifully (and erroneously) speculate to be the "Foreign Boy's" (Badami 69) brilliant professional credentials and illustrious genealogy. As a PIO, Vikram's "foreignness" *in India* as a "Westernized" man calls into question Orientalist constructions of "non-Western" males in culturally essentialist and antithetical terms. Vikram himself is shown to be as at odds with Indian custom as he is able to exploit it for his own self-interest. On the one hand, Suman remarks that he had the peculiar habit of looking his elders "straight in the eye," which is construed as a "lack of respect" (68, 69); he also forgoes custom by visiting Suman's home without

his family's permission, which makes "Ganesh Maamu and his fifteen family members [come] rushing in to retrieve him, somewhat put out that we had claimed him first" (71). As this episode illustrates, the community continually excuses Vikram's cultural mis-steps and social impropriety on the basis that he is a cultural outsider, reinforcing the point that it is in his prefigurement as a "foreign-returned" (68) suitor that Vikram is able to expedite and capitalize on his quest for a new bride.

The Poetics and Politics of Snow

Within the aforementioned contexts is embedded what I term as the "poetics and politics of snow." Snow is a leitmotif insofar as the reader is continually asked to pay attention to this ubiquitous symbol, from the prologue's opening line—"Sunday morning. Snow floats down like glitter dust from a flat winter sky" (1)—to the frightening events that take place in the small winter-bound British Columbian township of Merritt's Point. Here, something must also be said about the stunning jacket cover of the first edition: a photographic image of a lone sari-clad woman walking along a barren snow-covered road, the vivid colours (green, gold, saffron) of her sari "an incongruous sight" (97) in the stark white landscape. From cover to cover, then, the image of snow engulfs both reader and characters in a circular narrative circumscribed by an incontrovertibly "Canadian" environment. Badami's snow-bound landscape recalls Margaret Atwood's claim that "[t]here is a sense in Canadian literature that the true and only season here is winter" (*Survival* 49). One might say that Badami's fatalistic representation of a place where "your breath hangs like a ghost before your face" (64) positions her latest work firmly within a Canadian literary tradition in which "[d]eath by the hazards of nature is a familiar event" (Simpson-Housley and Norcliffe 223). However, the Canadian winter also assumes a specific resonance for immigrant writers from southern climes, for whom metaphors of ice and snow emblematize the struggle for adaptation and survival as culturally and geographically displaced beings.[6]

Badami herself confesses to the profound impact that her "contentious relationship with winter" would come to have on *Tell It to the Trees*: "the creepiest character in this book is Winter. . . . It's a translation of my own dislike of this very Canadian season. There, that's my guilty little secret. I live in Canada, profess to be partly Canadian but cannot pretend to like winter" ("Afterword" n. pag.). Badami's statement attests to the way the northern winter is a pervasive metaphor of culture shock and alienation for

many immigrant writers. For poet Rienzi Crusz, the Canadian winter is the figurative "dark antonym" ("Dark Antonyms" 20) to his native tropical Sri Lanka, which further alludes to the émigré's divided self or "geography," for whom a "hibiscus heart / freezes to its roots, / . . . final as winter's argument" ("Geography of Voice" 24). The Canadian winter as a metonym for the émigré's divided geographies reaches its metaphysical apotheosis in Lakshmi Gill's poem "Out of Canada" where, even in the anticipation of death, the landscape proves inhospitable: "It assaults me at every turn: / my eyes are offended / by what they see—the bright / sunlight on the snow / icy shafts that pierce straight / to my head . . . / I cannot die here in this country / where would I be buried" (49).

Not only has snow (and the Canadian winter) served as an apt metaphor for the radical transformations and challenges of immigrant subjecthood, but it has also assumed more political overtones where the immigrant condition is compounded by race, racism and the legacies of European imperialism. Poet and scholar Himani Bannerji has been particularly adept in "politicizing," if you will, the metaphor of snow and winter. This is epitomized in her poem "Paki Go Home," where the racial epithet of "Paki" commonly lanced at South Asian immigrants eerily emerges from "winter sleeping in the womb of the afternoon" and, like "a grenade explodes" in "words [that] run down / like frothy white spit" (5). As María Laura Arce Álvarez suggests, the Canadian winter in Bannerji's poems acts as a metonym for "that cruel, violent and racist part of postcolonial Canada" (17). Bannerji's poem also attests to the way the host society is a potentially terrifying place of exile for women of colour for whom immigrant struggle is compounded by the "multiple" or "converging patriarchies of the community [of] male elite and the Canadian state" as Bannerji states in her seminal study *The Dark Side of the Nation* (169).

In *Tell It to the Trees* snow similarly assumes a pernicious quality that hints at the extreme forms of outsidership—even fatal outsidership—experienced by migrant women who are doubly victimized in situations of domestic violence: "first by the violence perpetrated against them, and then by Canadian society, which often . . . fails to provide the appropriate support and interventions that would empower these women" (Chokshi et al. 151). Suman's "winter paranoia" thus at once reflects the common condition of a newly arrived immigrant struggling to acclimatize herself to a decidedly alien environment; it also captures the far less examined condition of the sponsored bride rendered invisible in her new-found s/State of

remote outsidership. Where snow functions as a metaphor of isolation and entrapment, then, it does so in the harshest of terms: like a person trapped in a blizzard, Suman's predicament is a potentially fatal one. Indeed, the plot unfolds mysteriously around the opening image of a woman found frozen to death outside the Dharma household. It is at the interface of immigrant subjectivity, race, gender, and patriarchy that the poetics of snow is politicized. Such an interface creates the basis of a more active denunciation of the systemic forms of inequality that govern the lives of immigrants, and immigrant women in particular.

However, in *Tell It to the Trees* the northern winter is also imbued with a complex palette of imagery and symbol, such that nature's "monstrous" aspect[7] points as much to the internal "geograph[ies] of the mind" (Atwood 18) as to the external landscapes of a seemingly inhospitable climate. Badami unsettles the negatively encoded "immigrant" poetics of snow in her provision of multiple perspectives, which bring to view a more diverse range of immigrant experiences than Suman's story of acute disenfranchisement will allow. Thus, the snow is a polysemic signifier that engenders a figurative continuum along which we are witness to different "states" of "at-homeness" in the "wintry world." As Suman confesses, her son Hem, who is named "for winter, the season in which he was born . . . sees beauty where I see only misery, he is at home in this wintry world whereas I forever remain a stranger to it" (Badami, *Tell It* 91). Though Suman is terrorized by the elements within and without, her son Hemant and stepdaughter Varsha look to nature as a place of refuge and recovery outside the father's abuse. Indeed, the title evokes the children's habit of telling their "secrets" to the trees since betrayal of the family secret to outsiders will almost certainly incite their father's violent reprisal. For Varsha, then, snow "floats down like flowers from a low grey sky" (75), whereas for Suman it is a harbinger of the "terrible" months of the "cruel" isolation to come (174).

That Suman, as a sponsored bride, inhabits the most extreme and thus potentially fatal form of outsidership is brought home in the foil character of Anu, an Indo-Canadian woman who takes up temporary residence at the Dharma property in a romantic bid to escape the city's distractions. Anu only starts to see winter as a menacing force over the course of her developing friendship with Suman. Thus, while she faces her first rural winter with casual indifference ("Winter has arrived without much notice" [174]), and is amused by Suman's antipathy for the cold, her attitude changes once she is privy to the harsh realities of Suman's predicament. In a comment

that foreshadows her own tragic demise as a victim of hypothermia, a fate precipitated by the savage elements that govern the Dharma household, Anu declares, "[t]he silence which seemed so idyllic in summer is now a nightmare. And the frigging cold—I don't remember cold being *this* cold!" (216).

In contrast, for Suman the cruel isolation of winter is an all-consuming reality matched only by the indifference of her social environment. Indeed, the township appears as barren and bereft as the winter landscape, as its members seem wholly desensitized to her and her children's victimization.[8] Though Suman is denied contact with the outside world by a controlling husband, Badami subtly draws our attention to the fact that any such form of isolation is a condition created by networks of social complicity. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine that in a small, close-knit township such as Merritt's Point, everybody does not already know everybody else's business. While the elderly neighbour Mrs. Cooper is said to have spent a lot of time in the Dharma household when it was occupied by Vikram's first wife (notably also a victim of Vikram's violence), we are told by Vikram's daughter that Mrs. Cooper only "wanted company and couldn't be bothered about what Mom did" (22). Nor do those residents whose positions confer upon them some level of social responsibility as potential advocates for Suman and her children fare any better. When the children clamber onto the school bus after being beaten mercilessly by their father, the bus driver Mr. Wilcox naively accepts the pat explanation that Varsha "fell down the stairs" and Hemant's contradictory testimony that she "bumped into a wall" (188). This leads the children to contemplate: "Will Mr. Wilcox notice? Will he guess? Does he know? And has he too taken a vow of silence like the rest of our town? . . . All the kids at school know, the teachers too. The whole world knows, but nobody says a thing" (188-89). The children's statement underscores the extent to which Badami configures the father's abuse as enabled by the collective inaction and indifference of the community at large.

The township's inaction stands in ironic contrast to the South Asian women, Akka (Suman's mother-in-law) and Anu, who attempt to come to Suman's aid.[9] Akka's and Anu's refusal, within the scope of their respective circumstances, to accept the violence of patriarchal power provides an agential counterpoint to the figurative paralysis of both Suman and the township. Representing an older and younger generation raised in India and Canada respectively, these characters are, to varying degrees, models of female resistance who provide "a countersentence" (Spivak 93) to the Orientalist narrative that over-determines their roles as fragile, hapless

victims of Oriental despots. The contrasting strength of these South Asian women characters with the general apathy of the greater population also challenges the salvationist doctrine underpinning European imperialism, whose duplicity Gayatri Spivak has famously captured in the phrase, "White men saving brown women from brown men" (93).[10] Anu not only offers friendship at the cost of her own safety and, as we learn, her life, but also offers Suman the physical, financial, and legal means of escape. Conversely, though we encounter Akka in a progressively enfeebled physical state, her story of emancipation from an abusive husband serves as the historical antecedent for gendered resistance in the Dharma household. In this instance, the foreign environment facilitates Akka's release from continued assault, but only in the context of her own resourcefulness: she sees in a blizzard the opportunity to lock her husband out of the house, where he dies of hypothermia. In another narrative turn, Akka's method is tragically misappropriated by her granddaughter Varsha against Anu, who misguidedly deems Suman's friendship with Anu to be an act of betrayal. Anu's death at the hands of a disturbed young girl born and raised, like her father, in Merritt's Point, sets the stage for cycles of violence that cannot be neatly pathologized in strictly "ethno-cultural" terms. Indeed, as Akka's story illustrates, Vikram is, himself, an abused child, such that two generations of Dharma children—one male, the other female—are shown to reproduce patterns of violence, thus complicating further the specifically gendered thrust of Orientalist power.

The poetics *and* politics of snow are both fully crystallized in the dual symbolism of Suman's missing passport and the harsh winter landscape. Throughout the narrative, Suman is plagued by the missing passport; however, when we learn that Varsha hides the passport to prevent her stepmother's escape, Vikram is once again displaced as the source of domination and power. Varsha's singular act affirms the view of Suman's precarious legal identity as a source of disempowerment that is on par with that of her husband's terrorizing presence. Indeed, both the snow and the missing passport pose barriers to Suman on physical and psychological levels, from the literal entrapment of road blockages and unsafe passages to the mental roadblocks that prevent Suman from breaking free from a condition of victimhood. Both the missing passport and the seemingly indomitable landscape lead Suman to believe that she cannot legally or physically navigate her way out of her predicament as her husband's dependent.[11] Much like her winter paranoia, then, Suman is effectively immobilized as her husband's dependent; that is,

she remains proverbially frozen within a heightened state of vulnerability without the basic tools of self-representation and self-identity. For Suman, snow is "something you [can] die in or hate" (66), to use Atwood's phrase, so long as her house, and the State that houses her, is not her own.[12]

De-Orientalizing and Re-Orienting the Terms of Engagement

In *Tell It to the Trees*, the transcontinental arranged marriage is shown to compound, if not produce, conditions for domestic abuse. Sponsored spouses are often openly threatened with the idea that they can be sent "back home" or have any claim to statehood revoked (Indo-Canadian Women's Association 96). And the threat can be real. As the *Status of Women's Canada* policy study reveals, "the status of an immigrant woman in Canada depends entirely on the sponsor since he may withdraw his sponsorship undertaking at any time prior to the granting of her permanent residence visa" (Côté et al 30). While Suman's fear is not in being sent "back home" but rather in being trapped in a "place where nobody cares what happens" (Badami 254), the symbol of the missing passport serves as a sobering reminder that whether or not the sponsored spouse has access to government support in situations of violence, her condition as a stateless subject, be it real or imagined, becomes the most effective weapon at her abusers' disposal.

Significantly, Suman remains trapped within her domestic and legal confines by the novel's denouement, such that she has to remind herself of "the thin little word—I" that she left behind "on the roof of an old house in Agra" (143-44). The fact that Suman's "I"—her claim to selfhood—has been lost in a snow-ridden landscape, forces us to witness Canada differently and to hold it accountable, to some extent, for her tragic situation. To this end, the novel destabilizes Canada or "the West's" currency as the romanticized site of South Asian female emancipation from Orientalist male despotism. This, as I have suggested, is made particularly evident in the fact that Vikram (a second-generation Canadian)—together with the legal, socio cultural, and other tools for hetero-patriarchal domination with which he *terrorizes* Suman—is an extension of Canadian policy and practice as much as he is an extension of a version of India he hopes to restore and reinvent through his newly imported bride.

Transnational feminists such as Chandra T. Mohanty have helpfully advocated for a critical feminist materialism—that is, the call to apprehend women's lives within the historical, material, sociocultural, and other factors of which they are a part.[13] However, such contextual analysis becomes

considerably complicated in relationship to immigrant women's lives in the diaspora. If "context" is the intersection between the host and home society, what aspect of the host society do we address: the world inside or outside the home? What aspect of citizenship do we assess: a woman's relationship—often a dependent one—to spouse or to State? In other words, for diasporic women straddling multiple sites and realities, "context" consists not only of home and host world but also of the various "geograph[ies] of gender" (Handa 116) that inform a woman's subject position. Keeping this in mind, it seems reasonable to conclude that transnational or other feminist engagements with gendered violence must similarly examine the various "scales" of citizenship, to use Walton-Roberts' term, that inform the female diasporic subject's multiple realities, particularly as they generate conditions for exploitation and domestic abuse.

In adopting a new paradigm—a de-Orientalized one, if you will—for reading gendered violence within South Asian communities, I hope to foreground the complex ways in which the domestic and national, spouse and State, are deeply imbricated categories. Gendered violence within the immigrant community is reflective of such complexities, and must be apprehend as such. Such *de-* and *re-*orientation might encourage us to ask, as I believe Badami's novel implicitly does, what other option someone like Suman (or her equally vulnerable children) has but to "tell her secret to the trees"—if, that is, her situation is simply typecast as "an immigrant problem" or an abhorrent foreign practice, rather than treated as a social reality that has something to do with our own proverbial backyards? Surely this is no different than inviting someone into our homes only to cast them out in the cold. Or perhaps it is another act of cultural displacement, to use Zonana's analogy, which defers the harder project of our self-definition as Canadians.

NOTES

1 See CBC News "Muslim Community Grapples with Shafia Verdict." See also Stephanie Findlay's "Were the Shafia Murders 'Honour Killings' or Domestic Violence?" The Shafia murders took place in Kingston on 30 June, 2009. The three daughters and first wife of Montreal resident Mohammed Shafia (an affluent Afghani businessman) were drowned in their car in the Rideau Canal. In January 2012, Shafia, his second wife Tooba Yahya, and his son Hamed were each charged with four counts of murder in the first degree. Family violence has also plagued the Punjabi Sikh community. See Navjeevan Gopal, "Father-in-law of Punjabi Girl Killed in Canada Arrested." This case involved the murder of Amandeep Kaur Dhillon by her father-in-law Kamikar Kaur Dhillon in Mississauga on the morning of 1 January, 2009. The murder was also termed an "honour killing." As journalist Sue Montgomery points out, there are as many such grizzly cases of violence

against women and family murders in "white" Canadian households, but they are not branded as honour killings (n. pag.).

2 Sue Montgomery's article "Attacks on Women Happen All Too Often in Canada" has since been taken down from Canada.com.

3 We can find such themes reproduced in works by South Asian women writers, including Bharati Mukherjee, Chitra Divakurani, Meena Alexander, and Nirmala Warriar.

4 See the legal terms and conditions for spousal sponsorship as defined by Citizenship and Immigration Canada: <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/immigrate/sponsor/spouse-apply-who.asp> (accessed 3 Aug. 2012). Dependency on the sponsor was first legislated as a ten-year period.

5 See Côté et al. 31. Though a sponsored person suffering domestic abuse can apply for social assistance benefits, such information is rarely made accessible to the sponsored individual by the sponsor, the Indian agency handling the transaction, or the Canadian government who only requires the sponsoring individual to sign and thus be privy to such a document.

6 Writers of fiction have also drawn on this leitmotif, including Cyril Dabydeen, Rabrindanath Maharaj, M. G. Vassanji, and Dionne Brand, to name a few.

7 Badami also refers to winter as the "monster within the covers" of her "snow-ridden novel" ("Afterword"), which is reminiscent of Atwood's discussion of "Nature the Monster," where "nature is a monster, perhaps, only if you come to it with unreal expectations or fight its conditions rather than accepting them and learning to live with them" (66).

8 Badami's depiction of the British Columbian township's inaction is not a question of poetic license. Canada did not legislate specifically against domestic violence or spousal abuse until 2002, almost two decades after India, even though Statistics Canada reveals that spousal violence itself makes up the "single largest category of convictions involving violent offences in non-specialized adult courts in Canada" whereby "[o]ver 90% of offenders were male."

9 Indeed, in Canada South Asian women generally act as their own advocates. It took South Asian women's advocacy groups such as the British Columbia-based Sahara to lobby the Canadian government to reduce the duration of dependency from a ten year to a three year period. (See Noorfarah Merali, "Understandings of Spousal Sponsorship in South Asian International Arranged Marriages.")

10 Spivak's phrase arises in the context of her discussion of female voicelessness, in the matter of the Hindu practice of *sati*, or widow burning, which became a site of British India's legislative "civilizing mission" both in opposition to and, as Spivak illustrates, in collusion with Brahmanical power, each of which effaces the "women's voice-consciousness" (93).

11 As Noorfarah Merali notes, non-English-speaking women's interview disclosures suggest that there were four primary barriers to accessing community resources for help in their difficult life situations: (a) their obvious language barriers; (b) lack of knowledge of relevant community services or programs; (c) extensive sponsor control that minimized their contact with people outside of their husbands' families and that led to intense supervision; and (d) fear of deportation if one was to make an abuse report or seek help (4).

12 Here I am drawing on Margaret Atwood's poetic concluding statement in the "Appendix on Snow" section of "Nature the Monster": "Snow isn't necessarily something you die in or hate. You can also make houses in it" (*Survival* 66).

13 See Chandra T. Mohanty's *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Durham: Duke UP, 2003).

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Armand Garnet Ruffo

Angry Thunderbird, 1975

A major subject of Norval Morrisseau's work, the thunderbird held great significance for him as it does for the Anishinaabe in general. In his book Legends of My People *(1965) he devotes a chapter to what he calls "Thunderbird Beliefs." He writes, "The Ojibways of the Lake Nipigon area believed in two kinds of thunderbirds… The latter had a very bad temper, made the loudest noise…."*

Of the old stories. The belief in wings of thunder
and eyes of lightning.

You wrapped comfortably in the style of the moment.
Secure in the civilization of your apartment.

This flat image of what seems a bird with a small sack
of something. Electric eyes. Divided circles.

This is your mind on the mid-day road when the sky turns
black and you are suddenly no longer secure or certain.

Because for all your education you still tuck fear
under your pillow and rest your head on it every night.

And for a moment its scream lifts you high above your knowing
into the claws of something huge, immense.

Rachel Bower

"Yes, but . . . have you read his *letters*?"
Epistolary Correspondence with the Past in Michael Ondaatje's *In the Skin of a Lion*

> To the letter-writer every event is recent, and is described while immediately under the eye, without a corresponding degree of reference to its relative importance to what has past and what is to come. All is, so to speak, painted in the foreground, and nothing in the distance.
> —Walter Scott, "Samuel Richardson"

In 1824, Walter Scott suggested that the epistolary form hindered the creation of historical narratives. Charging the form with "prolixity," an inescapable stress on the "moment," and a lack of retrospective discrimination in reporting on "important" events, Scott departed from literary letters in his own writing and suggested that there was a lack of fit between the letter narrative and the historical narrative (*Redgauntlet* 141; "Samuel" 41-42). By contrast, in the present day it has become a critical commonplace to claim that Michael Ondaatje's 1987 novel, *In the Skin of a Lion*, rethinks official "History." However, few critics scrutinize the formal or stylistic techniques through which the novel creates its historical narrative. On closer inspection, it appears that the novel self-consciously uses letters to create a narrative that asks the reader how they know, and who they hear. It is my contention that Ondaatje, an author not usually associated with the epistolary form, harnesses the epistolary flaws described by Scott in pursuit of an adequate literary material through which to narrate the human histories of Toronto for the late-twentieth-century reader. The novel calls upon the reader as epistolary recipient to rethink her present through a correspondence with Canada's past. A close analysis of the epistolary craft

allows us to return to the importance of dialogue and communication in Ondaatje's novel: aspects which were admired by early book reviewers but were quickly submerged by a sea of literary criticism eager to embrace the novel as a quintessentially "postmodern" text. These literary critics often emphasized fragmentation, indeterminacy, estrangement, and ambiguity. In contrast, my reading directs our attention away from the impossibility of locating historical truth towards the possibility of corresponding or *connecting* with the past and witnessing truths for the *future*. I believe that this possibility is sedimented within the novel's use of the letter form.

This article explores the interpretative possibilities offered by the epistolary lens, building on Janet Gurkin Altman's assertion that "the basic formal and functional characteristics of the letter, far from being merely ornamental, significantly influence the way meaning is consciously and unconsciously constructed by writers and readers of epistolary works" (4). My reading relies upon a strong intersection of mode and theme. The epistolary form lends itself to an interrogation of questions of history and temporality. On the broadest level, every letter is written to the future, every epistolary narration is retrospective, and every reading of a letter is a seeking of the past. Despite this mediation, the letter always demands connection in order to create meaning, and therefore challenges the separation of past from present. The other epistolary characteristics important to Ondaatje's novel are: the centrality of the reader *within* the epistolary text as well as without; the centrality of diegesis where meaning is created through acts of writing, sending, and receiving letters as well as through narrated content; the symbolic value of the letter, where the continuation and cessation of correspondence signifies within the plot; the emphasis on detail and "writing to the moment"; the first person voice, where the epistolary "I" coincides with a stress on the writing self and on witnessing and individual agency; and finally, and most importantly, the way the future orientation of the letter is structured by a specifically defined addressee who is called upon to respond, placing the "I-you" relationship at the heart of epistolary exchange. This "other"—the addressee, recipient and reader—is central to the epistolary structure, and Altman rightly asserts that it is the addressee "whose presence alone distinguishes the letter from other first-person forms" (87).

Upon publication, *In the Skin of a Lion* attracted rave reviews and won a string of prestigious literary prizes, including the City of Toronto Book Award and the first Trillium Award.[1] Through the lens of Patrick Lewis, a self-proclaimed "searcher," the narrative navigates Toronto in pursuit of

the threads of truth that lie beneath the grand veneer of modern bridges and monuments. The figure of the searcher recurs in other late-twentieth-century novels that also rely heavily on letters as historical sources, including Amitav Ghosh's *In An Antique Land* (1992), Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map of Love* (1999) and M. G. Vassanji's *The Book of Secrets* (1993).[2] By juxtaposing a contemporaneous investigator with letters from the past, these novels layer correspondences and position the reader of the novel as an epistolary addressee. As Ghosh's narrator suggests, this means that the reader must seek traces from moments when the only people we can imagine as fully human are those people "who had the power to inscribe themselves physically upon time" (16-17). *In the Skin of a Lion* highlights the failure of the written document to easily include those without this power: the illiterate, the dispossessed, labourers and immigrants, examining the inadequacy of its own literary material and project of "searching" whilst categorically insisting that we do not abandon this project. Much of Ondaatje's other prose fiction, particularly *Running in the Family* (1982), which he wrote while he was researching and writing *In the Skin of a Lion*, also formally and thematically engages with epistolarity, narration, and family history, and Ondaatje recently returned to reflect on the form in *The Cat's Table* (2011).[3]

Nevertheless, it may seem unusual to approach a novel that lacks an epistolary frame (and even an extended series of represented letters) through the epistolary lens. Despite the initial lack of obvious epistolary markers, *In the Skin of a Lion* not only explores how the unique structure of letters can open up historiographic possibilities, but is itself structured by the grammar of the letter, reflecting Ondaatje's own process of excavation, writing and address in its overall structure. At the time of the novel's publication Ondaatje stated that the lack of information about "the people who were building the bridge" was "a total eye-opener," and he turned to the "tapes and transcripts" of the Multicultural History Society of Ontario to locate individual histories of Ontario that were not available "in history books" (Ondaatje, "Interview" n. pag.). The literary material of *In the Skin of a Lion* reflects an attempt to convey these experiences to the reader, and we are called upon as recipients of this material, in the same way that Patrick is called upon as he pursues his quest for lived history. The novel also offers a meditation on the adequacy of literary material for the presentation of oral histories, an issue which is particularly pertinent to the constitutively written epistolary form.

Patrick's initial role as a "searcher" for the missing millionaire, Ambrose Small, develops into a more significant pursuit of the threads of untold

national stories when Hana, Cato's daughter, removes the "grade-school notebook" from her suitcase and shows him her father's letters: "*Dear Alice,* scrawled, the handwriting large and hurried but the information detailed as if Cato were trying to hold everything he saw, at the lumber camp near Onion Lake, during his final days" (160). This encounter sits at the heart of this article and I return to it shortly. Elsewhere, the sterility of the Riverdale Library that contains "everything but information on those who actually built the bridge" (151) is contrasted with the vitality of the "collection of letters" ignored by everyone but Patrick which leads him to Clara in his search for the missing millionaire (62) and with the letters Patrick composes to Clara in his head late at night (87-89). Later, Patrick's lover, Alice, "likes" Joseph Conrad (140) but it is his letters that *speak* to her: "'Yes, but,' she says rising as the child cries, 'have you read his *letters*?'" (140). She feverishly reads out an extract she has copied from the letters, bringing Conrad's first person voice directly into the room despite its material remove from the original rhetorical letter, written to William Blackwood, a Scottish publisher, rather than "to a newspaper" as the narrator suggests (141).[4] In Ondaatje's version, the letter directly addresses Alice and Patrick and conveys Conrad's belief that it remains possible for "infinitely varied" men to unite and struggle "for an idea" (141). In its entirety, the original letter appeals for a principled stance without "compromise" and praises Blackwood's magazine "Maga" because "In this time of fluid principles the soul of 'Maga' changeth not" (14). This admiration for that which endures—for the soul that "changeth not"—is put into dialogue with Patrick's response to Alice: "The trouble with ideology, Alice, is that it hates the private. You must make it human" (141). This brings us to one of the central problematics of the novel. *In the Skin of a Lion* asks us to consider how far it is possible to honor the infinite variation and specificity of individual experience while remaining committed to an ideal of human commonality, or solidarity. The first person letter narrative is leaned upon to convey the experience of the human individual whilst this experience inevitably exceeds the first person narrative. The novel therefore grapples with two difficult, and inextricably linked problems at the same time. On one hand, the narrative asks how far it is possible for people to unite in their diversity to take action, and how far individuals can correspond across boundaries of class, history, and culture towards redeeming the present, or even transforming the future. On the other hand, the novel struggles to forge an adequate literary material for this task. The narrative therefore attempts to performatively engage us in the collaborative dialogue that is necessary

to envisage a different future, taking us *through* the question of how far it is possible to rework existing literary conventions in the pursuit of a genuinely reciprocal encounter between writer and reader.

Interestingly, early reviewers were quick to notice the importance of human connection and dialogue in the novel. *In the Skin of a Lion* was published at the heart of what Robert Stacey recently called the "zeitgeist" that swept up journals and publishing houses and "saw 'postmodernism' and 'the postmodern' become part of the common vernacular" ("Introduction" xii). Like many of Ondaatje's longer works, the novel soon became a staple in the body of texts representing Canadian postmodernism, and critics often view Ondaatje's "Canadianness" and "postmodernism" as going hand in hand.[5] Although the capacious term "postmodern" is often loosely deployed to refer to a vast range of narrative techniques and thematic preoccupations, it is possible to outline tendencies of this criticism where, as Herb Wyile observes, "various critics have followed the lead of [Linda] Hutcheon in articulating how Canadian writers have deployed frame narratives, multiple narrators, unstable points of view, narrative self-reference, parody, the recontextualization of documents, and various other strategies associated with postmodernism to explore and subvert both traditional history and traditional historical fiction" (184). While these readings often purport to examine the novel's treatment of "history," most concentrate on fragmentation and the resultant destabilization of "history" and "discourse." To take a single example, Douglas Barbour writes that in the "palimpsest" of the novel "History as fiction and fiction as history keep writing over each other . . . Nothing is certain, especially textuality" (180).

Early reviewers, however, were less hasty to ascribe the novel's aesthetic to postmodernism, and instead observed how the novel's "cinematic" or "filmic" style and use of the fragment and mosaic created a curiously recognizable narrative order. For example, Michael Hulse described "a novel about communication" where Ondaatje "employs juxtaposition and cinematic intercutting to create *continuity* of depth out of an *apparent discontinuity* of surface" (par. 3, par. 1, my emphasis). In other words, the superficial fragmentation and chaos of the narrative is not incompatible with a deeper structure of order and continuity. Jonathan Baumbach echoes this sentiment in his praise of Ondaatje's ability to bring "together the *diverse* elements of his story into a moving and *coherent* whole" (par. 2, my emphasis), and even the more sceptical Michiko Kakutani describes how the novel "eventually yields faint intimations of order" (par. 1). Even Aritha van Herk, who describes an evasive, destabilizing narrative, concludes that "what is most

moving is the human connectedness of this book" (136). Perhaps Ken Adachi's warm review in the *Toronto Star* illustrates this most clearly. Adachi argues that Ondaatje's primary allegiance is "to history, to the immigrant past experienced as though it were the present; and hence he needs to make his characters lifelike and engaging. And so they are. The novel, in fact, is centred on Patrick's search for human connection and truth" (par. 8). Adachi, writing in Toronto at the time of the novel's publication, clearly describes a novel that draws on techniques of literary realism to forge connections and *make the past present* for a future reader. This differs quite significantly from the more popular approach to the novel, typified by Lynette Hunter's comment that "Ondaatje has long been recognized as a writer who points out the inadequacies of conventional realism with a thoroughgoing postmodernist investigation of language and form" (6).

Thus, while early reviewers responded to the language, tone and overall impression of *In the Skin of a Lion*, subsequent critics have tended to concentrate on the extent to which the novel's so-called postmodern aesthetic betrays or embodies its political commitment. John A. Thieme, for example, critiques Ondaatje's postmodernism for being apolitical.[6] Stacey's astute essay on the novel as "covert pastoral" has convincingly shown how the debate about whether the novel exploits the working class subjects it seeks to represent in fact relies on a misguided assumption that the novel intends to succeed as a "proletarian" novel ("Political" 441). Critics who debate the political efficacy of the novel's "postmodern" aesthetic rely upon a similarly problematic set of assumptions. By beginning with the theoretical frame, rather than closely examining the literary material itself, critics have frequently reduced the text to an arena in which to evaluate the postmodern rethinking of history. The focus on Ondaatje's use of postmodern devices to destabilize and contest official "History" neglects his simultaneous concern with recording the past in order to "keep the facts straight, the legends uncovered" (*Running* 85-86), and to recognize that "there is order here": "very faint," but also "very human" (*Skin* 152).

Although postmodernist strategies are undoubtedly important to an understanding of Ondaatje's work, the privileging and amplification of these coincides with a hermetic emphasis on indeterminacy, multiplicity, provisionality, liminality, decentering, constructedness, the fluidity of generic boundaries, and the deferral of meaning and facts. In other words, the thematic preoccupations created by a postmodernist lens distract from the simultaneous stress in the novel on *connection*: on the dialogue

between a past and future recipient, and on the urgency of witnessing truths for a future recipient.

A preliminary look at Cato's letters shows how the epistolary lens emphasizes witnessing, connection, and detail. His letters to Alice witness the brutal lived experience of the migrant workers who fuel industrial expansion: "*They lose two days a month because of wet weather. Travelling eats up $10 a season; mitts $6; shoes and stockings $25; working clothes $35*" (162). The minute detail of this inventory will be familiar to readers of epistolary novels, and seems to darkly echo one of the early letters in Samuel Richardson's well-known *Pamela* (1740): "my Master gave me more fine Things . . . several Ribbands and Topknots of all Colours, and Four Pair of fine white Cotton Stockens, and Three Pair of fine Silk ones" (*Pamela* 19). In Ondaatje's account however, the technique that Richardson famously described as "writing, to the moment" becomes a means of inscribing the routine, everyday violence that the capitalist economy imposes on the lives of the workers.[7] Cato's letter reads like a shopping list, punched through with semi-colons and dollar signs, so that the price and its repetition govern the grammar.

The density of detail in this letter is typical of the novel and this was also observed by early reviewers, including Hulse (par. 1) and Adachi, who describes a novel that is "addicted" to minutiae where facts, figures, and details "boggle" the mind (par. 6). This emphasis on detail takes us back to Scott's critique of the epistolary form. Scott argued that the epistolary stress on detail with its "various prolixities and redundancies" must "hang as a dead weight on the progress of the narrative" (*Redgauntlet* 141) and also complained that, "[a] game of whist, if the subject of a letter, must be detailed as much at length as a debate in the House of Commons, upon a subject of great national interest" ("Samuel" 41-42). Scott argues that epistolary narratives lack discrimination in distinguishing between important and unimportant events, and this obviously works against an attempt to objectively narrate historical events of significance. However, Scott also goes on to describe how this faculty of the letter also facilitates the creation of full, human characters, where letters afford "the opportunity of placing the characters, each in their own peculiar light, and contrasting their thoughts, plans and sentiments," suggesting that this means that "the inferior persons are sketched with great truth" ("Samuel" 42, 24). It seems then, that Scott perceives a tension between the ability to narrate past events with pace, discrimination and objectivity, and the richness of detail in epistolary narratives. Ondaatje's use of letters, however, collapses this

tension, so that the *only* way we can build up an accurate historical portrait is through the detailed, lingering representation of these so-called "inferior persons." There is a formal correspondence here between Patrick's seeking of the past and Walter Benjamin's oft-cited grasping of the constellation of history. Consider the similarity between Scott's comment about the game of whist and Benjamin's proposal that a "chronicler who recites events without distinguishing between major and minor ones acts in accordance with the following truth: nothing that has ever happened should be regarded as lost for history" (246). This similarity reveals the equalizing manoeuvre that the letter potentially contains where a meticulous attention to detail enables the writer's lived experience to protrude into their recipient's present. In contrast, in *In the Skin of a Lion*, Rowland Harris, Commissioner of Public Works in "his expensive tweed suit that cost more than the combined week's salaries of five bridge workers" (46), relies on the deletion of detail: "For Harris the night allowed scope. Night removed the limitations of detail and concentrated on form" (31). As Lee Spinks rightly observes, Harris' "monocular urban vision immobilises labour by translating it into the physical fact of the monuments it leaves behind," evacuating "lived experience from civic space" (138). The epistolary form then potentially renders Harris' abstracted world view untenable as Patrick's search for lived detail not only questions sanctioned histories, but also works to positively accumulate knowledge, signal allegiances, and speak truth to power.

The letters also formally anchor the importance of dialogue and connection in the novel. This perhaps becomes clearer if we consider the moments of epistolary *failure* within the novel. Earlier, "frozen" letters metaphorically reflect Patrick's inability to access his own history: "What remained in Patrick from his childhood were letters frozen inside mailboxes after ice storms" (55). Patrick is incapable here of reading his own past, as he lacks a reader to receive and thaw these letters. A similar dilemma can be seen in the series of staccato letters composed by Patrick in his head: "Dear Clara / All these strange half-lit lives. Rosedale like an aquarium at night. Underwater trees" (87). Patrick's breathless letters convey the immediacy of spoken dialogue, and the insensible, almost unconscious associative word play creates the impression of words repeating inside Patrick's head as he lays in bed: "This battle for territory, Clara, ownership and want, the fast breath of a fuck, human or cat—supernatural moans, moon talk—her hands over the face" (87). These "letters" are not recorded and consequently cannot be read. The first person "I" is almost entirely absent from the first two "letters"

which begin and end mid-stream, whilst the third recounts a violent, repetitive bloody dream, excessively peppered with I's and you's, and this hyperextends and distorts the "I-you" structure through overloading the text: "I came up to you and asked for a dance. The man with you punched me in the face. I asked you once more and he punched me in the face" (89). The grammar of these "letters" is not that of a letter. The opening line combines the I-you structure with the verb: "I came up to you and asked for a dance." Within the epistolary frame this is irretrievably recursive, as the recipient necessarily knows this exact information already. Relief from this recursive structure can only be gained if the addressed subject was absent in the original experience: in other words, if the telling describes a fiction, a lie, or a dream. We soon learn that the writer is recounting a dream, and this relieves the tension a little, but still sits uncomfortably with the epistolary structure, as the imagined "you" of the dream is merged with the supposed "you" of the (unwritten) epistle. This scene attempts to force these moments of consciousness, and unconsciousness, into a form that cannot contain them with verisimilitude, and therefore highlights the inadequacy of epistolary searching in seeking the visceral vibrancy of lived experience. However, this is not to abandon the form, but to put pressure on its structures in seeking the traces of lived experience. These interior narratives cannot be forced open without encounter. Within the epistolary frame, the narratives require recording in order to become "unfrozen" and potentially open to reception. The lack of encounter in the above letters brings us to a crucial point.

Epistolarity is inextricable from encounter. In short, letters are generated when a first person narrative is written to an addressee. The epistolary creation of historical narratives is dependent upon an understanding of encounter that accepts that the searcher can change in the face of the unfamiliar, and this involves pushing beyond neurotic interiority, or even self-reflection, and genuinely reaching out to an other. The Hegelian frame of the "experience of consciousness," *Erfahrung*, is useful in helping us understand this. As a continual process of judgment and revision, *Erfahrung* resists the immediate assimilation of the unfamiliar into the familiar, or fixation of this as absolute difference.[8] Here, one must change one's own criteria of truth in order to "know" in a more meaningful way. A refusal to do this is to unreflectively assign the encountered object its place and affirm an intact self. The *inter*subjective communication of epistolary exchange both necessitates the continual revision of consciousness and reaches out to another. This takes place both within and without the text.

The most powerful example of Hegelian encounter in the novel appears in Patrick's reading of Cato's letters. Let us pause for a moment on the scenes leading up to this. Patrick's epistolary encounter is immediately preceded by a vivid account of the subhuman working conditions that tarnish and disease the bodies of the darkly punning dye-workers as they work with the dangerous derivatives of the natural world: tar, feldspar, paint, fumes, logs, and toxic chemicals. This witnessing testifies to the realities behind Harris' monuments and presents the urgent challenge of re-presenting the experiences of those who are the "unborn photographs" (142). The letters in the novel offer a specific formal response to this challenge.

This is dramatized in the following scene when Patrick is watched reading Cato's letters, which were originally written to Alice, Hana's mother. "Hana sits on the bed and watches him. For what? He thinks as he reads what his face should express to the letter-writer's daughter" (160). This scene doubles the epistolary relationship so that the correspondence is now between Hana, the sender, and Patrick the recipient; overlaying the original exchange between Cato and Alice. This exchange mimes the conventional epistolary relationship where we read letters not intended for us. We, as readers, are therefore implicated in watching Patrick acting out *our* role, as he reads a letter not written for him. The narrative asks, "And who is he to touch the lover of this man, to eat meals with his daughter, to stand dazed under a lightbulb and read his last letter?" (162), forcing the reader to also ask, and "who am *I* to read this last letter?" Patrick's reading demands empathy and imaginative involvement with his correspondent(s): "He realizes what he is doing, that he has become a searcher again with this family" (162).

Hana's watching invites the reader to physically share Patrick's reading. "Patrick reads slowly," and the repetition of "*Dear Alice*" on the page takes the reader back and forth with Patrick as he glances back up to the addressee:

> *Dear Alice –*
>
> *The only heat in this bunkhouse is from a small drum stove. In the evenings air is thick from the damp clothes* (160)

Grammatical awkwardness evokes the material conditions of the text's production, and contrasts with the fluidity of the clause-laden surrounding narrative. This enhances the sense of the dislocated writing subject at the same time as inscribing the reception of the letter.

"He holds now the last ten minutes of Cato's language" (162). This letter holds the experience that remains unrecorded and unsaid. Although the

epistolary investigation cannot exactly retrieve this, the minutes before Cato's death are preserved in the folds of his letters: "While he is cutting a hole in the ice at Onion Lake, Cato sees the men. They ride out of the trees and execute him. They find no messages or identification on him. They try burning the body but he will not ignite" (162). The inclusion of Cato's physical letters make the mediation involved in narrating his death explicit as there are no witnesses and no documents on him, but at the same time they allow Cato's inscription of himself to be read and excavated for the present. These letters therefore respond to the challenge set in the previous scene: how can aesthetic plumage ever adequately enable radically singular histories to puncture the present, without reifying them or reducing them to untroubling entertainment?

The epistolary scene attempts an answer to this question. Patrick's reading of these letters makes the intertwined histories of four characters immediately present, even though two of these individuals are no longer alive. Cato's experience, Alice's reading and Patrick's reading are all physically presented by the text at the same temporal moment. "Patrick sees Cato writing by tallow light . . . sealing the letter, passing the package to someone leaving the camp the next morning. When Alice opens the package five weeks later she pulls the exercise book to her face and smells whatever she can of him, for he has been dead a month" (161). Even the moment of his writing is made present: "Cato sits dead centre, at the food table, the pipe smoke moves live and grey around him. His hair smells of it" (161). Hana is the epistolary sender in giving these letters to Patrick, and also a receiver of her father's letters. The narrative slips between the present and past tense, and readers must attempt to relate to all of the historical sender(s) and recipient(s) of the letter, at the same time as their own reading.

This is connected to the unique capacity of the epistolary form to layer readers within the text. As Altman proposes, "in no other genre do readers figure so prominently within the world of narrative and in the generation of the text" (88). This depends on the recorded dialogism of epistolarity. Cato's letters are received by Alice, and later by Hana and Patrick, so that the receiver of historical writing who was famously described by György Lukács as the "reader of a later age," is situated *within* the novel as a central and self-interrogating figure. Ondaatje therefore uses epistolary conventions to create a self-reflexive dialogue between past and present within the text.[9] As the addressed "you" the reader of the novel is not only spoken to, but is also obliged to respond.

We are therefore clearly shown how reading and writing are crucial generative acts within letter narratives. Scott's criticism that, "the characters must frequently write, when it would be more natural for them to be acting" ("Samuel" 43) must be reconsidered when examining writing *as* acting in the epistolary frame. As Altman observes, "[n]ot all of letter fictions narrat*ive* events are narrat*ed* events. In the epistolary work, acts of communication (confession, silence, persuasion and so on) constitute important events; they are enacted rather than reported in discourse" (207). Cato's letters are deliberately written to the future. As a letter-writer, he is deeply invested in an urgent and optimistic "call" to a future that is not identical with his own, in order for his letter to be received. Cato insists on inscribing these experiences to puncture the official histories from which they are already excluded, and even when he is hunted, "his package of letters is travelling, passed from hand to hand" (161). Cato thus seizes Richardson's "writing to the moment" as an act of resistance. As the camp bosses pursue him on horseback, "At each camp he writes into a notebook, jams it into a tin, and buries the tin deep under the snow or ties it onto a high branch" (161). The messenger here takes centre stage, countering Harris' dismissal of the role in the final scene of the novel where he tells Patrick that he belongs to "Mongrel company" and "lost heirs": "You don't understand power. You don't like power, you don't respect it, you don't want it to exist but you move around in it all the time. You're like a messenger" (248). Cato, however, certainly does understand power, and commits his letters to the uncertain archive of his environment in the burning hope that they will be received and thawed. The urgency of this deliberate writing to the future is stressed by the short sentences, the glimpses of his "hunters," and the burying of his letters that witness the plight of the unrecorded migrant workers. The novel juxtaposes the mediated testimony of the experiences of these labourers with the immediacy of the human chased and shot to death. The symbolic value of Cato's letters and his determination to write amplifies their narrated content, and the "searcher" brings Cato's message to the fore. Thus, through Cato, and the readers of his letters, the narrative moves towards an affirmation of the human aspect of political struggle and national history.

The epistolary scene of Cato's letters then speaks to Spinks' illuminating analysis of the "recursive" structure of the final scene of the novel. Spinks rightly identifies the following question as central to the novel: "how can we open ourselves once more to the emancipatory potential of the past without conceiving the future in the past's own image?" (168-69). The reading of

Cato's letters puts pressure on this recursive structure in re-presenting (making present again) a multiplicity of past moments through the unifying lived moment of the searcher's reading. This means that the present moment corresponds exactly with moments from the past and this puts pressure on the reader to conceive of a future beyond a recursive tautology.[10]

This is powerfully coded in a single word in this scene. In Cato's letter, "The words on the page form a rune—flint-hard and unemotional in the midst of the inferno of Cato's situation" (162). We should pause here, as the text does through the hyphenation and awkward single-syllable phrases, on the word "rune." The word itself is a riddle and condenses a number of moments from the novel into a single signifier. The rune as a "[c]ourse, onward movement," or the "running [of persons]" evokes the chase of Cato ("rune *n.*1," def. 1), whilst in meaning a "flow of blood" it invokes death but also the optimism of the bodily life-flow ("rune *n.*1," def. 2). More specifically, a rune is a "Finnish poem" ("rune *n.*2," def. 2a) and this points to Cato's Finnish genealogy, which in turn was the "key" to Patrick's identification of the Finnish loggers of his childhood. This further chimes with its meaning as "a watercourse" ("rune *n.*1," def. 3), invoking the river used for logging by these men: "The Finns of his childhood used the river, even knew it by night" (*Skin* 163). A "rune" is more commonly known as a "letter," ("rune *n.*2," def. 1a) and like other epistolary authors, Ondaatje plays on the interpretive possibilities of the relationship between alphabetical and correspondent "letters" and "characters" and between the "margins" of a document and society. The rune is also a "cryptic" sign with "mysterious or magical powers attributed to it" ("rune *n.*2," def. 1a), containing structure, and space for interpretation. The rune, then, presents a constellation of possible moments from within the world of the searcher, holding more than can be told and demanding continual re-reading.

Let us again recall the correspondence between Patrick's epistolary re-reading of the archive and Benjamin's demand that we stop "telling the sequence of events like the beads of a rosary" in order to grasp the constellation which our "own era has formed with a definite earlier one" (255). In this way, one establishes a concept of the present as the "time of the now" which is "shot through with chips of Messianic time" (255). The epistolary agent is here sited in a fleeting moment that potentially contains all of the moments of the past, and is called to seize these moments in order to think imaginatively about her current position and the future.

Understanding this complex use of epistolary conventions casts a new light on the overall structure of the novel. Most critics mention the novel's

use of the "mural," and while this is often conflated with the fragment, Ondaatje discussed the mural specifically with John Berger, a well-known influence on Ondaatje's work who is deeply committed to the letter form.[11] Ondaatje told Berger that he learned a lot from the "kind of echo" used in the mural when writing the novel ("Conversation"). The echoes of a mural produce precisely the *correspondence* of meaning I described in the "rune." Ondaatje describes the echo he perceives in the mural, when "someone is holding a pencil over on that wall, and someone is holding a wrench on that wall, and it is exactly the same gesture" ("Conversation"). Thus, while reviewer Kakutani interprets Ondaatje's "repetition of certain motifs (fire, water, lizards, the image of someone falling)" as underlining "Ondaatje's vision of the world as a fragmentary place" where everyone is "compelled to play a game of connect-the-dots" (par. 6), Ondaatje in fact moves away from the reconstruction of a fragmented picture towards inscribing order *differently*, so that, in Ondaatje's words, "the structure of the novel becomes a recognition of echoes, perhaps" ("Conversation"). The time-lapses between letters make the epistolary form well suited to this echo and Ondaatje intensifies the effect by layering the readers of Cato's letters as we have seen.

Nevertheless, the utopian impulse glimpsed here remains tempered by the limits of an individual's historical and human context. Stacey argues that it is the novel's "acceptance of history as a limitation" that marks it as "politically engaged" (465). This limitation relates to Patrick's necessarily restricted perspective (as an historically situated individual), and to a significant constraint of the epistolary form, which is tightly bound by its first person voice. Although it is, of course, possible to create open letters with multiple signatories (we), or multiple recipients (plural you), thereby forcing open the I-you structure, these constructions also necessarily reduce the obligation on the recipient to respond. In Ondaatje's novel however, the narrative cleverly exposes the limits of the first person address *and* its alternative (here posed as the openly addressed message in a bottle) whilst refusing to depart from the I-you structure: "Patrick would never see the great photographs of Hine, as he would never read the letters of Joseph Conrad. Official histories, news stories surround us daily, but the events of art reach us too late, travel languorously like messages in a bottle. *Only the best art can order the chaotic tumble of events*" (152).

This passage explicitly describes the limits of Patrick's experience, making obvious what the frequent narrative interventions throughout the novel have already told us: as an individual Patrick cannot know everything. Indeed, it

is "only the best art" that can illuminate the past (152). And yet, this art, like the letter in a bottle that lacks a tightly circumscribed addressee, reaches us too late, and therefore the individual cannot simply be discarded, even with her or his human shortcomings and limited perspective. The reading of Cato's letters perhaps evidences an attempt to prise open this limited perspective while preserving the I-you structure (thus keeping the obligation to respond intact). Thus, in *In the Skin of a Lion* the layered readers of Cato's letters do not become the undefined "you" of the message in a bottle, but each remains addressed (and is obliged to respond) as a specifically situated "you," even while the simultaneous multiple readings allow for a collaboration and a wide angle lens that is difficult to incorporate into the first-person perspective. The narrative therefore preserves the first-person narrator and I-you structure in an attempt to harness the illuminations of art *through* this limited perspective and not in order to expose this perspective as limited (which we already know). This scene therefore charts an affirmative attempt to envisage a different future based on an ideal of humanist encounter across time, even while its limits are acknowledged. By layering readers, combining letters and narratorial interventions and amplifying the echo, the novel therefore moves towards a collective vision of social transformation that requires us to look beyond the individual, even while it shows the indispensability of the individual in this process.

This brings us full circle, back to the dialogue, connection, and conversation that struck early reviewers of the novel. In contrast to Harris's parting words, "Don't talk. Just take it away" (254), the novel pulses with the imperative that is impressed on Alice as she is famously caught in the air and "pulled back into life": "'*Talk, you must talk*'" (155). In this book, Harris, whose writing instruments surround him like bullets, "pad," "grid," "pen," "gun" (249), is the record keeper who silences, whereas Cato's buried letters speak loudly to their reader(s). From the first page to the last, we are reminded that the entire narrative unfolds during a dialogue between Patrick and Hana. The young Patrick yearns for "conversation—the language of damsel flies who need something to translate their breath the way he uses the ocarina to give himself a voice, something to leap with over the wall of this place" (10). But for this voice to transcend the time and place it must be written down and sent (as with the novel). Cato's letters provide the older Patrick with this "something" that enables him to leap, temporarily, over the walls of his immediate time and place: "He had lived in this country all of his life. But it was only now that he learned of the union battles up

north where Cato was murdered some time in the winter of 1921" (163-64). Through an intensely personal correspondence, Patrick moves from being "a searcher gazing into the darkness of his own country" towards a renewed political knowledge of the history of his nation (164). Thus, through reworking epistolary conventions, Ondaatje utilizes aspects of the form that Scott argued were incompatible with the continuation of historical narratives, leaning on us, as readers, to rethink our present through a critical engagement with the past. This requires allegiance, solidarity and a sustained imaginative empathy. It also demands us to look beyond an exhausted stress on fragmentation and the destabilization of the past, and instead turn our gaze towards the future in seeking those faint threads of order that bind us together as human beings.

NOTES

1 The novel was also shortlisted for the Governor General's Award (1987) and the Ritz Paris Hemingway Award (1987). It was the first of Ondaatje's works to be published with a large publishing house.

2 Ghosh's investigator, "Amitab," seeks the history of the "Slave of MS H.6" in the footnotes of Ben Yiju's letters, and Soueif's Amal al-Ghamrawi investigates the history of colonial Egypt through letters found in a trunk.

3 *The Cat's Table* contains various letters, which hold "the flame of another time" (242). *Running in the Family* is a scrapbook of notes, photographs, and anecdotes, which examines how acts of witness are recuperated. Ondaatje's *Coming Through Slaughter* investigates epistolary failure, and how letters can conceal and separate, as does Ondaatje's father's letter in *Running in the Family,* which conceals mental illness. This relates to the complex "Letters and Other Worlds" (*Rat Jelly,* 1980). Also see "Pacific Letter" in *Secular Love* (1984). *Anil's Ghost* (2000) examines the excavation of historical truth, towards justice. Letters are used in the later chapters of *Divisadero* (2007). *The English Patient* (1992) asks important questions of the form and the copy of *The Histories* contains notes, maps, and cuttings. A detailed discussion of epistolarity in Ondaatje's oeuvre is unfortunately beyond the scope of this essay.

4 The original letter was written from Conrad to William Blackwood, the Scottish publisher, Stanford-le Hope, Essex. 29 Oct. 1897 (Conrad 14). There are some slight differences between the extract cited in the novel and the original letter: for example, the substitution of "hard" (Conrad 14) with "harsh" (Ondaatje 141).

5 For example, John A. Thieme suggests that Ondaatje's work is "typically Canadian" in its "post-modernist investigations of language and form" (40).

6 Thieme makes this wider point about Ondaatje's work within a more specific reading of *Running in the Family*.

7 Richardson describes this way of "writing, to the moment" in two of his long letters to Lady Bradshaigh, *Selected Letters*: 257 and 289.

8 This theory of "experience" is largely taken from G. W. F. Hegel's "Introduction" to *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, translated by A. V. Millar as *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

9 See Lukács' *The Historical Novel* [*Történelmi regény* (1937)], which discusses the importance of dialogue for the historical novel.

10 I am indirectly indebted to Benjamin's discussion of Charles Baudelaire's *Fleurs du mal* here (see "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," *Illuminations* 152-96).

11 Berger is a well-known influence on Ondaatje's work. Berger's commitment to the letter form is in evidence in the recently acquired files of his personal correspondence in the British Library, and his epistolary novel *From A to X* (2008). See Bower (forthcoming).

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Derek Webster

Self-Timed Photo, Moving Day, 1994

The dark walls of an unfurnished room
And the glint of a distant, gold-roofed dome

Reflect the bright, false starts upon the table.
The burnt-chicken smell. Crossed arms, no smile,

Hint of confusion, fear. My girl-zapped head.
I loved those days, their harsh and undiluted

Skies. But rewind? No. I was wound so tight.
I'm saddened by this young man's inner fights—

So let's just say the head in silhouette
Is someone I don't know, have never met.

There are no words, no place to turn for relief,
When your past still holds your unattained self.

Leave the flawed chamber after each bloom.
Throw out your flowers. Rent another room.

Maude Lapierre

Fanged Nationalisms
Vampires and Contamination in Suzette Mayr's *Venous Hum*

In a review of Suzette Mayr's *Venous Hum*, Mridula Chakraborty laments that the Alberta novel, which satirizes a number of assumptions concerning racial, sexual, regional, and national identities, is ruined by Mayr's "unexpected, and completely unnecessary, horror pin" (36). While *Venous Hum* operates as a high school reunion novel that revisits the impact of homophobia and racism on the protagonist, Lai Fun, Mayr's novel also deploys vampires and cannibals. Despite Chakraborty's mention that the intervention of these monstrous figures prevents the full development of the satire, I argue that Mayr's use of magic realism is central to the novel because it intensifies her thorough critique of Canadian nationalism. It is true that vampires and cannibals usually intervene as gothic or horror literary figures, but I read their presence in *Venous Hum* as magic realist because they are not terrifying. As Christopher Warnes advances, magic realist narratives sometimes resemble works of horror fiction when the latter make "coherent use of codes of the natural and the supernatural" (2). Yet, this juxtaposition is a "source of anxiety" in horror fiction, while magic realism "normalizes the supernatural" (3, 4). Mayr's use of vampires and cannibals in *Venous Hum* corresponds to this definition, since for her, magic realism is "just a further extension of the real" (*Why* 168). The novel features two vampires: Lai Fun's racist and homophobic teacher, Mrs. Blake, and Lai Fun's mother, Louve. According to Andrea Beverley, these characters are vampires "for very different reasons" (275). They represent two seemingly competing forms of nationalist fervour. On the one hand, Louve and her husband Fritz-Peter are enthusiastic supporters of the government's multiculturalism policy

(1971), because it validates their status as Canadian, rather than immigrant, subjects. Mrs. Blake, on the other hand, is threatened by the introduction of multiculturalism and bilingualism, because the presence of non-white, non-British subjects destabilizes her conception of Canada as a homogenous nation. While the text appears to favour Louve and Fritz-Peter's vision of Canada as a multicultural utopia, the connection *Venous Hum* draws between their vision and that of Mrs. Blake hints that Mayr takes a critical stance toward national narratives because they ultimately serve to manage and normalize identities. The similarities Mayr draws between Mrs. Blake and Lai Fun's parents can be detected in the effects of the coercively imposed vision of Canada on Lai Fun. But it is the fact that Mayr turns both Mrs. Blake and Louve into vampires that best demonstrates how both women are the targets of Mayr's destabilizing critique of any attempt to establish an all-encompassing national narrative. The presence of vampires and cannibals in *Venous Hum* acts as a strategy of literary contamination, where the novel's explicit condemnation of Mrs. Blake as a vampire contaminates the metaphorical implications of Louve's vampirism. For that reason, the critiques which explicitly apply to Mrs. Blake can be extended to Louve's seemingly benign nationalism. Literary contamination in *Venous Hum* allows the novel to function as a thorough critique, since neither Mrs. Blake's nor Louve's version of Canada can establish itself as a master narrative of Canadian identity.

I read the inclusion of vampires and cannibals in *Venous Hum* as a strategy of literary contamination because such figures are connected to racial anxieties that have long influenced the literary representations of racially mixed characters. Historically, as Robert Young notes, the word "contamination" was used to describe early colonial anxieties towards children of "mixed" unions, or hybrid subjects, whose existence was viewed as contaminating both race and culture (54). This biological interpretation of the hybrid as a form of pollution has led to the literary representations of "mixed" offspring as suspicious, threatening, or tragic. George Elliott Clarke mentions that "the catalogue of treacherous Creoles . . . is so long as to be almost convincing" (213).[1] Another persistent literary convention was that of the "tragic mulatto," which betrayed a general discomfort towards people of "mixed heritage" because their ability to transcend categorization entailed that they could neither belong to white nor black communities (212). As Mayr has noted, these characters were often eliminated from the text because they could not be fixed; they were inevitably "doomed" by their blackness

("Vampires" 332). The concern over purity that generated the notion of contamination is a manifestation of biological anxiety that is often revealed in the literary representation of "mixed" characters. It is a tradition against which Mayr writes and which she challenges in *Venous Hum*.

Contamination has also been resignified positively in Canadian literature. Lola Lemire Tostevin reconfigured it as an empowering literary device in order to explain her bilingual poem *'sophie*. For her, contamination suggests that "differences have been brought together so they make contact" and prevent the solidification of an illusionary sense of authenticity (13). Diana Brydon draws on Tostevin's argument in her article "The White Inuit Speaks" in order to emphasize what Canadians might share with colonized peoples (97). She specifically challenges Linda Hutcheon's assertions that there has been no creolization in Canada and that only Indigenous writers speak from a "true" postcolonial perspective (Hutcheon 76, 78). Brydon is right to point to Tostevin and the Métis as examples of creolization (98), but her argument that Hutcheon's article constitutes a "cult of authenticity" (98) from which First Nations have nothing to gain (99) is misguided. For Brydon, white writers who incorporate Indigenous spirituality in their works are producing a creole text (99). However, the imbalances of power between Indigenous peoples and Euro-Canadians entail that these texts often contribute to ongoing oppression, such as stereotypical and homogenizing representation, and appropriation of voice, instead of instigating dialogue. In the context of *Venous Hum*, unequal relations of power are crucial to the operations of contamination, as it is those with the power to impose their interpretation of Canada on others who see their visions contaminated. For these reasons, contamination should not be perceived as a tool through which *others* can be understood. Instead, contamination functions as a device which draws connections between ideas that appear to be in stark opposition to each other. The creation of this connection subsequently subverts exclusionary visions characterized by the attempt to coercively assert a single narrative of identity.

In *Venous Hum*, literary contamination is most evident in Mayr's use of vampires and cannibals because the novel draws on the literary and colonial histories attached to these figures to articulate its critique of the competing versions Louve and Mrs. Blake hold of Canada. Vampires, for instance, have long been employed in literature to convey fears of contamination. Critics of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* have argued that the text betrays these fears through its anti-Semitic and homophobic sentiments (Halberstam 337; Craft 111).[2] These interpretations point to the threatening and contaminating role of

vampires whose acts of blood-sucking challenge norms and result in undesirable mixings. According to Christopher Craft, Dracula is "a border being who abrogates demarcations" (117), and while this skill is clearly a threat in Stoker's novel, it is one which Mayr seems to value in *Venous Hum*.[3] For Judith Halberstam, gothic fiction does not merely demonize the other, but simultaneously reveals "the mechanisms of monster production" through its generic instability (349). In other words, the presence of monsters does not generate a stable category of monstrous otherness, but rather demonstrates the extent to which monsters are created with a certain function in mind. The cannibal exemplifies this monster production. Indeed, William Arens' "Rethinking Anthropophagy" triggered a spirited debate in anthropology because it disputes the idea that cannibalism was ever practiced (41-45).[4] Instead of examining cannibalism as a social practice, some studies now look at the accusation as an attempt to differentiate civilized Europe from "uncivilized" peoples as Maggie Kilgour advances (239). Like the vampire, the cannibal blurs the distinction between the eater and the eaten through incorporation (Kilgour 240), but Diana Fuss warns that the two practices should not be conflated. According to her, both monsters incorporate alterity, but the vampire reproduces itself through this act of assimilation, since vampirism is "both other and self-producing" (730). In other words, vampirism is an act of contamination, since what makes Dracula terrifying is that, as Gerry Turcotte notes, "we" will become like "him" (77). Examining the vampires and cannibals in *Venous Hum* then requires paying attention not only to what they eat and why, but also to what is produced through the act of incorporation.

In *Venous Hum*, the vampiric and cannibal presence is connected to the competing forms of nationalism that emerge following the introduction of the multiculturalism policy in 1971. This policy, enacted as the Canadian Multiculturalism Act in 1988, proposes that while Canada has two official languages, "it recognizes the importance of preserving and enhancing the multicultural heritage of Canadians" (*Multiculturalism Act*). Referred to as "multiculturalism within a bilingual framework," official multiculturalism emerged out of the Bilingualism and Biculturalism Commission. Official multiculturalism seeks to encourage Canadians of all ethnic backgrounds to maintain their cultural heritage, while increasing their participation within the Canadian state through the acquisition of one of Canada's official languages (*Multiculturalism Act* 3c, 3i). For Sunera Thobani, the policy enabled a reconfiguration of Canada from a settler colony into a liberal-democratic society (144). Similarly, Will Kymlicka notes that the adoption

of multiculturalism entails that "Canada will never again be viewed as a 'white' and 'British' country" (57). Multiculturalism can then be interpreted as a policy with radical intentions, since it requires a re-imagination of the nation. *Venous Hum* opens by stating that when this policy was adopted, "Trudeau sported a long, flowing haircut. Canada's hair has been disheveled ever since" (11). This comment encapsulates both the enthusiasm and the anxiety that accompanied this new conceptualization of the Canadian national identity, as the adoption of multiculturalism elicited a strong polarization of viewpoints. Both Arun Mukherjee and Thobani argue that people from many diasporic communities found the policy empowering and responded positively to it (Mukherjee 69; Thobani 144). This attitude is encapsulated in the message of welcome *Venous Hum* emphasizes, where the text understands multiculturalism as signifying that "those who never felt comfortable suddenly were *home*" (11). Yet, multiculturalism has also faced numerous critiques. Perhaps most famously, in his controversial book *Selling Illusions*, Neil Bissoondath writes that multiculturalism goes too far in its reconceptualization of the nation (71). Conversely, critics such as Smaro Kamboureli and Thobani disagree that multiculturalism has radically altered the fabric of the Canadian nation, especially since "multiculturalism within a bilingual framework" reasserts the dominance of French and English cultures, and therefore maintains the status quo (Thobani 145; Kamboureli 98).[5] This debate is relevant to *Venous Hum*'s representation of the impact of multiculturalism on the Canadian nation because the novel draws connections between the policy's opponents and its enthusiastic supporters. Although these two positions appear diametrically opposed, their views need to be critically examined because, as numerous critics point out, multiculturalism did not have the "dishevelling" impact they imagined.

Supporters and opponents of multiculturalism are indeed similar in that they share a belief that Canada and the Canadian identity were transformed following the adoption of official multiculturalism. In *Selling Illusions*, Bissoondath criticizes multiculturalism because he believes that it has eroded any sense of "centre" to Canadian identity (71), and that Canada, once a "homogeneous" country, is now fragmented and segregated (25). Yet, as Kymlicka observes, empirical evidence suggests that immigrants now integrate "more quickly and effectively today than they did before the adoption of the multiculturalism policy" (8). Kymlicka's statement troubles the assumption that multiculturalism has rendered Canada more heterogeneous, as it implies that the nation is now more cohesive. Those who

view multiculturalism as empowering do so because they interpret the policy as proof that Canada "was on a cusp of change" (Mukherjee 69). Kamboureli contradicts this argument, as she maintains that multiculturalism accepts differences only to manage them more effectively (82). In other words, multiculturalism does not modify Canada, but rather contains differences within a manageable framework: for instance, Kamboureli notes that the Ministry of Multiculturalism manages differences by only encouraging projects rooted in "folklore" (106). Difference is hence managed because it is rendered static. In addition, Kamboureli and Thobani argue that multiculturalism does not amount to a policy of anti-racism (Kamboureli 103; Thobani 162). The *Multiculturalism Act* does acknowledge the existence of racial discrimination, as it states that the minister is meant to "assist ethno-cultural minority communities to conduct activities with a view of overcoming any discriminatory barrier," such as racism (5g). Yet, in addressing the role of racism, this clause suggests that it is those who suffer from discrimination who must work with the government to overcome this barrier, and not racist Canadians who must abandon their discriminatory behaviour. The idea that multiculturalism radically altered Canada can therefore be questioned, as the wording of the act does not destabilize prior attitudes. Mayr's novel participates in this debate by presenting both staunch opponents and enthusiastic supporters of multiculturalism, yet insisting that both sets of characters use their interpretation of it in order to manage identities. In *Venous Hum*, multiculturalism is inextricably bound to nationalism, as it shapes the different manner in which Louve and Mrs. Blake understand who belongs within the nation. While official multiculturalism seems opposed to an imagining of the Canadian nation as homogenous, in this novel, both these nationalist visions ultimately prove coercive. In that way, Mayr generates a thoroughly destabilizing critique of nationalism, as neither Louve's nor Mrs. Blake's interpretation of Canada is allowed to occupy a privileged position in the text.

In its representation of Mrs. Blake's and Louve's understanding of Canada, *Venous Hum* explores how multiculturalism is mistakenly constructed as having reconfigured Canada. For Mrs. Blake, the introduction of multiculturalism threatens her sense of centre because she constructs Canada as a homogenous, that is, white and English-speaking, nation. As a racist, classist, and homophobic elementary and high school teacher, Mrs. Blake's actions towards some of her students emphasize her desire to control and contain identities within what she considers to be the norm. Beverley

argues that the character functions as a parody of racist ignorance (247) because she forces Lai Fun to draw herself with a black crayon (99) and requests that Lloyd, an Indigenous student, demonstrate to his classmates how feathers should be worn (98). However, these requests signal what some critics see as the consequence of multicultural policies, which do not generate anti-racism, but require the performance of an "authentic Other" deprived of substance (Kamboureli 106). By forcing Lai Fun to draw herself with a black crayon, Mrs. Blake shows that she perceives Lai Fun as "black,"[6] even though Lai Fun's own sense of identity is more fluid since her father's "skin is pink and white" (101). Similarly, she assumes that Lloyd knows how to wear feathers because of his ethnicity, and thereby requests that he perform her understanding of his heritage for the class. Mayr has her character manage the students' identity in a way that conforms to societal expectations, which can only see Lai Fun as black, and Lloyd as a homogenized representative of Canada's Indigenous population. This desire to control identity expression points to her fear, similar to Bissoondath's concern in *Selling Illusions*, that official multiculturalism threatens Canadian identity (71). For Mrs. Blake, multiculturalism does not reflect the changing nature of the Canadian population, but is "shoved down honest, Canadian throats" (95), a statement which underlines the threat official multiculturalism represents for her.

This argument is however contested in the novel, since the enthusiastic response to multiculturalism by Louve and Fritz-Peter demonstrates the willingness of some people conceptualized as Other to be incorporated within the nation. For Lai Fun's parents, multiculturalism validates their "Canadianness." As Beverley mentions, Lai Fun's parents do not fall under the category of diasporic subjects (242): their origin is assumed to be elsewhere, but its precise location is never detailed. They identify solely as Canadians, as being from "here," or from Ottawa (89), thereby defusing claims that their roots lie outside the nation. The repeated assertion that they are, first and foremost, Canadians (89, 93, 106, 107, 176) points to their idealist interpretation of multiculturalism even as it challenges those who refuse to view immigrants as "Canadian." In other words, Louve and Fritz-Peter do not wish to erode, or even alter, the Canadian identity, as they operate within the logic of Canadian identity formation. They send Lai Fun to French immersion school because "they do not want Lai Fun to become . . . the status quo" (89), but their idealized dream for a "special" (89) child "of all Canada" (93) merely corresponds to the new, state-sponsored status

quo, which defines Canada as multicultural and bilingual. Their relocation to Alberta and their decision to become vegetarians are also linked to this desire to normalize their relationship with the nation, to "live normal, boring suburban lives forever" (179). For Beverley, Lai Fun's parents have wilfully assimilated (280), a decision that is empowering for *them*. Louve and Fritz-Peter's endorsement of multiculturalism then entails that *Venous Hum* does not present multiculturalism as having altered and radicalized the fabric of the country. In fact, Louve and Fritz-Peter's assimilation challenges the automatic assumption that multicultural subjects necessarily wish to preserve their heritage.

The novel does not, however, deploy Louve and Fritz-Peter to celebrate multiculturalism. Instead, *Venous Hum* deepens its critique of the national narratives it contains by emphasizing the coercive potential of both Mrs. Blake and Lai Fun's parents' versions of Canada. Mrs. Blake's imagined Canada is coercive because it can be associated with institutional racism. Her behaviour in the classroom demonstrates that she is not solely concerned with fostering her students' learning skills, since

> she is the kind of teacher who notices the cut and the cost of her students' clothes. Who is a judge's kid, who has a single mother who works at a discount clothing store. Which kid has salon-cut hair, which is ruined by a hare-lip, bulgy eyes. What colour the kid's skin is. What the kid's name is: Hadleys fare better than Lai Funs, and Johns excel over Ozzies. (104)

This passage describes the systemic discriminatory practices under which Mrs. Blake operates as she categorizes her students through visual markers that prescribe how she will treat them. Mrs. Blake also claims a permanent status within the education system when she jokes that she has "been teaching at this school since before the school board opened it" (100). She further boasts that despite her bigotry, she cannot be fired because "I've been teaching here forever. I'm going to keep on teaching forever" (211). She is unavoidable and omnipresent, as she moves from being Lai Fun's elementary school teacher to being her high school teacher, and in the process controls most extracurricular activities (110). Mrs. Blake is "everywhere," "always watching them," and even returns from the dead (110, 105). As in Mayr's novel *Moon Honey*, *Venous Hum* constructs racism as a systemic issue rather than as simply a personal matter, and uses Mrs. Blake's permanent institutional status to that effect.[7] Though she might fear that increased immigration threatens her Canadian identity, Mrs. Blake's institutional status demonstrates the extent to which the dominant interests she champions

cannot be so easily destabilized. Because the Multiculturalism Act states that its goal is to increase participation in the nation (3c, 5d), it is not constructed as challenging the nation but as expanding it. For Thobani, this clause discredits the role of institutional racism because it implies that diasporic Canadians need to suppress their differences in order to integrate (156). In *Venous Hum*, Mrs. Blake functions in a similar fashion: she claims that her acts of discrimination against Lai Fun "prepare her for the real world" (104), because they teach Lai Fun when to express, and when to repress, her differences. Although Mrs. Blake does not embrace the argument for multiculturalism, her behaviour and prejudices—while not directly associated with this policy—continue to operate as she manages Lai Fun's identity within a Canadian framework. Mrs. Blake's nationalism then proves dangerous, because it is inextricable from racism. Multiculturalism cannot destabilize her construction of Canada as homogenous or the institutional racism she enacts on her students.

In contrast, although the nationalism of Louve and Fritz-Peter appears benign, its coercive potential is implicitly criticized once they impose their bilingual and multicultural vision on their daughter. For Beverley, Lai Fun constitutes a "test-case" for Trudeau's multicultural and bilingual Canada (239): her parents support bilingual education "because the Canada they want, the daughter they want, is special and bilingual" (89). Yet, Lai Fun is more than a test-case, since she is often equated with Canada, particularly when she is portrayed as her parents' "glorious Canadian Proclamation" (93). Louve and Fritz-Peter always affiliate Lai Fun with the national rather than with the regional. They state that "even though Lai Fun was born in Western Canada, she will be a child of all Canada, of leaf-bright autumns and spring coastal rains and Great Lake boating and Newfoundland ice storms" (93). Through the characters of Louve and Fritz-Peter, Mayr projects one version of a national vision, where Canada is defined as multicultural and bilingual. However, Lai Fun ultimately resists her parents' attempt to make her embody their version of Canada. Lai Fun's education was supposed to prevent her from becoming "one of *them*" (89), a phrasing that, for Louve, describes a unilingual and monocultural subject such as Mrs. Blake. However, Louve is forced to recognize that her now teen-aged daughter has become "*one of them*" (130). This repetition stresses that Louve understands her vision of Canada as being in direct opposition to the one Mrs. Blake espouses. Yet, because her teacher and her parents continuously seek to manage her identity, Lai Fun responds by attempting to subsume her differences. Instead

of fostering the development of an empowered bilingual/multicultural identity, the combination of Louve and Mrs. Blake's competing nationalisms results in a desire for sameness, which Lai Fun expresses in her longing "to be like other people" (128).

Lai Fun's need to subsume what makes her different is most explicitly enacted on her name. In elementary school, Mrs. Blake transforms the name "Lai Fun" into "Lou Anne" (93) because she believes that this "black girl with a Chinese name" (94) should have a "Canadian name" (93).[8] Later, a teenaged Lai Fun demonstrates that she has internalized Mrs. Blake's views: "I'm going to change my name! . . . A name people think is normal. Like Faith or Patience. Everyone thinks I'm some sort of fucked up Chinese woman!" (129). She even goes so far as to ask her friend Daisy to call her "Jane" (149-50). The name Lai Fun, given to her because it is her father's favourite type of noodles (129), also illustrates the problematic aspects of Louve and Fritz-Peter's nationalism. It reduces Lai Fun to an "ethnic" food item, and functions as a non-threatening marker of her "diversity." While Lai Fun becomes embarrassed by her request to be called "Jane" (149-50), the fact remains that her upbringing led her to wish for a "normal," anglicised name. Similarly, Lai Fun withdraws from the choir in the school production of *The Mikado* "because it would be fucking unbelievable for a brown girl to dress up like she's Japanese" (115). In *Venous Hum*, the production of *The Mikado* certainly emphasizes the role of racism at Lai Fun's school (Beverley 254), not only through Lai Fun's reaction, but also because "no one has the guts to tell Lloyd that it's a little bit weird that a Native kid is pretending to be Japanese" (Mayr, *VH* 119). While Lai Fun's decision to withdraw from the play seems like an act of resistance, it is not based on an opposition to the play's racist overtones since she does not view her white classmates' racial appropriation as ridiculous.[9] What *Venous Hum* demonstrates through Lai Fun's desire for sameness is that it is not only Mrs. Blake's acts of discrimination that have a negative impact on her identity formation, but also her parents' insistence that she is "special" (89) like Canada. Each version of nationalist fervour has a different aim. Mrs. Blake wishes to separate "difference" from the dominant culture, while Lai Fun's parents want to incorporate their difference into the dominant culture. However, Lai Fun resists both in her own desire for invisibility.

The novel's subsequent insertion of vampires and cannibals serves to intensify the connection between the nationalism of Louve and Fritz-Peter on one hand and of Mrs. Blake on the other. Vampirism enters *Venous Hum* both literally and metaphorically in order to contaminate interpretations

that would deem the parents' nationalism as preferable to Mrs. Blake's institutionally sanctioned racism. Mrs. Blake feeds on her "ethnic" students in order to affect their learning (103). For Beverley, she is metaphorically monstrous in the way in which she treats the children, which is why her being *literally* a monster constitutes "just a further extension of the real" (Beverley 274; Mayr, *Why* 168). In that way, Mrs. Blake's vampirism fits within a magic realist tradition rather than a horror one, because it allows Mayr to, as Beverley argues, "engage more deeply with the everyday" (273). More specifically, the vampire metaphor contaminates Mrs. Blake's acts of discrimination against the children, as it proves that they are more coercive than simple acts of ignorance. Her vampirism is also structurally constructed as belonging to two different types of metaphorical consumption. Mrs. Blake rations her appetite for ethnic children because "it's rare to find exotic out here on the edge of the prairies" (103). Her pleasure here denotes the metaphorical consumption of the Other, where the appropriation of ethnic otherness fulfills a desire for the exotic. Mrs. Blake also enacts this exotic fantasy in her decision to stage the controversial musical *The Mikado*. Beverley notes that Mrs. Blake's management of the play lacks any reference to its satirical intent, as the work of W. S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan uses a Japanese setting to comment on nineteenth-century Britain (253). Mayr mocks Mrs. Blake's play when a student of Japanese heritage mimics the students who participate: "Whenever Kim shows up, they do imitations. . . . and Kim has the prettiest voice of all imitating Hadley imitating an Englishwoman imitating a Japanese woman imitating an Englishwoman" (121). Through this multi-layered imitation, Mayr signals the appropriative tradition of the play, which her character is recreating. Mrs. Blake however affiliates herself with a different form of vampirism when Louve, the other vampire, confronts Mrs. Blake and accuses her of "feeding on children": "'I am just doing my job,' says Mrs. Blake. 'Assimilating them'" (219). This interpretation of vampirism as assimilation is justified by the character as allowing the Other to return as the same, but her behaviour throughout the text fails to permit any of the children to assimilate. In other words, Mrs. Blake prevents her acts of vampirism and cannibalism from becoming synonymous with incorporation and assimilation. Instead, she continues to view the children of immigrants as "invaders," "creeps," "bums," "monsters," and "freaks" (219). That is, as *contaminating presences*.

While Mrs. Blake's fear of contamination prevents her from assimilating the children on whom she feeds, Louve's desire to assimilate Canadian

identity contaminates *her*. Louve attacks Lai Fun's lover Thor, who has become enamoured with Louve. Thor's interest in Louve stems from his belief that she has mafia connections, and borders on harassment once he reads her novel and realizes the depth of her knowledge and experience (171). Once Louve drinks Thor's blood, she feels unwell because "she sucked back three bottles of wine, ten sucks at the asthma inhaler, and two breakfast marijuana joints with all that blood" (180). While Louve's nausea testifies to Thor's questionable lifestyle choices, it also points, metaphorically, to what Louve has absorbed through her act of incorporation. Thor stands for a certain type of Canadianness: he is an unoriginal writer with conservative, homophobic, and misogynist views. When Thor asks Louve "where do you really come from" (176), he triggers Louve's attack because, through this question, he constructs himself as a "legitimate" Canadian because of his whiteness, and therefore, as one who has the right to cast Louve as Other because of her blackness. Once she feeds on him, Louve absorbs this negativity such that her subsequent illness demonstrates the toxicity of Thor's identity. Because the consumption of Thor's body makes Louve ill, *Venous Hum* criticizes Louve's desire to uncritically incorporate Canadian identity.

While Louve's vampirism acts as a pharmakon, to use Jacques Derrida's term, where the blood that should feed Louve poisons her, it also points to the similarities between Louve's vision of Canada and that embodied by Thor and Mrs. Blake. If their Canada is poisonous, then so is Louve's. The subsequent cannibalization of Thor's body is juxtaposed with a celebration of multicultural Canada. The novel repeatedly insists on the excess of the feast, which lies in the amount of food that will be consumed (185-86), and this excess is meant to echo the enthusiastic response to multiculturalism of both Louve and Fritz-Peter. For instance, as she is cooking with Fritz-Peter, Louve refers to Canada as "the land of liberation" (186). Feasting on Thor's body allows Louve to celebrate and assert her own Canadianness, as though the feast marks the defeat of those who, like Thor, would undermine her sense of belonging on the basis of her skin colour. The feast also presents an unflattering portrait of "immigrants" feeding on the body of the dominant Canadian. Still, it works to legitimate their presence in the country, since this scene functions as an act of revenge against those who question their Canadian status through the use of the question "where do you really come from?" (176). Indeed, the feast actualizes the fear that immigration erodes the dominant Canadian identity. As Mayr notes, she chose to make Lai Fun's

family monstrous in order to embody the fears that immigrants "steal jobs" (qtd. in Andrew 37). In that sense, *Venous Hum* demonstrates the coercive potential of both forms of nationalisms, as the negative connotations of Mrs. Blake contaminate the metaphorical function of Louve's vampirism and cannibalism.

At the same time, the feast allows Lai Fun to dissociate herself from her parents' excessive nationalism. As a "child of all Canada" (93), Lai Fun was made to embody her parents' nationalist vision. As an adult, she is also coerced into attending the dinner party, after her mother asserts that she must because "Lai Fun, it's your Heritage" (200). This "heritage" initially appears to refer to Lai Fun's diasporic heritage, but the novel systematically denies any diasporic connections. When Louve refers to her daughter's heritage, she rather echoes the concluding line of the "Canadian Heritage Minutes" television segments, broadcasted in both English and French in order to generate a common sense of national identity.[10] In other words, Louve reaffirms that the feast embodies her idealized version of Canada, even though she speculates that Lai Fun "will know Thor by the yellowy taste of nicotine under the shrimp-shell fingernails" (200). At the dinner however, Lai Fun only makes "a token nibble at a black-bean finger" (228). While Lai Fun is aware that Thor is being consumed, her refusal to eat is connected to her dedication to veganism, to her belief that "tofu is a little bit like heaven" (228). This reference to veganism complicates the feast further, since Louve and Fritz-Peter had abandoned cannibalism in favour of a vegetarian, later vegan, diet upon settling in Alberta in order to "put down roots deep into the earth" (179). Alberta is usually associated with meat eating, but veganism enables the family to settle in the region because their diet of human flesh meant that they had "to deal with hiding bodies and making up stories and moving to yet another shitty town in the boonies" (178). If their decision to feast upon Thor's body reconnects them with multicultural Canada, then it also severs them from their regional identity. In contrast, Lai Fun rejects her parents' nationalism in favour of regionalism—the latter being her chosen affiliation.

The fact that *Venous Hum* makes two seemingly different characters vampires also signals that Louve and Mrs. Blake might be more similar than they appear. Beverley suggests that Lai Fun's family and Mrs. Blake "are monstrous for very different reasons" (275). Yet, their literal differences cease to matter in their metaphorical implications. After all, both women are self-referentially identified as a "metaphor" (101, 178), and the use of the word in its singular form indicates that they must share some metaphorical

function. Louve attacks Thor when he comes to her apartment because he undresses while she is out of the room and intends to steal her ideas for a screenplay. Despite Louve's request that he "put [his] trousers on" (175), Thor remains half-naked until she bites off one of his fingers and starts sucking his blood (177). Beverley reads Louve's action as vengeful (277) because Thor had dared to ask "where do you really come from, Louve?" (176). However, Thor's predatory attitude before Louve attacks, coupled with Louve's difficulty "to resist a perfect vein" (177), casts her reaction as an act of self-defence enacted through her instinctual lust for blood. Similarly, Mrs. Blake does not construct herself as predatory, but as protecting dominant interests. Through her assertion that she is "just doing [her] job," Mrs. Blake trivializes her actions as being simply part of the system, as though she could not be held responsible for what she does. She thoroughly denies all accountability by projecting her monstrousness on Louve: "Who gets to feed on whom! Taking jobs away from people who deserve them and were here first. You're an invader" (219). Through this projection, Mrs. Blake constructs her acts of vampirism as self-defence against the "monsters" who are invading her country and stealing jobs.

Both Louve and Mrs. Blake also deceive others into thinking that they are, or could be, benign. Beverley argues that Mrs. Blake's appearance, described in the novel as "that creamsicle of a woman with her blonde, perfect page-boy," clashes with her racist behaviour (Mayr 98; Beverley 274-275). For Beverley, this dissonance indicates that Mrs. Blake "incarnates a metaphor for racism and discrimination that are both camouflaged and palpable" (275). Her name also recalls William Blake, a poet associated more with struggles for social justice than with institutional racism. The name seems redeeming, since Mayr could have called Mrs. Blake "Mrs. Kipling" or "Mrs. Conrad" had she wished to overemphasize her racism. By calling her Mrs. Blake, Mayr creates positive associations between her character and William Blake, which intensifies the shock that Mrs. Blake's behaviour creates. Similarly, Louve's name is strongly suggestive of her predatory instincts, as "louve" is the French word for a female wolf, yet her appearance as "a housewife wearing *tube socks*" (178) seems to be what bothers Thor the most as she sucks his blood. This juxtaposition between the monstrous and the benign, the homely which so suddenly turns unhomely, is also attributed to a man who simultaneously resembles Dracula and Trudeau: "the old man turns the corner . . . and his cape whips around like he is some kind of Dracula, like he is some kind of Pierre Elliott Trudeau" (76). Louve and Mrs.

Blake function similarly, since, like Trudeau's multiculturalism policy, they evoke a threat cloaked in a seemingly harmless appearance. In other words, neither woman can be cast as a villain.[11] Instead, they highlight the dangers that lie in coercive world views because both women are encapsulated by the same vampire metaphor. In that way, the novel can use its explicit critique of Mrs. Blake to influence how Louve can be interpreted.

In other words, Suzette Mayr's *Venous Hum* does not constitute an uncritical endorsement of multiculturalism. Rather, it proves to be a thoroughly destabilizing critique of the nationalisms it contains as every position is criticized for its potentially coercive element. While the monsters the novel deploys may seem, on a first reading, to be surprising or "unnecessary" (Chakraborty 36), they are essential to Mayr's critique. The presence of vampires not only actualizes the dangers of racism and the fear of immigration, but also demonstrates that Mrs. Blake and Louve are metaphorically connected: both women are worthy of criticism because the condemnation of Mrs. Blake's actions is extended, through literary contamination, to Louve's behaviour. While this article only examines monstrousness in its relation to Mayr's critique of nationalisms, *Venous Hum* also operates within a high-school reunion genre where even the dead attend the event, while also exploring Lai Fun's dysfunctional same-sex relationship. As such, Mayr's novel destabilizes many narratives of identity formation, as it emphasizes the fluidity of racial and sexual identities through genre blurring techniques, intertextuality, and humour. Even though Mayr's *Venous Hum* has yet to attract the same kind of critical attention that her first two novels have received, it proves to be a rich text that challenges preconceptions regarding race, sexuality, Alberta, and Canadian nationalism. *Venous Hum* is similar to Mayr's other novels, as the genre bending techniques she mobilizes in all her texts, such as magic realism, enable her to articulate critiques of racism (*Moon Honey*), age discrimination (*The Widows*), and homophobia (*Monoceros*). In conclusion, Mayr uses her novels to criticize coercive worldviews and narratives, and in *Venous Hum*, literary contamination allows her to ensure that both of the coercive national narratives the novel represents are undermined.

NOTES

1 Mayr has, however, criticized Clarke's position on racial hybridity. By dedicating a separate chapter to biracial writers in his *Odysseys Home*, Clarke claimed biracial writers as black yet emphasized their difference from other African-Canadian writers through his insistence on their "zebra poetics" (Braz 446-47).

2 Halberstam makes her argument through Stoker's anti-Semitic connections as well as through the widespread belief in the "blood libel" at that time. Craft reads *Dracula* as betraying, while also displacing, homoerotic desires.

3 Mayr has mentioned that she loves vampires because "they work as a metaphor for just about anything having to do with being an outsider" (Dudek 334).

4 While Arens' position has been strongly criticized, his argument is particularly relevant to my own inasmuch as he is interested in the position it holds in the Western imagination, where it has been transformed into an absolute sign of Otherness (42).

5 Both Thobani and Smaro Kamboureli note that the policy's attempt to sever language from culture is unsuccessful. For Thobani, "multiculturalism within a bilingual framework" constructs English and French subjects as the nation's "real" subjects (145), while Kamboureli questions the possibility of effectively dissociating language from culture (98).

6 By categorizing Lai Fun as black, Mrs. Blake adheres to the "one drop rule," where those with a single black ancestor remain black regardless of their skin tone or identity affiliation.

7 All of Mayr's novels construct discrimination as an institutional matter. *The Widows* criticizes the way in which society marginalizes the elderly, while *Monoceros* examines how homophobia is inherent to a Catholic school.

8 Mrs. Blake here indicates that "Canadian" must be white, that it cannot be black, and cannot have a "Chinese" name. "Lou-Anne" is simultaneously exclusive and inclusive, since it is supposed to make Lai Fun more acceptable, yet implies that "Lai Fun" cannot be Canadian.

9 As Beverley mentions, *The Mikado* has "long been criticized for its stereotypical and shallow description of Japan, and contemporary productions often modify offensive lines" (253). In *Venous Hum*, only Kim, a Japanese-Canadian student, criticizes the play for being racist (118). Her voice of dissent within the novel, however minor, is significant in its very presence.

10 See http://www.histori.ca/minutes/default.do?page=.index.

11 Mayr states that she does not believe in villains: "different characters have different motivations for what they do, even when what they do seems malicious or evil" (*Why* 166).

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Julie Paul

The Rules of the Kingdom

> In the earliest days of the province almost every settler took in travellers overnight, but as immigration increased, many, almost in self-defence, took out inn licenses so as to be able to charge their guests.
> —1970s Upper Canada Village Guidebook, Morrisburg, ON

If you rub nothing and nothing together, what is made?
Everything. Each thing, every day, is made from scratch.

Imagine leisure time as sleeping, dare to dream of cakes and beds made,
candles dipped, barns raised, wild turkeys plucked—

It is memories that present the problems. Fine chairs and tables and linens
packed in the brain, horses instead of borrowed oxen,

thoughts that were given free passage from a land where castles exist
to a country where no palace has ever stood.

Your log house is a room in the forest made from forest itself.
What shelters and warms you is also what you hate a little more each day.

The rocks keep coming back to the surface.
The trees rub against each other, thickening while you weep.

When you hear a knock at your door, you cannot ignore it,
even though you want only to heap sweaters on your head.

Under your own roof there may be no boots lacking holes
but if you put yourself in the traveller's shoes you must invite the stranger in.

Your floor has comforted the weary before, your rosehip tea
has warmed many cheeks. Give them freely.

You are a long way from any kind of comfort, therefore you are the comfort.
Make this your diversion. Make this your solace.

Your heart, forced open by the new creeds of desolation,
pounds out a welcome. You hold a candle up to a face

that radiates equal measures of hope and disbelief.
Come in, your mouth says. Rest by our generous fire.

J. I. Little

A Country Without a Soul
Rupert Brooke's Gothic Vision of Canada

If journeys are primarily either about the traveller or about the worlds the traveller encounters (Oerlemans 149), the North American travel journals Rupert Brooke published in 1913, at the age of twenty-five, are indisputably in the former category. Brooke did not follow the self-historicizing approach of many of today's travel writers, adopting instead an ironic distancing tone, yet his haunting gothic images of the Canadian landscape do reflect his somewhat tortured psyche.[1] Unique as Brooke's imagination and literary skills may have been, however, his vision of Canada was neither completely idiosyncratic nor without influence among his contemporaries, particularly those of his privileged social class. Brooke's travel journals, written at a time when ties between former colony and mother country remained strong, therefore deserve more attention than they have hitherto received from either his biographers or Canadian literary scholars and historians.

Brooke was conflicted by sexuality as well as domesticity, like many other upper-middle-class English men of his era (Tosh 189), and he was impelled to travel to North America by romantic entanglements that had resulted in a nervous collapse (Caesar 37-40; Delany ch. 8). His hope was presumably that a continent with wide-open spaces might serve as the rest cure that his trips to European recreation sites such as the Swiss Alps and Cannes no longer provided. To cover his expenses, Brooke contracted to submit travel articles to the prestigious *Westminster Gazette*, which, according to historian Stephen Koss, preferred to write the masses off as customers rather than write down to them (10). These articles reappeared posthumously in 1916 as *Letters from America*, in a volume that included an introduction by the highly respected

Henry James, who had published his own impressions of Quebec City and Niagara Falls.[2]

Brooke's printed descriptions of the outdoors advertisements of New York City and of a baseball game at Harvard University leave the impression that he was fascinated by the energy of the United States.[3] Privately, however, he wrote that "[t]his is *not* a land for a civilized man. There are three things worth some praise; the architecture, the children's clothes, and the jokes. All else is flatulence and despair and a living Death" (qtd. in Keynes 469).[4] Although he reported being warned by Americans that Canada was "a country without a soul,"[5] in turning northward the sensitive young poet felt "heartened" that he was "in a sense, going home" (49). It would seem that, in a kind of reverse colonialism, he was hoping to find a younger and better Britain, but he was soon disappointed in that regard. English Canadians he found to be as materialistic as the Americans, but more repressed, making them exceedingly dull, though there was some solace to be found outside the major urban centres and particularly in the western provinces.

Brooke's challenge as a travel writer was to describe the tourist sites that were invariably associated with Canada—including Quebec City, Niagara Falls, and the Rocky Mountains—without tarnishing his reputation as a rising literary star by resorting to the clichéd images of his many predecessors. Because, in Brooke's opinion, Canada's landscapes had yet to be interpreted by a great artist or poet, they were not fully alive. His role as a travel writer was therefore to give birth to them, paradoxically, by conjuring up death-related images that humanized the physical environment in accordance with gothic conventions (sometimes referred to as Dark Romanticism) (McEvoy 20). As Coral Ann Howells and others have shown, this was an approach to the Canadian landscape that was much less original than Brooke apparently realized. Literary critic Cynthia Sugars writes that the "gothicization of Canada has a long history in Canadian cultural expression," with one feature of early Canadian literature positing the wilderness "as a Gothic landscape inhabited by savage creatures (animal and human) which posed a threat to the European adventurers" (410). Brooke's articles, nevertheless, offer little support for the thesis, associated most famously with Northrop Frye and Margaret Atwood, that writers in Canada felt a strong antipathy towards Nature.[6] Viewing the landscape from the comfort of a railway car or steamship, Brooke could hardly experience the terrors associated with the wilderness gothic. Aside from reflecting a sense of malaise when describing large bodies of fresh water, as we shall see, Brooke's travel narrative conforms

more closely to the second feature of the gothic in Canada, as identified by Sugars, namely a perception that the country was "a terrifying *terra nullius* that was devoid of Gothic effects or ghosts" (410). Brooke's highly imaginative gothic images clearly reflected his troubled psyche, but, on a more self-conscious level, he evidently felt that he was bestowing upon the uncultured young country the "soul" that it so lamentably still lacked.

Brooke's first impression of Montreal was that it "consists of banks and churches" (50-1). The Scots, who dominated the British part of the city with its "rather narrow, rather gloomy streets," "aggressively prosperous buildings," and "air of dour prosperity," spent their time in "laying up their riches in this world or the next" (51). One feature of the city that did interest the young English traveller was its cultural duality. He observed that even though "[t]he French and British in Canada seem to have behaved with quite extraordinary generosity and kindliness towards each other, . . . it is not in human nature that two communities should live side by side, pretending they are one, without some irritation and mutual loss of strength" (52-53). In short, Brooke shared the romantic nationalist assumption that a strong nation had a "soul" based on common ancestry. He was perhaps also thinking of his own internal sexual conflicts (Caesar 15, 34) when he wrote that "Montreal and Eastern Canada suffer from that kind of ill-health which afflicts men who are cases of 'double personality'—debility and spiritual paralysis" (53).

Brooke had a relatively high opinion of the national capital, however, for in his words Ottawa could be praised without resorting to "statistics of wealth and the growth of population; and this can be said of no other city in Canada except Quebec." The fact that Ottawa was a city of civil servants and homely wooden houses, and that in the evening light the Parliament buildings "seem to have the majesty and calm of a natural crown of the river-headland," clearly appealed to Brooke's search for security and stability. But the face of commerce was still quite visible, even on Parliament Hill: "just to show that it is Canada, and not Utopia—the line of national buildings will always be broken by an expensive and superb hotel the Canadian Pacific Railway has been allowed to erect on the twin and neighbouring promontory to that of the Houses of Parliament" (55-56).

Brooke's personal correspondence reveals that his travel narrative is misleading in suggesting that he visited Ottawa before doubling back to Quebec City.[7] Ottawa appears in the same article as Montreal simply because neither city was considered interesting enough to warrant more detailed description. Quebec was quite a different story, however, for the old fortress

city appealed to Brooke's strong antimodernist sensibility. To mark the contrast with Montreal, the chapter on the provincial capital begins with the traveller's departing view of the former city, a view that recalls Blake's dark satanic mills. Mount Royal, "crouched, black and sullen," overlooks a harbour that is "filled with volumes of smoke, purple and black, wreathing and sidling eastwards" (61). Brooke added that this "inferno" and "mirk" suggested that either "diabolic invisible hands" were moulding the "pitchy and Tartarian gloom" into a city, or that the city was already "disintegrating into its proper fume and dusty chaos" (61). In short, the threat was not Nature or the wilderness in this case, as critics such as Howells and Faye Hammill have argued was characteristic of Canadian gothic imagery, but the urban and industrial.[8]

As his vessel approached Quebec the following morning, in sharp contrast, Brooke found that "[t]he air was full of gaiety and sunshine and the sense of singing birds, though actually, I think, there were only a few gulls crying" (63). With "the individuality and the pride of a city where great things have happened, and over which many years have passed," Quebec was as "refreshing and as definite after the other cities of this continent as an immortal among a crowd of stockbrokers" (64). As "an aesthete's aesthete" (Eksteins 123), Brooke idealized the innocence of youth and worshipped beauty He, therefore, paid Quebec the ultimate compliment when he wrote that the city had "the radiance and repose of an immortal; but she wears her immortality youthfully" (64). Inspired by the Plains of Abraham, and reflecting his ongoing shift from Fabian pacifism to British imperialism, Brooke apparently saw no contradiction between his idealization of youthful innocence and his suggestion that if warfare were replaced by commerce, then patriotism would die and Quebec City would become "a forgotten ruin" (65-66).

British travel writers were not only generally enthusiastic about Quebec City, they were by this time inclined to take a positive view of what their predecessors had once found so reprehensible, namely the French-speaking *habitants*' apparent resistance to agricultural improvement (Moyles and Owram 92-93; Little 15-19). As the central figure in the group of Cambridge friends whom Virginia Woolf named the Neo-Pagans by virtue of the fact that they went on hiking and camping expeditions, swam in the nude, and idealized the simple rural life (Delany xii), Brooke found the *habitants* to be "a jolly sight." In his words, "[t]hey are like children in their noisy content. They are poor and happy, Roman Catholics; they laugh a great deal; and they continually sing. They do not progress at all" (67). But his view of the priests

was another matter. Reflecting his Protestant prejudices, Brooke resorted to gothic imagery when he wrote that those on board the boat descending the St Lawrence to the Saguenay "diffused an atmosphere of black, of unpleasant melancholy. . . . Their eyes were small, shifty, and cruel, and would not meet the gaze" (67-68).[9]

Arriving at the mouth of the Saguenay as darkness was falling, Brooke felt shut in by "walls rising sheer from the water to the height of two thousand feet, going down sheer beneath it . . . to many times that depth" (68). As it ascended the lifeless river, whose waters were "inky and sinister" even in the daytime, the "homeless, irrelevant, tiny steamer seemed to hang between two abysms" (68-69). In fact, "[t]he whole scene seemed some Stygian imagination of Dante," and, as he also made clear in a letter to one of his intimates, Brooke had the sense that "this region was the abode of devils" (69).[10] In creating such a gothic image of the lower Saguenay, Brooke was moving well beyond the aesthetic construction of the sublime that in Britain had shifted from Burke's overpowering force (self-annihilation) to Kant's more comforting spirituality (self-exaltation). Like the picturesque, then, sublime imagery has been associated with British cultural imperialism (Gillespie 90-99, Ryan 267-70), but one might assume that gothic images depicting the landscape as distinctly alien reflected a post-colonial sensibility.[11] The fact remains, however, that Brooke was a self-confessed imperialist, and, as Sugars argues, the gothic tradition had been imported by early Canadian writers to provide "legitimating substance to the settler-invader experience of occupation" (410). Only at the mouth of the river, in the historic village of Tadoussac and under a light blue, English-like sky, was Brooke able to shake off his sense of unease, at least temporarily. Plunging naked into the water, as he had done many times in England with his Neo-Pagan friends, he found that "[s]tray shreds of the St Lawrence were warm and cheerful," but the black current of the Saguenay was "cold as death" and he retreated shivering to his hotel (68-71). As biographer William Laskowski notes, this was a negative baptism, "death without rebirth" (87).

Brooke felt more at ease in rural Ontario because its "weather-beaten farm-houses, rolling country, thickets of trees, little hills green and grey in the distance, decorous small fields, orchards, and, I swear, a hedge or two," reminded him of England (75). Particularly important was the fact that "this country has seen the generations pass, and won something of that repose and security which countries acquire from the sight" (76). Here, in short, Brooke found traces of the pastoral myth that he was strongly drawn to,

and which Frye has defined as an idealization of childhood memory (88). Unfortunately, the picturesque Thousand Islands had been largely spoiled, Brooke lamented, by the fact that each island, "if big enough, has been bought by a rich man—generally an American—who has built a castle on it. So the whole isn't much more beautiful than Golder's Green" (76).[12]

Once his boat reached the Great Lakes, Brooke began to feel emotionally uneasy again. Henry James had complained that Lake Ontario offered "a sort of marine-effect missed," with "the blankness and vacancy of the sea," yet "without that vast essential swell which, amid the belting brine, so often saves the situation to the eye" (James 364-65). Brooke probed deeper than the aesthetic, however, observing that there was "something ominous and unnatural" about those large bodies of water. In his imagination, "[r]ivers are human," and even though the cruel and treacherous sea "has no soul," it was still "all right" because mankind had engaged it in an "age-long feud" (77). But "these monstrous lakes, which ape the ocean, are not proper to fresh water or salt. They have souls, perceptibly, and wicked ones" (78). Lake Ontario, "was a terrible dead-silver colour," with a surface that was "inexplicably sinister and dead, like the glint on glasses worn by a blind man" (78). As on the Saguenay, and in language that evoked Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (first published in 1899), the boat mysteriously "appeared to leave no wake." But it did leave a trail of black smoke "very close over the water, like an evil soul after death that cannot win dissolution" (77-78). Nature, in short, did not present a threat in the real sense, with crashing waves threatening to capsize the vessel, but in the highly imagined sense that again evoked the gothic.

This gothic sensibility shifted radically on reaching Toronto, "the soul of Canada," or what Brooke might have more consistently referred to as the "non-soul." Toronto, Brooke found to be simply boring: "a clean-shaven, pink-faced, respectably dressed, fairly energetic, unintellectual, passably sociable, well-to-do, public-school-and-varsity [sic] sort of city" (79). In short, it was "all right" (82), the depressing thing being "that it will always be what it is, only larger, and that no Canadian city can ever be anything better or different" (84). In a sense, then, the true Canadian wilderness—as defined by a cultural and spiritual emptiness—was to be found in the larger cities.

Despite its commercialism, however, Brooke was deeply moved by Niagara Falls, writing privately: "I'm so impressed by Niagara. I hoped not to be. But I horribly am. The colour of the water, the strength of it, and the clouds of spray—I'm afraid I'm a Victorian at heart, after all. Please don't breathe a word of it: I want to keep such shreds of reputation as I have left" (Keynes 491).[13]

Referring in particular to Niagara Falls, historian Elizabeth McKinsey claims that the American sublime had, indeed, become long passé by the turn of the century but Brooke rose to the challenge of surpassing literary predecessors such as Charles Dickens and Anthony Trollope by resorting to gothic imagery.[14] Ignoring the fact that major hydroelectric projects had subdued much of Niagara's wild energy and come to epitomize humanity's victory over nature (McGreevy 7-8, 106), Brooke described the river above the falls in exceptionally animated terms, using words such as "chattering," "leaping," "laughing," "springing," and "weaving." But these words only heightened the sense of fatalistic tragedy as the waters, "borne impetuously forward like a crowd of triumphant feasters, . . . seem to fling themselves on with some foreknowledge of their fate, in an ever wilder frenzy" (89). Finally, "[o]n the edge of disaster the river seems to gather herself, to pause, to lift a head noble in ruin," before taking the plunge "into the eternal thunder and white chaos below" (90).[15]

Despite referring to the river as female, Brooke may have had his own psychological collapse in mind. In any case, he described the rapids below the falls as masculine, for "[h]ere the inhuman life and strength are spontaneous, active, almost resolute; masculine vigour compared with the passive gigantic power, female, helpless and overwhelming, of the Falls. A place of fear" (94).[16] Succumbing to a pessimistic fatalism, or what might be viewed as a gothic sense of doom, Brooke added that "[i]n such places, one is aware, with an almost insupportable and yet comforting certitude, that both men and nations are hurried onwards to their ruin or ending as inevitably as this dark flood" (95-96).[17]

Like the uncompromising anti-modernist that he was, Brooke shunned the railway for the leg of his journey between Sarnia and Port Arthur (today's Thunder Bay), noting that by boarding a boat in the afternoon and waking up at Sault Ste. Marie in the morning, "you have done with the rather colourless, unindividual expanses of Huron" (99). Sailing along the shoreline of Lake Superior with its picnickers and campers, "[t]he human race seemed a jolly bunch, and the world a fine, pleasant, open-air affair," but, once out of sight of land, Brooke's sense of unease returned (100). As the vessel slid through "a queer, pale mist," he wrote, "[w]e seemed to be ploughing aimlessly through the phantasmal sand-dunes of another world, faintly and by an accident apprehended" (100-1).[18]

Describing his trip on the night train from Port Arthur to Winnipeg, Brooke began with the romantic view from his lower berth of a "wild starlit

landscape" (101), but, according to Patricia Jasen, tourist interest in northern Ontario had faded after resource exploitation left "an atmosphere of desolation and emptiness" (103). Not surprisingly, then, Brooke soon turned to gloomier images. Thus, he wrote that "[f]or four hundred miles there is hardly a sign that humanity exists on the earth's face, only rocks and endless woods or scrubby pine, and the occasional strange gleam of water, and the night and the wind" (101). Areas where forest fires had passed through lent themselves to particularly gothic imagery, for the grey pine trunks "appear stricken by calamity, intolerably bare and lonely, gaunt, perpetually protesting, amazed and tragic creatures" (102).

Although editors Sandra Martin and Roger Hall obviously overlooked these passages in suggesting that after Brooke left Montreal there was "a shift to a state of contentment that became obvious in his writings" (19), he did become uncharacteristically cheerful once he reached Winnipeg. Sharing his contemporary British travelers' enthusiasm for the Canadian West (Moyles and Owram 119-20), Brooke noted that its people were "more friendly, more hearty" than those of the eastern provinces. The architecture might be even more hideous than that of Montreal or Toronto, but it was "cheerily and windily so" (103). And even though one could find "poverty and destitution" in the Prairie city, at least it was "less dingy, less depressing" than Birmingham (103). Claiming to sense a community spirit in Winnipeg, perhaps a reflection of frontier optimism and energy, Brooke wrote that "one can't help finding a tiny hope" that it "may yet come to something," and "[t]hat cannot be said of Toronto" (104-5). Brooke's personal letters reveal that while in the West he was repeatedly asked about his political views, and this is reflected in much of his writing on Winnipeg and its surrounding area, with the discussion of tariffs, the naval bill, East European immigration, and the co-operative movement (Keynes 102-3).

But the highlight of Brooke's Manitoba sojourn was a side trip with "an old Rugbeian I found in Winnipeg" to the remote Lake George, eighty miles northeast of the city (Letter to A. F. Scholfield, Toronto, July-August 1913. In Keynes 491).[19] Here, he was finally inspired by the soul's "indefinite room to expand," writing that "no one else is *thinking* of the lakes and hills you see before you. They have no tradition, no names even; they are only pools of water and lumps of earth, some day, perhaps, to be clothed with loves and memories and the comings and goings of men, but now dumbly waiting their Wordsworth or their Acropolis to give them individuality, and a soul" (117-18). William Laskowski observes of such passages that "[i]t is as if such

things cannot exist until artists, with their nominative capacity, conjure them up with the power of time and its experience" (89-90), but by participating in the longstanding tradition of configuring Canada as a *terra nullius*, Brooke was erasing the First Nations' ties to the landscape.[20]

Despite the fact that he packed Ben Jonson and Jane Austen "to keep me English" while in the Manitoba backwoods (111), Brooke was drawn to what he felt was a virgin landscape where "[t]he air is unbreathed, and the earth untrodden" (118). He even slipped briefly into the clichéd picturesque convention that he generally avoided: "All things share this childlike loveliness, the grey whispering reeds, the pure blue of the sky, the birches and thin fir-trees that make up these forests, even the brisk touch of the water as you dive" (118). In fact, it was the sensual experience of swimming in a Canadian lake, Brooke wrote, "and none of sight or hearing," that impressed him most as a "token" of the country:

> It is not languorous, like bathing in a warm Southern sea; nor grateful, like a river in a hot climate; nor strange, as the ocean always is; nor startling, like very cold water. But it touches the body continually with freshness, and it seems to be charged with a subtle and unexhausted energy. It is colourless, faintly stinging, hard and grey, like the rocks around, full of vitality, and sweet. It has the tint and sensation of a pale dawn before the sun is up. Such is the wild of Canada. (118)

To Brooke, diving into a fresh clear body of water was a baptism of sorts, a washing away of the guilt associated with sex, and a reinvigoration to face the world anew (Delany 207). As Conrad points out, however, and as the Saguenay example noted above illustrates, such freedom was also a flirtation with destruction, for "the swimmer has only his stroking limbs to keep him buoyant" (87).

Ambiguity towards Nature has been said to be "the mark of true gothicism" (Northey 22-23), but Brooke was more concerned about the despoliation of Nature than about its destructive powers, for he predicted that in the future the timber would be "cut down and made into paper," the land "divided into town-lots and sold, and sub-divided and sold again, and boomed and resold," with the parts not suitable for development "given in exchange for great sums of money to old ladies in the quieter parts of England" (118-19). In the towns would be built "churches, hotels, and a great many ugly sky-scrapers," as well as "hovels for the poor, houses for the rich, none beautiful" (119). Even where there was no sign of such development, then, Brooke's enjoyment of the natural environment was tainted by his forebodings of what he prophesized lay in store for it.

Abnormally wet weather spoiled Brooke's appreciation of the Prairie landscape en route to Calgary, for he observed that the "interminable, oblique, thin rain took the gold out of the wheat and the brown from the distant fields and bushes, and drabbed all the colours in the grass" (125). Seeing no inhabitants on that "Sabbath morn," he observed sardonically that it was not clear whether they were at work, in church, "or had shot themselves from depression induced by the weather" (123-4). Brooke clearly found it amusing that long-time residents "tell me they get very homesick if they go away for a time. Valleys and hills seem to them petty, fretful, unlovable. The magic of the plains has them in a thrall" (125).

Despite such condescending comments, however, Brooke genuinely admired the fact that in the Prairies, "among all the corruption, irresponsibility, and disastrous individualism," there were "some faint signs of the sense of community" (126). As a literary man, he was particularly impressed by the public libraries, writing that they improved as one moved west from Montreal, "which is unable to support one," until in Calgary "you find a very neat and carefully kept building, stocked with an immense variety of periodicals, and an admirable store of books, ranging from the classics to the most utterly modern literature. Few large English towns could show anything as good" (126). Despite his sophisticated urbane manner, Brooke was clearly enthralled with the romantic myth of the Old West, writing that "[f]or no great reward, but the love of the thing," the fearless members of the North-West Mounted Police had "imposed order and fairness upon half a continent" (129-30). But "[t]he tragedy of the West" was that the pioneer generation had now passed, and "what they lived and died to secure for their race is now the foundation for a gigantic national gambling of a most unprofitable and disastrous kind" (130). Thus, "where good men worked or perished is now a row of little shops, all devoted to the sale of town-lots in some distant spot that must infallibly become a great city in the next two years, and in the door-way of each lounges a thin-chested, much-spitting youth, with a flabby face, shifty eyes, and an inhuman mouth, who invites you continually, with the most raucous of American accents, to 'step inside and ex-amine our Praposition'" (131). In short, Brooke saw the Prairie Eden as being contaminated by the corrupting influence of capitalist greed, represented here not by a wealthy banker or developer but by a somewhat diabolical creature who might have emerged from an urban slum.

Brooke presumably felt relieved, then, to be boarding the train for the west coast. Although he had to compete with American tourists for a perch in the

open-sided observation car, he was deeply impressed by the Rockies, reporting that there was beauty there at last, "for the first time in Canada" (148). Indeed, they had a "kindlier" beauty than did the Alps because their rock was "of a browner colour," but the advantage of the Alps was that "[t]here, you are always in sight of a civilisation which has nestled for ages at the foot of those high places" (148). The Rockies, in contrast, were "irrelevant to humanity. No recorded Hannibal has struggled across them; their shadow lies on no remembered literature" (148). Brooke ultimately found the Rockies to be disturbing because Nature "is there alone, scarcely a unity in the heaped confusion of these crags, almost without grandeur among the chaos of the earth" (148). Humanizing the landscape in a distinctively gothic vein, Brooke described pines that "drooped and sobbed," rivers that "roared and plunged with aimless passion down the ravines," and clouds that "trailed along the valleys, a long procession of shrouded, melancholy figures, seeming to pause, as with an indeterminate, tragic, vain gesture, before passing out of sight up some ravine" (150). In short, then, Brooke was again transferring his own rather gloomy sensibility to a country that he apparently felt was sorely in need of a soul.

Brooke's mood was not always bleak, however, for at Lake Louise he found the picturesque scenery that every genteel English traveller longed for. It was not so much the glacier at the end of the lake, or the fact that the glacier climbed to "one of the highest and loveliest peaks in the Rockies," that impressed Brooke (151). Rather, he rhapsodized over the view from his hotel window where the ever-changing lake "is Beauty herself, as nearly visible to mortal eyes as she may ever be" (151). The water "beyond the flowers" was an ever-changing green, sometimes "shot with blue, of a peacock tint" (151). When a breeze ruffled the surface, the lake became "milky emerald," and when the sun caught it, it became "the opal distillation of all the buds of all the spring" (151-2). The image of the "shrouded, melancholy figures" viewed from the platform of the CPR caboose resurfaces, but now as "dark, processional pines, mounting to the sacred peaks, devout, kneeling, motionless, in an ecstasy of homely adoration, like the donors and their families in a Flemish picture" (152). Finally, if briefly, then, the jaded young traveller felt able to express a sense of contentment, though only by imagining the physical landscape as an antiquated European painting.

And, as his readers would by this point have anticipated, Brooke's mood shifted again as he climbed one of the nearby mountains at sunset. Rather than adopting the monarch-of-all-I-survey perspective famously identified with male imperialism by Mary Louise Pratt (213), he contemplated the

"strangeness" that he had observed throughout his North American travels, namely that to love what was "an empty land" was "like embracing a wraith" (153). England's soil was "heavy and fertile with the decaying stuff of past seasons and generations," but in the Rocky Mountains "there is nothing lurking in the heart of the shadows, and no human mystery in the colours, and neither the same joy nor the kind of peace in dawn and sunset that older lands know" (154-5). Even where capitalist development was not a threat, as it was in Calgary, Brooke felt dissatisfied. The land might be "virginal," every lake "new-born," and the flowers "less conscious than English flowers," but, he lamented, "one misses the dead" (156).

Despite his ignorance concerning the presence, history, and culture of First Nations people in what he described as an "empty land," Brooke's romantic anti-modernism predisposed him towards the myth of the "Noble Savage," a myth that had long served those who were critical of European materialism, individualism, and corruption (Francis). In contrast to those he labelled as the "French and Scotch half-breeds" who "frequent the borders of civilisation" further east (136), Brooke depicted those Aboriginal peoples who he imagined as relatively "unspoiled" by European contact as children of Nature, though he did slip into the past tense when describing their virtues. Thus, he wrote, they might have a weakness for gambling and warfare, but they had once "enjoyed a 'Nature-Worship,' believed rather dimly in a presiding Power, and very definitely in certain ethical and moral rules." He configured them as loyal, brave, and stoical, and claimed that they had also been monogamous, good parents to their children, and completely honest (138-39). In short, the Indigenous peoples had once embodied the very ideals that the young Neo-Pagans aspired to.

As for physical appearance, the traveller known as England's "young Apollo" (Delany ix) wrote that the older men on the Stony reserve he visited had "superb" physiques, "their features shaped and lined by weather and experience into a Roman nobility that demands respect" (141). But these men represented the past, for "[c]ivilisation, disease, alcohol, and vice" had reduced the Stonys "to a few scattered communities and some stragglers, and a legend, the admiration of boyhood" (139). Criticizing the government's efforts to assimilate the First Nations, Brooke asked: "Shall we preserve these few bands of them, untouched, to succeed us, ultimately, when the grasp of our 'civilisation' weakens, and our transient anarchy in these wilder lands recedes once more before the older anarchy of Nature? Or will they be entirely swallowed by that ugliness of shops and trousers with which we

enchain the earth, and become a memory and less than a memory?" (143). The colonialist implications of what Pratt refers to as the "anti-conquest" narrative, namely "strategies of representation whereby European bourgeois subjects seek to secure their innocence in the same moment as they assert European hegemony" (7), becomes clear with Brooke's rather arrogant conclusion that "[t]hey are that already. The Indians have passed. They left no arts, no tradition, no buildings or roads or laws; only a story or two, and a few names, strange and beautiful" (143). As Owram and Moyles point out, this was a commonly shared view among British travel writers of the day. The romantic young poet would have to cross the Pacific to the South Sea islands before discovering, at least in his own mind, the Rousseauesque paradise that he was searching for.

Brooke's *Westminster Gazette* articles did not include this paradise or even the west coast of Canada, but he was quite impressed with Vancouver where he spent several days, writing to his mother on September 8 that "[t]he country and harbour are rather beautiful with great violet mountains all around, snow-peaks in the distance" (Keynes 508). And, in the clear ocean waters off Victoria, Brooke observed that "[a] few gigantic stalks of glossy brown seaweed seemed to be shouldering their way shoreward through the calm. The opal light caught them, and passed, and breathed over the waters. There was great peace and beauty in the mountains and the sea" (Martin and Hall 141-42). Finally, as children played nearby on the beach, Brooke's conflicting thoughts turned to Canada: "I thought of her possibilities, and of her wealth and corruption and individualism and ugliness" (Martin and Hall 142).

Brooke was writing at a time of renewed imperialist interest in the former colonies, as reflected in the revival of British travel writing on Canada (Moyles and Owram), and he identified as an imperialist, himself. Thus, he promoted Canada's contribution to the British navy and opposed eastern European immigration to the Prairies, yet his travel articles reflect a sense of alienation rather than a confident colonialism. By the time Brooke reached the west coast he had clearly had enough of the country without a "soul," and he was eager to set sail for San Francisco. Although informed by the *Westminster Gazette* that they never published more than six articles in a series, Brooke reported to his friend and agent that he was continuing to keep a journal in the hope that that there might be a second series, or that the articles could be sold singly, but those on Vancouver and Victoria have survived only in hand-written fragments.[21] Two years after leaving Canada, "the handsomest young man in England" (Hastings)—whose famous war

poems welcomed death as a purging of the sins of the flesh—would die in uniform from an infected mosquito bite and be buried on an obscure Greek island (Delany 210). The final irony was that he was lionized as a sacrifice for the preservation of a pastoral England that was succumbing to forces unleashed by the same war he had enlisted to fight in.

Laskowski's optimistic interpretation of *Letters from America* is that it records Brooke's "internal odyssey to 'health' as much as it documents the reactions of a young Cambridge Apostle to America in the years immediately preceding World War I" (83). But this assessment misses the travel narrative's bleak sense of fatalism, and the reason why, as Eksteins observes, the troubled young writer became "a symbol of the spiritual confusion and longing of his generation" (26). Conrad is closer to the mark than Laskowski when he refers to Brooke's adventure as his "renunciatory journey, traveling through civilization to bid it farewell" (88). Brooke's aim was not to renounce civilization, however, as much as it was to escape it temporarily in order to restore his mental health and assert his manliness. Thus, in a letter to the London actress who was one of his love interests, Brooke described in somewhat gothic terms how he had participated in the night time butchering of a deer at Lake George: "the black water of the lake, muddy with trampling at the edge, and streaked with blood, . . . the head gazing reproachfully at us from the ground, everybody using the most frightful language, and the rather ironical and very dispassionate stars above. Rather savage" (Keynes 496).[22] Brooke's reference to the onlooking stars suggests that he saw his own role essentially as theatrical performance.[23] Reflective of his inner torments as the gothic convention may have been, it also enabled Brooke to endow what he perceived to be a young and rather unexotic country with the soul he felt it lacked, if only for the sake of making his articles more interesting. Rather than renouncing civilization, Brooke's travel narrative lamented what he perceived to be the cultural void, not only of the wilderness landscape but also of the principal cities of the New World, infected as they were by materialism and individualism. In short, the conservative young poet was ill at ease in the present and his journey across Canada offered little hope for the future; what he longed for was the irretrievable past with its comforting traditions, rituals, and hierarchies.[24]

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NOTES

1 On the obsession with death in Brooke's poetry, see Caesar 17-18, 46-48. Spooner refers to "a modernist understanding of gothic as interior drama rather than dramatic spectacle" (39). For a more detailed discussion, see Northey 3-9.
2 Originally written in 1871, James' two articles appeared in a volume of his travel essays in 1883.
3 Thus, Peter Conrad mistakenly assumes that Brooke had a modernist sensibility, claiming that his travel journal "is the first modern imaginative appreciation of the country [United States] because it joyfully discerns in America not social accoutrement or complication of detail but irrelevance, irresponsibility, absence" (89).
4 Brooke to Cathleen Nesbitt, Noo [sic] York, Sunday [1 June 1913] (Keynes 469).
5 British travellers had much the same impression. See Moyles and Owram 217-25.
6 For a persuasive critique of this thesis, see Glickman, esp. 45-58.
7 Brooke wrote from the Chateau Frontenac on 3 July, and Ottawa on 9 July (Keynes 479-80).
8 For contemporary comments made concerning the visual pollution caused by smoke in Montreal, with its impact on public health, see Kenny 62-65.
9 Other British travellers shared this view of the Catholic Church (Moyles and Owram 96-100).
10 Brooke wrote to Cathleen Nesbitt, "My dear, it's not a river: it's a part of Hell, got loose. . . . It's like some ghastly dream of Dante's." Letter to Cathleen Nesbitt, Chateau Frontenac, Quebec, 3 July [1913] (Keynes 479-80).
11 According to William Hughes and Andrew Smith, "the Gothic is, and has always been, *post*-colonial" (1).
12 Golders Green had developed rapidly as a London suburb after a tube station was opened there in 1910 (n. pag.). "Golders Green." *Wikipedia*. Web. 5 Mar. 2013.
13 McKinsey's sole quote from Brooke that "Niagara means nothing" (274) is clearly misleading.
14 On various literary responses to Niagara Falls, see Jasen 31-35; and Revie ch. 2.
15 The normally restrained Henry James resorted to even more animated imagery (see 370, 374) though Revie (108) claims that it was meant to be satirical.
16 Karen Dubinsky has noted the common identification of Niagara Falls as female (see 42-45). On Brooke's Victorian attitude towards female sexuality, see Caesar 29-30.
17 Privately, Brooke wrote: "I sit and stare at the thing and have the purest Nineteenth Century grandiose thoughts, about the Destiny of Man, the Irresistibility of Fate, the Doom of Nations, the fact that Death awaits us all, and so forth. Wordsworth Redivivus. Oh dear! Oh dear!" Letter to Scholfield (Keynes 491). McGreevy rather surprisingly ignores Brooke's journal, but writes that "[t]he Niagara literature offers glimpses of nineteenth-century soul-searching and speculation that are symptomatic of a more general cultural turmoil" (11).
18 To the English literary critic Edmund Gosse, Brooke wrote: "I have a perpetual feeling that a lake ought not to be this size. A river and a little lake and an ocean are natural; but not these creatures. They are too big, and too smooth, and too sunny; like an American business man." Lake Superior, 27 July 1913 (Keynes 494).
19 On the growing belief that the debilitating influence of modern urban life required a "rest cure" in the wilderness, see Jasen ch. 5.
20 Note the parallel with Catharine Parr Traill's complaint in *The Backwoods of Canada* (1836) that "[i]t is the most unpoetical of all lands, . . . there is no hoary ancient grandeur in

these woods, no recollection of former deeds connected with the country" (qtd. in Zeller 4). This theme was, in turn, echoed in 1947 by the poet Earle Birney: "It's only by our lack of ghosts / we're haunted" (qtd. in Hammill 47). For other examples, see Sugars 416-17.

21 Letter to Edward Marsh, San Francisco, 1 Oct. [1913] (Keynes 513-14). The two fragments are published in Martin and Hall 139-43.

22 Two days later, however, Brooke admitted to her that "I'm glad that I'm no 'sportsman.'" (Keynes 497).

23 One is reminded of Frye's comment that "[t]ravellers visit Canada much as they would visit a zoo: even when their eyes momentarily focus on the natives they are still thinking primarily of how their own sensibility is going to react to what it sees" (Frye 69).

24 It is therefore difficult to include Brooke with the young men whom Eksteins claims welcomed the war "as a pathway to the future, to progress, to revolution, to change" (133).

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Stephen Matthew Brown

5. Fuente de La Cibeles

You can bounce pretty much anywhere from here,
callejero, by foot, mediatized in errance over the
balustrade patio brick cobblestone, where the
streets crisscross to 6 points that pixelate
in a pointillist blur out of place w/ the place name
the street-sign subtext's, whose message is autism,
the manna of readymade's that made you realize
you can bounce pretty much anywhere from here

5.1
A man with one leg leaning his stub on a tree stump
With half a half joint in his calloused yellow finger-tips
Collected popcans with a tree branch walking stick
Outside a fleamarket La Fayuca where you get galangal
And acacia koa in trade for Campeche axiote, dallying
In exile in a pointillist blur out of place with the x-pats,
Who manna each moment to a mediatized readymade,
So that nothing's peppered with a discordant politics.

5.2
Quiet and integrated, the widow in the subway window, at a standstill in a sort of drugged stasis in utero, carrying a bag of curry leaves in a tweed satchel, whose evening was sketched out in a routine plan, so it was that, leaning against the green plastic metro-car interior wall panelling, quiet and integrated, I was, an I referencing an I unendingly as I, the two of us repeated patterns repeating a pattern.

When the subway stalled inside a side tunnel I put on casiotone for the painfully alone and thought of home.

David Williams

Spectres of Time

Seeing Ghosts in Will Bird's Memoirs and Abel Gance's *J'accuse*

Will Bird, a veteran of the Canadian Expeditionary Force whose memoir *And We Go On* (1930) made him a hugely popular speaker throughout the Thirties at Royal Canadian Legion events and at various memorial associations,[1] was frankly bewildered by the success of Erich Maria Remarque's story of universal despair and brutalization in *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929). In a subsequent volume of trivia and scattered remarks about the war, Bird wrote that, of seven translations he had read of German war books, he found Ernst Jünger's *The Storm of Steel* (private pub. 1920; commercial pub. 1924) to be the best, while the "poorest of all, I think, [is] *All Quiet on the Western Front*" (*Communication* 86). As Jonathan Vance notes, the undisputed preference of former soldiers for Bird's view of the war over that of Remarque "suggests that he came closest to capturing the proper balance" (28) between the threat of degradation, brutalization and demoralization in the trenches, and those finer qualities of character and civic nobility that modern warfare might yet assay.

While it now seems curiously dated, the negative response to *All Quiet* of a great number of readers from Australia to New Zealand to Britain to America cannot be summarily dismissed. Critic Modris Eksteins notes that "[t]raditionalists were incensed by what they saw as a completely one-sided portrait of the war experience. They objected to the language in the novel, to the horrifying images, to the frequent references to bodily functions" (355). More pointedly, Eksteins recalls that, "[t]o the German military the novel was 'a singularly monstrous slander of the German army' and thus a piece of 'refined pacifist propaganda.' The military everywhere, for that matter,

was inclined to support such a view. In November 1929, the Czechoslovak war department banned *All Quiet* from military libraries" (356). While Remarque had, rightly or wrongly, "accused a mechanistic civilization of destroying humane values" (352), he had evidently offended soldiers on all sides by denying that individual agency was still possible under conditions of modern warfare. For, as Eksteins claims, "[t]he characters of his *generazione bruciata* do not act, they are merely victims" (352). It is their narrators' plaintive passivity, as much as anything, that makes the "anti-war memory" of such books as *All Quiet* more than "just a different perception of events," and rather closer to "a series of malicious falsehoods that constituted a personal attack on the individual soldier" (Vance 27). Worse yet, it was seen to dishonour the memory of dead comrades unable to defend or even to address the continuing value of their sacrifice.[2]

For such reasons, the controversy generated by Remarque and other writers of the anti-war canon did inform Bird's memoir, though not merely in defense of the traditional forms of mourning catalogued by Jay Winter, nor even in answer to that "modern" irony[3] which some would see as the soul of Great War writing, much less that soulless world of "mechanistic" functioning remarked by Eksteins. Rather, Bird's preface offers several complex motives for writing: "[w]e are being deluged now, a decade after the war, by books that are putrid with so-called 'realism' . . . On the whole, such literature, offered to our avid youth, is an irrevocable insult to those gallant men who lie in French or Belgian graves" (5). He not only condemns that "[v]ulgar language and indelicacy of incident" to which traditionalists had objected in the work of Remarque and others, but he defends the memory of the "gallant" dead who were much and always more than passive victims. More largely, he rejects the claims of "realism" to represent the war. And his moral critique is almost indistinguishable from his epistemological critique, given that the portrait in the anti-war books of "the soldier as a coarse-minded, profane creature, seeking only the solace of loose women or the courage of strong liquor" is often a dishonest "substitute for lack of knowledge," in which the "distorted pictures of battle action are especially repugnant" (5).

In these "distorted pictures of battle," Bird seems to refer to Remarque[4] as well as others whose depictions of "soulless mechanization" in war are belied by such accounts as Jünger's memoir of soldierly agency—of courage, indeed, and will—set against the backdrop of a "storm of steel."[5] But where Bird resorts to an unseen world of the spirit to correct the distortion, it cannot be, at least initially, for reasons of loss or mourning, since his first ghost sighting occurs

before he learns of his bereavement. And, rather than focus on the apparition alone, he places his emphasis on the act of perception: "[t]his story is an effort to reveal a side of the war that has not been given much attention, the psychic effect it had on its participants. There existed before all battles and even in the calms [sic] of the trench routine, a condition before which all natural explanations failed, and no supernatural explanations were established" (4).

Let me state this exactly: I do not say that Bird denies or downplays the existence of the apparition; only that his concern is with the medium of its appearance, of how it appears to *him*. Insisting on the reality of his experience, he writes, "[e]very case of premonition I have described is actual fact; each of my own psychic experiences were [sic] exactly as recorded. The reader may term them fantasies, the results of over-strained emotion, what he will; there are many who know he cannot explain them" (6). While he asks us to read a war memoir that is also a ghost story, he does so in ways that seem closely related to the "spiritual" dimensions of cinema that Abel Gance had first explored in "The Return of the Dead" sequence of his anti-war film *J'accuse* (1919).[6] Indeed, Bird's work marks a similar shift in the temporal and perceptual frameworks of Western culture, given how his spectres, like those of Gance, appear to manifest themselves as cinematic doubles of the subject, and thus to function within the conventions and properties of cinematic technology available in the era.

And We Go On (1930)

An unseen world of "some mighty Power" may well underwrite Bird's *And We Go On,* even where he fully shares "the rancor" of the canonical anti-war writers who detest military authority, and even when he is as quick as any to despise "mosquito-brained recruiting officers" (14). A veteran of the 42nd Battalion, the Black Watch of Canada, Bird had been rejected by recruiters in Nova Scotia, and again by "a Western battalion" (13), before he was finally able to enlist, despite his "bad teeth," in 1916. As he readily admits:

> It was a long summer, that of '16. In my soured frame of mind I was often in trouble with officers and non-coms, and I refused to take promotion. One stripe was forced on me at last and led to my being imprisoned in the "fox farm," a wired enclosure on a hill back of the camp. There I served a sentence that lasted till just before we sailed. (14)

Countless scenes of military stupidity would seem to parallel events in Charles Yale Harrison's *Generals Die in Bed* (1930), were it not for Bird's sense of "the mystic and supernal" (5) forces that soldiers encountered in

the trenches: "Never on earth was there a like place where a man's support, often his sole support, was his faith in some mighty Power. All intervening thoughts were swept aside. Unconsciously there were born faiths that carried men through critical moments, and tortured minds grasped fantasies that served in place of more solid creeds" (4). Already on the first page of the preface, his quotation from the *Rubáiyat of Omar Khayam*[7] suggests that such "fantasies" might be shaped by traditional creeds, particularly when referred to as "the Master Knot of Human Fate" (4). Yet very different in kind is this later account of a cavalry charge on the first day of the Battle of Amiens (8 August 1918): "The mounted men dashed into the Wood, directly at the waiting gunners. Killing began as if on signal from some master director. The Maxims opened fire and men and horses rolled among the shrubbery or fell in the open" (221). The "master director" will not be explicitly linked to cinema until a revised version is published four decades later, when the sentence "Killing began" now reads, "as if it were a grand movie scene" (Bird, *Ghosts* 147). By 1968, however, Bird had excised that all-important preface expressing his opposition to writers of the anti-war canon and their reduction of soldiers to cogs in the machinery of war and of war to a state of ironic absurdity.

By the 1960s, Bird had decided to excise all but two supernatural visions from the revised memoir now entitled *Ghosts Have Warm Hands*. Even the original sighting of the ghost[8] of his dead brother Steve has been cut, along with most of the first chapter:

> He went to France in September, 1915, and the next month was in a trench on Hill 60 that was mined by the Germans. Only fragments were found of him and a dozen of his comrades. I was working in a harvest field in Saskatchewan, pitching sheaves on a wagon, when Steve walked around the cart and confronted me. He said not a word but I knew all as if he had spoken, for he had on his equipment and was carrying his rifle. (*And We Go On* 13)

Later, in their first encounter on the battlefield, Steve's ghost rouses him from sleep in a scene that largely survives in the revised edition. The ghost hurries him from "a shelter" in the "railway embankment" where his sleeping comrades are about to be killed by an artillery shell: "He jerked a thumb towards the ruined houses and motioned for me to go to them. I did not speak. I thought that if I could do exactly as he said, and not wake the others, perhaps he would actually speak to me" (72). In a fashion entirely consistent with silent cinema, Steve's apparition never speaks in Bird's hearing, although in the edition published four decades later, the ghost will

address him before Will is able to open his mouth: "Steve grinned as he released my hands, then put his warm hand over my mouth as I started to shout my happiness. He pointed to the sleepers in the bivvy and to my rifle and equipment. 'Get your gear,' he said softly . . . As soon as we were past the shelters I hurried to get close to Steve. 'Why didn't you write Mother?' I asked. He turned and the grin was still on his face. 'Wait,' he said. 'Don't talk yet'" (*Ghosts* 39).

Obviously acclimated to the "talkies" by 1968, Bird now recalled Steve's voice in a way that had seemed "unnatural" in the silent film era. Here is the "silent" scene:

> It was a snug bivvy and there was plenty of room for the three of us. We were soon asleep, but about midnight I was wakened by a tug at my arm. I looked up quickly, throwing back my ground sheet, and there stood Steve!
>
> I could see him plainly, see the mud on his puttees and knees. He jerked a thumb towards the ruined houses and motioned for me to go to them. I did not speak. I thought that if I could do exactly as he said, and not wake the others, perhaps he would actually speak to me. He started to walk away as I gathered up my equipment and rifle and greatcoat, and when I hurried he simply faded from view. (72)

While his bunkmates are still blown to bits in *Ghosts* by an artillery shell, the differences after four decades are telling; Bird recalls the scene in 1968 with a sensibility shaped by modern film, where sound both complements and enriches the picture, while the memoirist of the 1920s had nothing more than sight on which to rely: "I could see him plainly, see the mud on his puttees and knees," before "he simply faded from view" (72).

In large part, cinematic fades and silent appearances are ubiquitous devices in the earlier memoir, suggesting their affinity with silent film. At "Jigsaw Wood," for example:

> All at once I looked up and Steve was standing beside me. He did not say a word but looked around the cellar, then at me, and nodded toward the stairway. I placed my mess-tin on the stone where I was sitting and followed him across the steps.
>
> "Don't go up," Hughes said. "There's a lot of stuff coming pretty close, and orders are to keep under cover."
>
> "I'll be just a minute," I said, and never stopped. Steve was just ahead of me, as plain to my eyes as any of the others, and I was eager, keen. Would he speak to me?
>
> As we stepped out of the entrance to the road a salvo of shells crashed into a field just in front and, like the smoke and mist that drifted away from them, Steve faded away from view. I stood peering, watching where I had seen him last and—crash! A terrific explosion in the cellar! (*And We Go On* 251)

Bird's emphasis on sight, followed by the cinematic fade, is accentuated by the silence of the scene, the poignant yearning of the narrator to hear his dead brother speak. Denied the sound of speech, the memoirist remains mentally confined to the era of silent cinema.

Conversely, in *Ghosts*, the apparition "gripped my hand tighter and pulled me toward the door: 'Let's get from here—fast!' he said. The half-grin was on his face exactly as I had seen it the last time. . . . Steve was going up the steps and I was so close to him his boot hit my shin. It caused me to stumble and by the time I had caught my balance he was looking back, smiling. Then, in a heartbeat, he vanished" (169). The point is not simply that Bird makes use of the available resources of cinema unique to each era; it is rather that the memoirist of the first edition shapes such incidents as if to realize the vision of an unknown "master director." Contrary to Remarque and Harrison in their use of cinematic techniques,[9] Bird shows how a "ghost" might well inhabit the "machine."

Nor is it just the narrator who has these visions, or suffers from "second sight." From the first words of the first chapter, we meet men who at every turn are troubled by a sense of the uncanny: "I tell you I saw everything plainer than day," says Freddy, a "little man who seldom talked, but now he had started from his sleep and would not be stilled."

> "It was like a woman in white and it came right through that laced flap and went around the pole and pointed at you, and you, and you." He jerked a thumb toward six of the men who were in their blankets. "And I know," he went on, "that I'm going to get mine—I'll never see Canada again."
>
> There was something in his voice that stirred us strangely. He had had a very vivid dream—his voice and attitude told us how deeply he was moved—and Freddy was not a man who dreamed regularly. (*And We Go* On 9)

Yet Bird will not ask us to accept without question these instances of "the mystic and supernal": "Long after all the others were snoring I lay there in the dark and thought about Freddy's dream. Was there anything in dreams? Why had he seemed so certain?" (10). The answer, of course, is that every portent will be confirmed in the narrative; first Freddy, then each of the six, will "get theirs," just as predicted.

Like the preface, this scene and similar incidents of "supernal" superstition are cut from the text of *Ghosts*, a title that ironically conceals the dwindling importance of "the mystic and the supernal" to Bird's later memoir where he cuts the apparition of Steve from fourteen to two appearances.[10] Much as the cosmic director disappears from the "grand movie scene" in *Ghosts*, so

the narrator's deeply disquieting sense of standing apart from himself, as if watching himself in battle, is cut from *Ghosts.* Yet in *And We Go On*, it is a sense evidently shaped by cinema, as in this account of "Jigsaw Wood":

> Word came that we were to attack, and without a barrage; the lines were too complicated to allow artillery support. . . . Here and there I saw lips moving … I was not the least bit nervous myself. It was not that I had courage, but the fact that I could go over with a curious inexplicable feeling that my body was functioning quite apart from me. I saw myself doing strange things and seemed powerless to prevent or assist that which happened. (255)

Early film viewers had experienced something similar, as reported of one early exhibition of the Lumière brothers' new projection system in Lyon in June 1895, where viewers were confounded by images of a M. Janssen and a M. Lagrange moving and gesticulating on screen in their own persons, though sitting still amidst the audience (Matsuda 174). A related ontological confusion[11] occurs in the print *Memoirs of George Sherston* (1930), as Sassoon's narrator catches sight of his image in a mirror, just before the Battle of Arras, and finds that he is "staring back at himself from both sides of the glass." The point, as I have argued in "'Spectral Images': The Double Vision of Siegfried Sassoon,"[12] is that cinema altered our perceptual frameworks, and what had been latent in mechanical forms of doubling suddenly materialized in cinematic forms of doubling. Henceforth, the doppelgänger was to become an *animated* reality as well as a *psychological* illusion.

Bird's peculiar sense of his "body . . . functioning quite apart from me," while triggered by intense emotions of battle, had already been rendered familiar by the new perceptual frameworks of cinema. For the crucial difference between film and earlier media is that time was now materially (not just imaginatively) incorporated into motion pictures, along with the two spatial dimensions of length and width, if not depth. In other words, film's evocation of hidden dimensions of space and time on film[13] justified his markedly "anti-realist" claim to have witnessed the ghost of his brother in "a different sphere of existence," as if projected into his sphere; it even allows him to watch himself acting in another dimension beyond himself. Late in the narrative, he will explicitly equate these two experiences of phenomenological doubling: "I told him [the Student] how so often I seemed to stand mentally outside myself and wonder at my actions, and of the way Steve came to me. He was intensely interested and we became close friends" (*And We Go On* 284). The only thing Bird does not confess to his friend is his uncanny sense that they are now both featured in the cinema shot of an unseen "master director."

In sum, Bird's first version of his memoir allows us to glimpse new possibilities in the fourth dimension (time) of film that Remarque and Harrison, in their own cinematic narratives, and that Milestone in the film version of *All Quiet*, had reduced to a deadly mechanization of time. And yet this alternative view of a "ghost in the machine" had been available for at least a decade before any of these four. It first appears in a film that, like Will Bird's *And We Go On*, will sharply recoil from the waste and horror of war by staging a return of the dead on screen, so creating "a simultaneity of past and present in time and space" (Matsuda 174) in an unsettling new medium where seeing ghosts is naturalized by technology.

J'accuse (1919)

The long shadow cast by cinema over the events of 1914-1918, as well as over later mutations in the culture of the book, looms nowhere larger than in Abel Gance's feature-length film, *J'accuse* (1919), shot (some of it on location at the Battle of St. Mihiel) in the final year of the war, and given its advance screening mere days after the Armistice (Winter 134). As Gance recalled, Henri Barbusse's novel *Le Feu* (1916)

> had made a great impression on me as it was very energetic in its opposition to the war. So I was wondering what subject I could take to demonstrate the futility of war. And one day, when I was crossing the Boulevard du Château, still mobilized, I had this idea which I'd had long before, that if all the dead from the war—and they were uncountable—came back, the war would stop at once. I told myself that I must give the public this message—and so the idea came to me from one pavement to the other. (qtd. in Brownlow, *Napoléon* 28)

The cinematic result—a fourteen-minute sequence near the end of a three-hour movie—is one of the most justly celebrated scenes in the history of early cinema. In it, the dead rise from a dark, forbidding cemetery filled with crosses that, in the blink of an eye, metamorphose into a field of corpses huddled in the same red-tinted soil where wooden crosses had stood. Then one of the dead stirs, and, over a three-minute sequence, gets to his knees and rises to command legions of the dead to rise with him. A title card reads, "Their faces were muddy, their eye-sockets filled with stars. They came without number from the base of the horizon in waves of awakened dead."[14] Soon, they will come marching in frames of blood-red tint over several minutes of film down the tree-lined roads and lanes of le Midi, pursuing the terrified narrator Jean Diaz, the sentry who was standing watch at the foot of the cemetery. When Jean reaches home, he warns the villagers that the dead are returning to see whether their sacrifice has been to any purpose, that the

dead wish to know whether the loss of "the best" has led to the betterment of those "worse who survive."[15]

In a nuanced reading of Gance's film, Jay Winter recalls how millions of bereaved survivors around the globe did find solace for their grief in the filmmaker's vision, as well as value in their loved ones' sacrifice. Winter also reminds us that Gance "was not alone. Other film-makers working in the interwar cinema touched the same deep chord of mass mourning for the 'Lost Generation of the Great War'" (138). For such reasons, it is worthwhile to read *J'accuse* with Winter in terms of the spiritualist séances[16] that were a hallmark of worldwide mourning in the 1920s, and to regard cinema more generally as "a kind of semi-private séance, bringing old images to millions through 'modern technology'" (Winter 138).[17] And yet Winter's reading also reduces the medium to its content, making it the latest instalment of romantic *images d'Épinal*, such as those of Napoléon that, in the 1820s, had been grafted onto a waning tradition of religious iconography, and whose "quasi-religious aura" (Winter 123) held out hope of the return of the glories of the First Empire. These patriotic lithographs of Epinal would also be remobilized in the early days of the Great War to help raise public morale. By invoking the help of "Old-timers to the Rescue," and by aligning "the men of battles past with the front-line soldiers of 1914," the image-makers could draw on older sources "celebrating the martial virtues of the Grand Army and its glorious victories a century before" (129).

There may be better warrant than Winter sees for aligning Gance's "Return of the Dead" with a revanchist tradition of Gallic glory. In a scene cut into the first version of *J'accuse* in 1922, three years after the victory parade under the Arc de Triomphe,[18] the living (in warm brown tints) come marching in an overhead long shot lasting six seconds, cutting to a medium long shot of soldiers marching for another eight seconds through la Place d'Étoile. A straight-cut leads to the following title: "The unknown dead … all the dead … all the great dead … were also passing."[19] After this title, the screen splits to footage of the dead in blood-red tints marching for thirteen long seconds above the victors, in a belated gesture to the most famous image in the revanchist repertoire, Édouard Detaille's monumental painting *Le Rêve* (1888), where the "glorious vanquished" of 1870-1871 lie in a broad field with fasces of rifles dotting the spaces between hundreds of bedrolls on the ground, while in the heavens above the sleeping soldiers there march columns of men in airy uniforms behind Napoléon.[20] The sheer size of the image (4 m x 3 m), taking up an entire gallery wall of the Musée d'Orsay,

evokes awe. But a curious thing happens when the image is translated onto film: the lower half begins to darken into the same red tint of the upper half, before the camera cuts to a shot of Jean Diaz fleeing the marching dead, then cuts back to a single, unified plane of men marching along a country road. The living appear to have joined the dead, though the march goes on, erasing boundaries between life and death, as the dead return to confront the living.

Long after the fact, Gance would acknowledge that

> The conditions in which we filmed were profoundly moving. There were great numbers of soldiers coming to the Midi on eight day passes—a little breather after four years at the front. By that time, I was shooting in the Midi, so I asked the local HQ if I could borrow two thousand soldiers. I wanted to shoot the sequence of the Return of the Dead. These men had come straight from the Front—from Verdun—and they were due back eight days later. They played the dead knowing that in all probability they'd be dead themselves before long. Within a few weeks of their return eighty per cent had been killed. (qtd. in Brownlow, *The Parade's Gone By* 614)

At the same time, these fated men, whose images still live on film, return to life in ways beyond the reach of Detaille's soldiers who either sleep immobile on the ground or pass in frozen procession through unmoving clouds. For the medium allows the filmmaker to raise ghosts at will; the dead return on celluloid from an infinity of time, crossing the gap between sky and earth in a manner that exposes a painterly gulf between past and present. Kevin Brownlow may claim too much that, in this film, Gance "made fuller use of the medium than anyone before or since" (*The Parade's Gone By* 596); but Gance had at least the courage to take his medium literally, to link its material potential to render the past as being present with the psychological power of his theme of the Return of the Dead. Content and form begin to merge before our eyes in the fourth dimension of film; the past literally *moves*.

For such reasons, Winter is guilty of reducing the sequence to a "dream," or of reading it as a catalyst in the rise of surrealism, or even as one more "twentieth-century revival of popular romanticism" (142-43). The film, of course, has to allow for the Return of the Dead as a collective dream. Jean Diaz returns from the hospital to his lover Edith Laurin who struggles to understand his feverish anxiety. To which Jean responds, "The nightmare … the dreams … life … the war … the dead … and the living … I no longer know! I accuse!"[21] Fourteen astounding film-minutes later, as Edith reluctantly closes the door on this moving recessional of the dead, she asks, "Were we dreaming? Is it all a marvellous suggestion? Under what influence were we then?"[22] And yet one must doubt that it was merely a dream, since

what began as Jean's narrative has come to life, not only to the villagers but to viewers of the film as well. Perhaps more so to us nine decades later than to Edith in the moment, for the dead have now come to include each face on screen. The soldier-actors returning to their doom at Verdun, the "villagers" who survived the war, and the popular film stars Romuald Joubé (Jean), Marise Dauvray (Edith), and Séverin-Mars (Edith's husband François Laurin) have by now all joined the soldiers as well.

So what is it that survives on film? "It is an incontestable fact," writes Stanley Cavell,

> that in a motion picture no live human being is up there. But a human *something* is, and something unlike anything else we know. We can stick to our plain description of that human something as "in our presence while we are not in his" (present *at* him, because looking at him, but not present *to* him) and still account for the difference between his live presence and his photographed presence to us. We need to consider what is present or, rather, since the topic is the human being, *who* is present. (26-27)

What or who is present to the villagers in the fourth dimension of film should be a guide of sorts to what we do see: in the scene where her father appears to Edith, Maria Lazare stands (in red tint) at the window of an exterior corridor, looking sadly through the glass, one hand extending towards her. A reverse shot reveals Edith in brown-tint staring slack-jawed, before the title card expresses the hope of "the best" that the worse may yet be improved. Another reverse shot reveals Maria Lazare's yearning face, before a helmeted soldier passes in the left windowpane with the father still straining to touch his daughter through the glass. The title announces that the newcomer is Edith's dead husband, François, who gazes lovingly at her as she reaches toward him, her lips trembling, before he raises his hands to prevent her passage from life to death. At this point, another title-card quotes four lines from the poet Pierre Corneille:

> May a beautiful fire transport you
> And, far from mourning my loss of the light,
> Believe that we never die
> When we die in this way.[23]

In a manner hauntingly similar to our own viewing situation, Edith gazes on the face of her husband in the frame of the window, as we gaze on the faces of the dead (and the living) in the frame of the screen.[24]

To a film theorist like Laura Mulvey, this type of cinematic "threshold between life and death becomes a space of uncertainty in which boundaries blur between the rational and the supernatural, the animate and the

inanimate" (37). But in the doubled spectatorship of the scene—the film viewer watching the living regarding the dead who continue (in the past-progressive-present tense of cinema) to move before our/their eyes—Gance appears to be far more intent on effacing, not just blurring, the boundaries between life and death.[25] Edith's uncertainty—"Were we dreaming"—is belied by what we have seen with our own eyes. "What influence were we under then?" she asks rhetorically, since we have seen exactly what she sees. We are under the spell of the visible necromancy of the medium.

So we stare across the gulf at . . . what? At minimum, we stare at another time that moves before our eyes: *we are looking at time*.[26] There is no better way to describe it: Gance's "Return of the Dead" necessarily differs in *kind* from the dream of painted soldiers in Detaille's celestial image because the former appear to us in the past-progressive-present tense, while the latter remain fixed in a painted, absolute past. Gance's dead soldiers, in other words, continue to move through time in ways that the spirit-followers of Napoléon can't ever hope to do in their frozen march across the heavens. In unprecedented fashion, the filmmaker fulfills the potential of his medium to bring the dead back from eternity. Though we cannot penetrate the barrier of death ourselves, we are privy to their flickering afterlife at least to this extent: that our gaze is fixed upon the face of time. As, it appears, is Will Bird's gaze in conjuring up his brother's ghost in fixities of print that open into cinematic dimensions of space and time.

The Uncanny and the Mechanical

It is finally in this blurring of boundaries between life and death that "the uncanny nature of the cinematic image returns most forcefully," Mulvey maintains in *Death 24x a Second*, "and with it, the conceptual space of uncertainty: that is, the difficulty of understanding time and the presence of death in life" (53). The unprecedented scale of death in the Great War was to make such understanding more difficult than ever, and Mulvey's Freudian explanation of watching the dead return to life on film is both logical and warranted. As she reads the effect of the technological uncanny, "[t]he threshold between life and death becomes a space of uncertainty in which boundaries blur between the rational and the supernatural, the animate and the inanimate" (37). As she sees it, however, the uncanny is less than an effect of reality (the materiality of the image); the still frame is merely a material illusion, and hence exploitable. In the late nineteenth century, professional magicians like Georges Méliès had realized cinema's potential to exploit the

"technological uncertainty" (44) deriving from the illusion of movement. Other skeptics, like the magician Harry Houdini, used such arts of deception to debunk faith in Spiritualism. "The showmen's aim," according to Mulvey, "was to create a space for doubt and generate the *frisson* associated with the breakdown of understanding that gives rise not to a belief in the illusion but to a sense of intellectual uncertainty" (45).

Such fashionable "uncertainty" is not, however, what animates the memoirs of Will Bird. While his spectres can and do evoke the uncanny nature of the cinematic image, he refused to doubt the reality of his brother's ghost. In both versions, Steve's spirit materializes with the same solidity that he had possessed in life. Even in his revisions, Bird explicitly denies a rational impulse to "explain" things by uncertainty, insisting most directly on the reality of the apparition in his changed title, *Ghosts Have Warm Hands* (1968). Where Mulvey adopts a rational stance—"We can certainly say, with Freud, that we have surmounted belief in the return of the dead, of animate forces in nature and even belief in the afterlife" (53)—Bird seems to believe that the afterlife could exist in another dimension, if still quite near to us. "I had seen Steve as clearly as I saw Mickey," he adds to the text of *Ghosts*. "His warm hands had pulled me from the bivvy. . . . [N]ow I knew beyond all argument or theory, by any man learned or otherwise, that there was a hereafter, and there would never again be the slightest doubt in my mind about it" (41).

If Bird's sense of the uncanny has nothing to do with Mulvey's uncertainty, how are we to explain his reduction of ghost sightings in the later version from fourteen to two? Or why did he excise the original "Preface," with its focus on "the Master Knot of Human Fate," as the veteran sergeant attempted to explain the death of a raw recruit by quoting from the *Rubáiyat*? Along with other examples of the uncanny jettisoned with the preface, Bird's "trench at zero hour" no longer appears in *Ghosts* as a mystical "crucible that dissolved all insincerity and the superficial," eliciting "from even dulled and uncouth natures a perception that was attributed to the mystic and supernal" (4-5). In its place, he substitutes a new opening chapter on the training of recruits and on the long sea voyage to England, both of which expunge those uncanny premonitions and musings about Fate with which *And We Go On* had begun. By contrast, the opening chapter of *Ghosts* simply portrays the resistance of enlistees to authoritarian absurdities.

Why such a radical change in both the form and content of the new memoir? Is it because the aging soldier is now inclined, forty years on, to

accept the finality of his own death? This is the general outlook of *Death 24x a Second*, where Mulvey identifies increasing disillusionment with the stillness of the filmstrip as an inevitable outcome of the cinephile's misplaced faith in film's magical movement. For her, it is the "dive into death" (60) of a Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida*, where he muses on the still photo and his preference for it over the cinema[27] that resolves the "technological uncanny" of cinema.[28] While there is merit in Mulvey's equation of "trauma"—given how it "leaves a mark on the unconscious"—with the photograph, since trauma is "a kind of index of the psyche that parallels the photograph's trace of an original event" (65), the idea of such a "trauma" in facing the fundamental illusion of cinema hardly explains the plot of Bird's revisions. For the old soldier is traumatized neither by ghosts nor by his own mortality, but by a different sort of ghost in the machine. That is to say, Bird's "trauma" does not at all derive from his belated recognition that the afterlife is not real or from any supposed disillusionment with the mechanical animation of images. Indeed, he refuses to accept the "mechanization of time" common to the writers of the anti-war canon, since his original memoir works only by analogy with cinema. So his avowal of faith in an afterlife is never really weakened by later qualifications that would reduce it to a "flickering afterlife."

Rather, the problem for the memoirist of the 1960s who refused to doubt the reality of spirit was the cultural triumph of that dispiriting view of "mechanical animation" that had become dominant in the formation and acceptance of the anti-war canon. Most crucially in Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* and Harrison's *Generals Die in Bed*, techniques of cinema had been used to represent the medium as an industrial extension of the assembly line, and the soldier as a victim of multiple forms of mechanization. Not least in these canonical novels was their portrait of the mechanization of time as a new and mostly unconscious stress put by cinema and cinematic narratives on a shell-shocked civilization that had just endured the worst war in history.

The Mode of Communication

The last word belongs to Harold Innis, the historian and father of communications theory in Canada, who had also fought in the Great War with the Canadian Expeditionary Force, where he "joined the field artillery as a private, took part in the attack on Vimy Ridge in April 1917, and was wounded in July." Seeing little of value in his experience, however, he wrote that, "[i]t is simply a case of walking in mud, sleeping in mud, and eating

mud if your grub happens to touch anything" (qtd. in Berger 86). Perhaps for this reason, he had nothing to say about films such as *The Battle of the Somme* (1916) or *J'accuse* (1919), even though he insisted that a change in the mode of communication had put "enormous strain" on civilizations undergoing such change.[29] More surprisingly still, he assigned no more value to cinema than he did to his own experience of the war: "Pictures spoke a universal language which required no teaching for their comprehension," he asserted in *Changing Concepts of Time* (1952). "The boob no longer believes anything he reads in the papers but he does believe everything he sees." It is a curious instance of the theorist failing to recognize the relevance of his own model. For the stress that cinema had put on Western civilization easily resembles the "enormous strain" that Innis saw imposed "on Egyptian civilization" by a "shift from dependence on stone to dependence on papyrus" (*Empire* 22). And the proof, while half-hidden in the glare of the war, can still be seen in this continuing debate between "moderns" like Remarque and Harrison and "traditionalists" like Bird that from the beginning had appeared to be about nothing more—and nothing less—than pacifism versus militarism. Yet the debate was just as much about time and how cinematic narratives were reshaping temporal sensibilities. And this, it seems, might be as threatening as war itself.

NOTES

1 Vance characterizes Bird as "the unofficial bard of the CEF" whose "five books and hundreds of short stories, articles, and poems about his wartime experiences" enjoyed "immense popularity" among Canadian veterans (27-28).

2 For Jay Winter, it is such "loss" that necessitates a return to tradition: "The strength of what may be termed 'traditional' forms in social and cultural life, in art, poetry, and ritual, lay in their power to mediate bereavement" (5).

3 See my critique of Fussell's "modern memory" in *Media, Memory, and the First World War* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009), 17-21, 26-32.

4 See *Media, Memory* (121-37) for discussion of Remarque's *All Quiet* and C. Y. Harrison's *Generals Die in Bed*.

5 See Ernst Jünger, *In Stahlgewittern,* 1920. *The Storm of Steel.* Trans. Michael Hofmann. London: Penguin, 2004.

6 For Winter, "Gance's film is a remarkable mixture of two visions of war," the one "full of conventional romanticism," the other apocalyptic. While Gance's medium offers "a very modern, cinematic way of 'seeing' the dead . . . the most 'modern' techniques are used to present ancient motifs and images about sacrifice, death, and resurrection" (7). The continuities of cultural history that Winter finds in the wake of the Great War are in fact evident in "the search for an appropriate language of loss" (5) in all three countries—

France, Britain, and Germany—on which his comparative study is based. My own approach is likewise comparative, though in terms of the medium, not the theme.

7 A crusty sergeant responds to a raw recruit's question about men having "the same chances" at the Front with the following lines from the Persian poet: "The Ball no question makes of Ayes and Noes, / But Right or Left, as strikes the Player goes; / And He that toss'd you down into the Field, / *He* knows about it all—HE knows—HE knows!" (3). In this quatrain, Monique Dumontet locates the beginning of a continuing debate in the memoir between determinism and free will (283).

8 The "ghost" story might illustrate what Winter sees as a cultural recourse to tradition—by which, "in very different ways," war-bereaved artists "resurrected the dead" (7)—were it not for Bird's curious sense of the *mediated* presence of the ghost, that is to say, as a real phenomenon appearing from another dimension now rendered visible to sight.

9 In particular, see my discussion in *Media, Memory* of Remarque's use (124-28) of the "past-progressive-present tense" (5) of cinema, and of Harrison's cinematic "telescoping of time" in *Generals Die in Bed* (130-36).

10 By my count, roughly forty percent of the text of *Ghosts* is material added to, or else substituted for, existing text in *And We Go On*.

11 Michael Hammond recalls something similar in the uneasiness of Alexei Tolstoi on a "visit to the cinema for a film in which he appeared. After watching himself for a few minutes he left saying, 'I don't know why but I feel frightened'" (92). His fear may well be linked to this deeply disquieting sense of acting "apart" from himself.

12 See *Media, Memory*, 138-57, in particular my conclusion that, "In terms of the cinematic epistemology that authorizes this all-embracing 'double vision' of Siegfried Sassoon, it seems that the only possible way to lead two lives at once is to be, as it were, on-screen and off-screen simultaneously" (157).

13 See *Media, Memory* (184-88) for discussion of how the perceptual frameworks of film naturalized the "fourth dimension" of time in Einstein's theory of relativity, and helped to popularize an image of "genius" in the public mind. As I see it, both cinema and "Einsteinean *kinematics* need to be re-thought as epistemological markers of a whole era in which space and time were being reconfigured in two distinct forms of discourse—relativistic physics and motion pictures" (188).

14 *J'accuse*, II, 33.48: "Ils avaient la figure terreuse et les orbites pleines d'étoiles. Ils venaient innombrables, du fond de l'horizon, commes des vagues reveillés" [my translation, given the relative inadequacy of many of the English subtitles].

15 *J'accuse*, II, 40.20: "Si le sort frappe les meilleurs ce n'est pas injuste, les mauvais qui survivent en seront améliorés" ["If destiny strikes down the best it is not unjust, the worse who survive will be improved by it"].

16 Hammond reminds us that, "from the outset, the cinematic image had been associated with the spirit world. Maxim Gorky's famous response to the Lumières' first showing as 'This is not life but the shadow of life' is but one association of cinema with a necropolis" (92).

17 Here, Gance follows another French "tradition" of finding an antidote to death in the medium invented by les Frères Lumière. A commentator for *Le Poste* (30 Dec. 1895) wrote of one of their first exhibitions that, "When this apparatus is made available to the public, when everyone can photograph his dearest ones, not only in their immobile forms, but in movement, in action with their familiar gestures and with words shaped on their lips, death will cease to be absolute" (qtd. in Matsuda 173).

18 "Three years later, Gance took film footage of this event and added another element to

it. While the living soldiers defiled through the Arc de Triomphe, the army of the dead marched *above* it, in every sense *au dessus de la mêlée*" (Winter 22).

19 *J'accuse*, II, 34.21: "Les morts inconnus . . . tous les morts . . . tous les grands morts . . . passaient aussi."

20 "The young conscripts manoeuvring, probably in Champaign, are dreaming of the [sic] future revenge . . . Likewise, Detaille's soldiers associate reminiscences of the glorious French past." (Musée d'Orsay storyboard, viewed on site in May 2009, and accessed online 9 Jan. 2012). Curiously, Gance's great middle period, from *J'accuse* (1919) through *Napoléon* (1927), presents as many similarities with, as differences from, the career of Édouard Detaille, the painter par excellence of France's military history.

21 "Le cauchemar . . . les rêves . . . la vie . . . la guerre . . . les morts . . . et les vivants . . . je ne sais plus! . . . J'accuse!"

22 *J'accuse*, II, 44.55: "Avons-nous rêvé? . . . N'est-ce pas une suggestion formidable? Sous quelle empire étions-nous donc?"

23 "Qu'un beau feu te transporte / Et, loin de me pleurer d'avoir perdu le jour, / Crois qu'on ne meurt jamais / Quand on meurt de la sorte" (*J'accuse*, II, 40.47).

24 If this marks a revival of Winter's "tradition," it does so only in terms of the "frame" within which it is viewed, of this medium whereby we see the fourth dimension of *time*.

25 Laura Mulvey's concern with spectatorship in *Death 24x a Second* is motivated by the "death of cinema," as digital technologies replace still frames that had previously produced the illusion of movement, but that could also heighten the awareness of stillness at the base of photographic projection, thus enabling new modes of viewing cinema. Compared to Mulvey's concern with the epistemology of film, Gance's concerns may be termed ontological; his actors literally see the dead cross the boundary to life, a boundary that is dissolved by external, as well as internal, spectatorship of the scene.

26 Even Mulvey will admit of past realities preserved on film and projected into motion that, "To look back into the reality of that lost world by means of the cinema is to have the sensation of looking into a time machine" (52).

27 "In *Camera Lucida,* the presence of death in the photograph is a constantly recurring and pervasive theme throughout the book" (59).

28 By contrast, see my reading of *Camera Lucida* in the context of Timothy Findley's concerted attempt to animate the still photograph, as demonstrated in chapter 7 of *Media, Memory,* especially 172-79.

29 See *Empire and Communications*, 7, 33, 125, 209; see *The Bias of Communication*, 76, 80, 106.

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Uncovering a Poet

Pierre Anctil
Jacob-Isaac Segal (1896-1954) : un poète yiddish de Montréal et son milieu. PUL 39,95 $

Reviewed by Rebecca Margolis

Vieux-Montréal
Une ruelle subsiste à Montréal
Qui un jour fut au cœur de la cité.
Des murs gris, marqués de brûlures jaunâtres
Une chapelle en démanche, abandonnée de Dieu.

Thus begins Pierre Anctil's French rendition of a Yiddish poem by Montreal poet J. I. Segal titled "Altmontreal," which appeared in his final book of verse published in 1955. As Anctil points out, Segal was a pioneer in portraying the urban environment of Montreal, far ahead of his French Canadian literary counterparts.

As Canada's most renowned Yiddish poet and a celebrated figure in Jewish letters, a full-length study of J. I. Segal is long overdue. There exist essays and an unpublished MA thesis about Segal by Adam Fuerstenberg and Shari Cooper Friedman, respectively, and he is discussed by numerous scholars of Yiddish culture in Canada, and yet this is the first monograph to appear that focuses specifically on Segal. As a long-time translator of Segal and author of numerous studies of Jewish immigrant life in Quebec, Pierre Anctil is well positioned to undertake just such a study, in particular one that combines an account of Segal's life with excerpts of his writing in translation.

This book offers a significant contribution to our knowledge of Segal's life and writing. Anctil has combed two primary repository archives of Segal's papers in Montreal and draws on Segal's voluminous correspondence with many individuals prominent in the local Yiddish cultural milieu as well as farther afield. He has exhaustively pieced together the details of Segal's life, from his family lineage through his death. He intersperses the text with his original translations of numerous poems from Segal's multiple books of poetry. The volume is richly illustrated with photographs, many of them from the private collection of the Segal family.

Perhaps the most fascinating aspect of the study occurs in the concluding chapter, where Anctil discusses Segal's foray into French-Canadian cultural circles through the medium of translation just as intercultural dialogue was becoming a facet of Quebec intellectual life in the 1950s. In 1953, one of Segal's poems was read in French translation by local Jewish cultural activist David Rome on a radio program about Montreal's Jewish Public library hosted by "nul autre que René Levesque" (329). Anctil, who has been closely involved with this type of intercultural rapprochement over the last decades, presents Segal as a pioneering figure within Quebecois-Jewish dialogue. This offers a brief but fascinating episode in the history of Yiddish letters as well as wider Quebec cultural life.

Although the work makes use of few secondary sources in either the footnotes

or the bibliography, the extensive primary source material offered by this encyclopedic work will be of great value to those who seek to undertake a scholarly analysis that situates Segal within the wider context of Yiddish letters in Canada as well as internationally. This reviewer hopes that this study inspires further interest in, and study and translation of, J. I. Segal. With a voluminous corpus of writing and a fascinating life story that encapsulates so many facets of Eastern European Jewish immigrant experiences, it seems that this will simply be a matter of time.

Archéologie des lettres québécoises

Bernard Andrès
Histoires littéraires des Canadiens au XVIIIe siècle.
PUL 39,95 $

Compte rendu par Joël Castonguay-Bélanger

Fruit de près de vingt années de recherches consacrées au corpus souvent mal connu du dix-huitième siècle canadien, cet ouvrage lauréat du Prix Gabrielle-Roy 2013 de l'ALCQ/ACQL se présente comme une synthèse et un aboutissement des travaux antérieurs réalisés par Bernard Andrès dans le cadre de son projet « Archéologie du littéraire au Québec » (ALAQ). Il propose une relecture d'un ensemble de textes que la critique et les historiens ont longtemps considérés avec la condescendance embarrassée réservée aux curiosités et aux objets *mineurs*, et s'attache au contraire à en montrer le rôle fondateur dans la genèse des lettres québécoises. S'intéressant à la fois aux premières représentations du Canadien diffusées dans la littérature européenne des Lumières et aux différentes sources manuscrites et imprimées témoignant de l'existence d'une culture lettrée dans la colonie, Bernard Andrès a réuni un corpus dont la diversité est d'emblée signalée par le pluriel du titre. Correspondances privées et publiques, chroniques, mémoires, poèmes de circonstance, récits, chansons et articles de journal forment la matière de ces « histoires littéraires », où le mot « littéraires » doit évidemment s'entendre selon l'acception élargie qu'il convient de donner à des écrits produits dans un espace qui ne s'était pas encore constitué en champ autonome, et à l'intérieur duquel les concepts d'œuvre et d'auteur ne jouissaient pas encore des définitions franches qu'allait leur donner l'institution au dix-neuvième siècle. Bien conscient de cette difficulté, Bernard Andrès choisit de désigner par le terme de « protoscripteurs » ces écrivains d'avant la lettre qui ne pouvaient prévoir que le recours à la plume, même à des fins privées, allait leur valoir, trois siècles plus tard, le rôle de défricheurs du champ littéraire québécois. S'il reconnaît le caractère problématique du statut « littéraire » donné aux documents ici rassemblés, Andrès invite à voir au-delà de l'événement ou de l'anecdote auxquels l'historien pressé pourrait être tenté de réduire ces archives, et propose au contraire de prêter l'oreille à leur dimension polémique, argumentative, philosophique ou esthétique. Reprenant une distinction avancée naguère par Michel Foucault, il plaide pour une démarche archéologique consistant à aborder ces *documents* comme autant de *monuments* susceptibles d'éclairer les conditions d'énonciation propres aux discours produits au sein de cette culture lettrée en formation.

La structure chronologique adoptée par l'ouvrage est relativement souple et le parcours proposé est loin d'être toujours linéaire. À la suite d'une première partie méthodologique portant sur la place et la valeur de l'archive en histoire littéraire, et proposant quelques pistes pour tenter de résoudre l'éternel débat entourant la datation de l'an zéro de la littérature québécoise, diverses études de cas sont regroupées en deux périodes reprenant la coupure convenue de l'avant et de l'après-Conquête

anglaise. Un manque de cohésion se fait parfois sentir entre les analyses singulières qui se succèdent sans toujours parvenir à éviter les transitions abruptes. De même, on aimerait comprendre les raisons qui poussent tantôt l'auteur à s'arrêter longuement sur tel morceau obscur alors que l'analyse de textes plus substantiels et mieux connus est ailleurs expédiée en quelques paragraphes. L'impression qui se dégage de l'ensemble est celle d'une « monumentalisation » pas toujours pleinement réalisée de documents qui ne parviennent pas tous à échapper à l'écueil de la lecture anecdotique et factuelle. On aimerait parfois mieux saisir la fonction illustrative de certains épisodes rapportés et la place que ceux-ci occupent dans cette histoire des mentalités à laquelle Bernard Andrès entend contribuer avec cet ouvrage.

La richesse et l'intérêt scientifique des archives manuscrites et imprimées du dix-huitième siècle canadien ne sont plus à démontrer. On ne peut que saluer la publication de travaux qui, comme celui-ci, contribuent à les faire mieux connaître et inspireront peut-être d'autres chercheurs à continuer l'exploration d'un corpus qui, de fait, offre un accès privilégié à un imaginaire, un art de dire et une réalité sociale à propos desquels il reste encore beaucoup à decouvrire.

Sommation à voir le jour

Nelly Arcan
Burqa de chair. Seuil 22,95 $

Compte rendu par Anne-Claire Marpeau

Burqa de chair est un recueil non autographe paru en 2011, soit deux après que Nelly Arcan, Isabelle Fortier de son vrai nom, s'est donné la mort. Il réunit cinq textes dont trois étaient jusque là demeurés inédits. Avant même son ouverture, pour peu que l'on connaisse les conditions d'édition de l'ouvrage, on est happé par ce sensationnalisme qui semble indissociable des œuvres de Nelly Arcan aux yeux du lecteur novice. De manière plus subtile, l'organisation des textes « fait sensation » : du plus long au plus court, du plus autobiographique au plus didactique, du thème du malaise intérieur — « la honte qui grandit avec l'âge » — à celui du suicide, tout enfin dramatise la lecture du livre en vue d'un résultat qui parat inéluctable : la mort volontaire de son auteur. Jusqu'à ses derniers mots qui semblent faire office de prophétie et de réquisitoire : « Il ne faut pas oublier que les barrières les plus solides contre la détresse des gens qui nous sont chers, c'est encore vous et moi ».

On pourrait oublier que ce qui est en question dans la lecture, ce ne sont pas vraiment les raisons de ce suicide biographique que semble pourtant fournir ce savant agencement (non chronologique) des textes. Ce qui nous parat plus intéressant, c'est la (re)découverte de productions littéraires en majorité inédites et de la voix qui s'y exprime. Le titre, emprunté à une formule de Nelly Arcan, est une métaphore frappante qui laisse penser que la problématique essentielle de ces textes est celle du malaise de la féminité dominée par un regard masculin, qui lui imposerait de porter son propre corps comme le vêtement étouffant des fondamentalistes. Or, on se rend compte en lisant que c'est surtout la question de l'impossible intégrité qui est posée ici. Et cette intégrité que dissolvent la vie, le fait de grandir, de se découvrir autre, cette intégrité que pulvérisent les questions d'un journaliste qui joue de la dualité entre l'écrivain et la personne réelle, cette intégrité en danger est autant anatomique qu'éthique. Tout nous interroge dans le recueil sur la possibilité de « réintégrer les contours francs de son corps » et de faire tenir ensemble la chair humaine, enveloppe et reflet d'une âme déchirée, face au « scandale de la vie ».

Le lyrisme et l'imaginaire de Nelly Arcan lentement vous esquintent et vous

atteignent aussi, vous lecteur. Vous vous laissez peu à peu envahir par ce malaise de vivre qui est aussi un trouble à dire, hachures de phrases, éruptions de noms, cris silencieux sur papier. L'écriture pourrait bien alors avoir une fonction thérapeutique autant qu'esthétique : inondant les pages, elle recoud en un patchwork inachevé les lambeaux de la vie et donne au lecteur la possibilité rêvée de « marcher sur l'eau ». De son flot ininterrompu, elle lave autant qu'elle laisse des traces, salissures inéluctables de la vie, cette « sommation à dire ». À la rigueur, il importe peu de savoir qu'Isabelle Fortier est morte. Reste l'écriture de Nelly Arcan qui dit, répète, lutte et maintient vivant le souffle de l'écrivaine expirant du corps défait de la femme.

Restless Pages

Ken Babstock
Methodist Hatchet. Anansi $22.95

Mark Goldstein
Form of Forms. BookThug $25.00

Basma Kavanagh
Distillō. Gaspereau $19.91

Barbara Langhorst
restless white fields. NeWest $14.95

Fred Wah
Medallions of Belief. BookThug $12.00

Reviewed by Kevin McNeilly

There is too much to say about Ken Babstock's *Methodist Hatchet*, Canadian winner of the 2012 Griffin Poetry Prize. An abundantly variegated language overflows his poems, even when most of them are rigorously framed in stanza and page—contingent tactics to stem the whelming currents of verbiage and image circulating through a media-saturated world. Babstock likes the ways our words collide and intersect: "What we mistake for popular song / blows out its hair near the window-mounted / air-con unit. Wet snare drum in the patronymic, / imagine seeing what's there" ("Fending Off the Conservatism in Adorno"). His enthusiasm for contemporary speech, which he hears not as decrepit but, in its collapsing bricolage, as a source of renewed vitality and even of wonder, is infectious and energizing. The mistakes we make, slippages in meaning, in syntax, and in idiom, are not errors to be regretted but generative moments when, like recombinant samples, poetic imagination is reactivated. Babstock's style is *sui generis*, although I hear traces of the multifarious lines of Tom Raworth and John Ashbery, or see analogues to the savvy assemblages of Michael Robbins. Babstock takes up his art in the age of its technological reproducibility—starting with replicant images in a home decorating magazine, where, say, art books by highbrow abstractionists like Gerhard Richter are positioned as accents on the floor beside a chair—not to lament its degradation to cultural commodity, but to embrace commodification as a source of aesthetic potential, to be re-stressed and salvaged. "Slide an arm," he invites us,

> right through
> the surface of this picture,
> into whatever spatial realm lies
> behind the illusion of depth[.]

Babstock faces the screens and surfaces of our illusions, not to demythologize but to find a correspondent verbal feel, to swim head up in that "desacralized" flow. He combs through layers of secular, mundane chatter and distills something from its sacred and its sacrilegious drift, its consuming spin. These aren't monumental poems, and Babstock never pretends to lithic memorability; they are, nonetheless, great work, and Babstock is one of the very finest poets of his generation. His writing bears brilliant witness to our complex and conflicted sense of our place and of our time.

Mark Goldstein's *Form of Forms* is a book-length poem in three movements—

"Creation," "Destruction," and "Quiescence"—occasioned by Goldstein's search as an adopted child for "information" (a resonant keyword) about his birth mother. Comparisons with Jackie Kay's *The Adoption Papers* (1991) might spring to mind, but the contrast in style and approach between Goldstein and Kay is immediately obvious. While Goldstein's text is lightly peppered with biographical factoids (birthdate, personal names, the odd address), its approach is neither narrative nor confessional, but—as the title suggests—formal, or perhaps meta-formal, if that can stand in as a word. Goldstein builds his poems on a fascination with the geometry of the printed page; he manipulates bureaucratic form-letters and paper documents, skewing and overprinting lines, erasing and re-spacing words, and juggling alphanumeric type to remake his source-texts into hybridized found-poems, sectioned and scattered across each recto and verso. There tends to be more white space than type on a given page, each poem's design-template testifying to an essential absence Goldstein is seeking to fill, poetically. He wants to reconstitute "an overriding self," a genetics he knows he must vestigially still embody, but he discovers only the hollow, untrustworthy and iterative verbiage of governmental agencies: "I trust this / will be of assistance to you." Goldstein's diction is more philosophical than lyrical, more abstracted than material; "thinking is safer," he writes, "than feeling." He combs through the material traces, in print, of his uncertain origins, trying to squeeze from empty pro forma phrases some residue of texture, moments when "bodily memory / intrudes" into detached representational arrays of text.

Goldstein has an "apparent need to touch" and to be touched, across thin but impermeable paper barrier of his poem, his lost beginnings. *Form of Forms* becomes an archeology not of the personal so much as of the concept of self. He engages from the get-go in a game of hide-and-seek ("this is a search / for clues"), identifying with a corporeality that simultaneously "reveals" and "conceals," but I hear very little of the redemptive empathy promised, as quiescence, by the formal *agon* of the poem's tripartite structure. He wants the "implicit / made / apparent," punning on the shared etymology of appearance and parentage. While his poem can come to terms with its lost origins—can finally reproduce his birth-mother's name—those terms remain effects of typographical sleight of hand, and finally refrain from articulating, let alone enacting, the empathetic bond, the umbilical covenant, that Goldstein craves. In that semantic shortfall, the pathos of Goldstein's poem might start to emerge; the allure of his book's material form, the aesthetics of its design, appears to me to come closest to reproducing an experience of trusting contact, of human touch. Simply put, it's a beautiful book to hold in your hands.

Basma Kavanagh's *Distillō* continues the run of beautifully produced, hand-typeset books from Gaspereau Press, run by Andrew Steeves and Gary Dunfield in Kentville, Nova Scotia, which is also where Kavanagh resides. These poems focus principally not on the Maritimes, but on the geography around Port Hardy, BC, on Vancouver Island. The cover and title pages are printed with airbrushed outlines of flora and fauna, and Kavanagh includes shaped poems mimicking pressed leaves or the shadows of a steelhead in a stream. The surfaces of Kavanagh's pages want to imitate water, and her poems gesture repeatedly at fluidity and at containment, mixing freely kinetic lines with self-conscious formality in a verbal register that is both porous and sealed. Her poetic tactic is to distill, as in the opening poem, a "Taxonomy" of various kinds of rain; she offers a micrology of drizzle (Latin, *distillō*, "I distill"), small cascades of careful close observation:

> Delicate drizzle gilds the standing
> bracken, polishes woody stalks,
> gleams from green bog orchids gossiping
> in the ditch, films the salmonberry
> blossoms, bronzes each bold stem,
> glazing every pore, grazing the breathing
> surface

There is some danger here of gilding the swamp lily, of overwriting the "flux" (to which every pore might be "a doorway; / soil, bark, lungs") and of converting her descriptive attentiveness—a number of texts, including this first poem, advocate for renewed and acute "listening" to the natural world—into decorative lyricism, as surfaces become polished glaze rather than membranous contact zones. But as I read, I find I can't help but be drawn into Kavanagh's finely tuned, shifting aural meshes, wanting (like her) to "hoard / mineral glow in marrow," to catch and hold, even temporarily, some of the kinetic energies of the flows in which she discovers herself to be immersed. *Distillō* is a seductive and technically accomplished first collection; its liquid cadences and interlaced textures affirm the promise of a significant new voice in Canadian lyric poetry.

Barbara Langhorst's *restless white fields*, like Goldstein's book, negotiates tense and uncertain terrains between the confessional and the textual. But while Goldstein's reflexive formalism often curtails his capacity to grieve his mother's absence, Langhorst seeks to objectify grief, mapping the work of mourning onto the white field of the page, trying to transmute the personal into persona. This book is an archeology, drawing heavily on the fraught historicism of Walter Benjamin, mixing a fierce imperative to redeem a terrible and "eviscerated" past with a sense of the disastrous futility of poetic effort: "whatever my path," she writes, "i can't avoid stepping on angels," evoking Benjamin's key image of cultural collapse from his theses on the philosophy of history. *restless white fields* traces Langhorst's efforts to come to terms with personal trauma; her father, in a state of post-stroke confusion, murdered her mother and then took his own life. At a number of points, Langhorst confesses what she feels to be her complicity in tragedy, particularly in her mother's death: that she wasn't present to stop her father.

The poems intercut such confessional directness—"there are no kind words for this"—with moments of either philosophical detachment or crystalline abstraction: "the fractal catastrophe of human time / your steps corner the bed your living death fades forgotten in tissue paper slips[.]" The lyrical can sometimes grant momentary evasions, but Langhorst's poems, while necessarily aspiring to draw renewal as "morning," from an extended and difficult arc of "mourning," never really shy into the comforts of the aesthetic, but want to push through a "firehorse of pain" toward a promise of meaningful closure. Words are dismantled vertically to suggest both the spiritual fracture of grief and the centripetal tug of sense-making, as the reading eye scans and reassembles them:

> not
> a cur
> e
> but
> a
> cal
> ling

These lines aren't talking-cure, and never take for granted any remedial givenness—but neither does the "calling" to which Langhorst's writing wants to attend. Elegy does not promise verdant renewal, but it does present Langhorst with contingent possibility: "elegiac dirt verminating / rhizomatic quackgrass / calling come to me / compose me[.]" The wordscapes that make up Langhorst's book—poems that act more like Benjamin's dialectical constellations than Deleuzian rhizomes—call to her for expressive form, to be composed, and

also offer her the possibility to recompose herself. *restless white fields* is a powerful and fascinating text that deconstructs the "broken economies" of grief, even as it finds its necessary path to self-forgiveness, to reconcile with loss.

The "Note" closing out Fred Wah's recent chapbook *Medallions of Belief* clarifies its intention: intermingling unpublished and newer poems with a handful of pieces from as early as 1986, this gathering offers up Wah's own "spectrum of considerations" on how to produce an occasional poem. It was published to accompany a workshop at the Toronto New School of Writing held on March 10, 2012 under the rubric "How to Write a Poem for the Queen," and presents some of Wah's work as the Canadian Parliamentary Poet Laureate, a post he held until December 2013. Most of the poems are dedicated to or occasioned by the work of others, and most also call into question, to varying degrees, what it is to occasion a poem, to use and to "use up" poetry in a historical—or better, historicized—present. Stylistically, the poems extend Wah's practice of the deliberate admixture of linguistic registers and pitches, collating a sometimes visceral density with prosaic baldness, or highfalutin theory with mundane colloquialism. I hear echoes of Robert Duncan's hybrid voice murmuring at times behind this work, although Wah's sources and forebears are as playfully various as his mercurial poetic practice. What I admire in a Wah poem is its commitment to the immediate moment; while each of these pieces remains thoroughly self-conscious about its own highly mediated language, each also aspires to touch the occasion of its own making, to collide the experiential and the textual in the temporary corpus of a given poem: "Physical / performs textual as anatomical / memory re-engages the heave / and accumulates a distinct / sound for the body *in* language, / outside the utterance" ("Parapoetic Sink"). The character and context of that heave is as variable and as different as each text it occasions, but it is the often improvisational swing back to a compositional present that most draws Wah's attention, and that gives his laureate poems a depth—if that's the right word—beyond their datedness as functionary artifacts. A key poem in the chapbook is "The Snowflake Age," a laud for the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II; Wah's poem interrogates the pronouns of the Queen's coronation address, reproduced in a local paper in 1952, finding instead of any "sovereign *We*" a network of shifting persons—"*I Me You / Your They My We*"—that allow him to rethink, and "re-engage" with, the interstices of the public and the private, sovereignty and subjectivity: "*we* too / Mark *our* time momentarily collected public[.]" Wah's poetry aspires to inhabit what he calls a "between," a conceptual and aural space in which the dominion of the speaking self is both asserted and held in abeyance, where the possibility of viable, intersubjective community, and with it a cultural politics of the many, begins to happen.

Disentangling Narratives

Shauna Singh Baldwin
The Selector of Souls. Knopf $32.00

M. G. Vassanji
The Magic of Saida. Doubleday $32.95

Reviewed by Dorothy F. Lane

In a recent interview, author M.G. Vassanji emphasized how writing a novel is a mysterious process: "you never know where you're going to end up." The enigma of origin and destination is shared by readers of both his and Shauna Singh Baldwin's novels, demanding an investment of time and attention in unraveling multiple stories. However, readers will emerge from these books with a heightened awareness of the material effects of colonization, and of contemporary Canadian issues, along with

new ideas about shared responsibility and community. Both books uncover secrets of the past, and simultaneously suggest deeper puzzles worthy of exploration.

Shauna Singh Baldwin's *Selector of Souls* (2012) is her third novel; she has also published two collections of fiction and one of non-fiction. In this book, she probes predicaments of family, finances, and cultural and religious issues associated with pregnancy, childbirth, and new technologies. She considers the lives and choices of women—both in India and in Canada—confronting gender discrimination. The "selector of souls" of the title is, in some sections, construed as the medical technology of ultrasound that facilitates the abortion of female fetuses. Elsewhere in the novel, the Hindu midwife Damini adopts the voice of Anamika Devi in leading the people to a new understanding of "soul selection" and its responsibilities. As Baldwin has noted, the convergence of religious and cultural belief—and the pervasiveness of "daughter-aversion"—is evident in justifications for sex-selection abortions, especially in the Indian villages of her settings. In the novel, this perspective comes into conflict with Roman Catholic principles governing the operation of a local clinic: abortion is forbidden, and even contraception is proscribed.

The beauty of Baldwin's narrative lies in the ease with which she draws these challenges into the stories of individuals, families, and communities; one is not able to judge easily the actions of the characters, even those that might seem heinous from a "Western" or "modern" perspective. Such dilemmas hit very close to home, as the narrative weaves the story of a child sent to live in Canada because of the family's daughter-aversion; the mother, Anu, believes she has protected this daughter by sending her to her sister, and this choice also enables her to leave her husband and become a nun in a northern clinic. She cannot, however, transcend the past or the tension of political voices enveloping personal ones. The sweep of the narrative results in a tendency to simplify some characters, and particularly Vikas, Anu's husband, and Damini's son, Suresh. Vikas is unwavering in abusive, self-serving behaviour, as well as dogmatic Hindu nationalism. It is difficult to empathize with many of the male characters in the book. Baldwin's endeavour to tackle issues of gender, sexuality, and discrimination is sometimes too transparent. By contrast, her descriptions of people and places—for example, that of the journey from Delhi to the Himalaya—evokes the wealth of stories both inside and outside the train, without overt judgment.

M. G. Vassanji's *The Magic of Saida* (2012) is a pithier book—shorter in length but not less complex; it too untangles the complex web of the contemporary global village. An exploration through South Asia, East Africa, and Canada, the book examines the postcolonial enculturation of medical practices and professions. The initial mystery surrounds Kamal Punja, a Canadian doctor hospitalized in Tanzania, discovered by the narrator, a local publisher named Martin Kigoma. Convinced he has been "poisoned" by "black magic," Kamal has returned to East Africa at a midlife juncture, to unravel the story of Saida, a childhood friend with whom he developed an intimate relationship. Through Kamal's conversations with Martin, his journey from Edmonton—where he has raised two children and established successful medical practices—to East Africa unfolds with care and complexity, offering only morsels of information in each chapter and alternating among various time periods and places. Just as the story of Saida seems eclipsed by that of Kamal's own slow journey—from Kilwa, to Dar es Salaam, to Uganda, to the Canadian prairies, and then back to East Africa—it is rapidly brought to an emotionally unsettling finale. The novel leaves us with less probing

political questions than does Baldwin's—apart from its focus on the emigration of medical professionals to Canada—but it again exposes the ambivalent responses to colonialism, the exploitation of African women by Asian men in East Africa, and the resounding impact of family and community. Remarkable in Vassanji's narrative is his interweaving of rich cultural and literary traditions—Swahili, Gujarati, Persian, and Islamic—the oral and written stories with which he himself grew up.

As Vassanji emphasizes, in the endeavour to untangle the past both reader and writer do not end up where they expected; sometimes, the journey takes them right back to the beginning. Finally, then, both books underscore the power of storytelling itself, in their contemplations of individual and collective lives, cultures, histories, and places. There are no easy judgments, only the rich and complex exploration of character that evokes more questions than it answers.

Le Cœur de l'éloquence

Marc André Bernier et Marie Lise Laquerre, dirs.
Entretiens sur l'éloquence et la littérature de Joseph-Sabin Raymond : édition critique.
PUL 24,95 $

Compte rendu par Sébastien Drouin

C'est en véritables pionniers que les éditeurs d'un manuscrit inédit de Joseph-Sabin Raymond (1810-1877) nous convient à une plongée dans l'univers du romantisme canadien et des transferts culturels entre le Canada et la France catholique, contre-révolutionnaire et ultramontaine. On doit à Marc André Bernier et à Marie Lise Laquerre d'avoir exhumé un important texte du dix-neuvième siècle québécois qui, même s'il a dormi d'un sommeil sans rêves des années durant, n'en demeure pas moins le précieux témoin d'une multitude de mutations esthétiques et politiques qui surviennent dans les premières décennies du dix-neuvième siècle.

Écrit entre 1832 et 1834, les *Entretiens sur l'éloquence et la littérature de Joseph-Sabin Raymond* proposent une synthèse du romantisme catholique principalement inspiré du *Génie du christianisme* (1802) de Chateaubriand; un romantisme qui s'est élaboré en réaction contre la littérature du dix-septième siècle (entendre le classicisme), jugée encline à brimer l'inspiration, mais surtout contre le dix-huitième siècle, dont la littérature « philosophique » aurait mené tout droit à la Révolution française; thèse contre-révolutionnaire s'il en est une. C'est toute cette époque que ce maître de rhétorique au collège de Saint-Hyacinthe évoque dans ses *Entretiens*, alors qu'il s'inspire autant des *Dialogues sur l'éloquence* de Fénelon (1718) que des *Soirées de Saint Pétersbourg* de Joseph de Maistre (1821). Le lecteur sourira peut-être en songeant que le manuscrit d'un obscur maître de rhétorique puisse avoir aujourd'hui le moindre intérêt. De son vivant, Joseph-Sabin Raymond était pourtant loin d'être un inconnu. Figure importante du monde littéraire québécois au dix-neuvième siècle, il a entretenu plusieurs correspondances avec divers intellectuels tant de France que du Canada et fut au centre de ce long processus ayant visé à bannir de l'enseignement des lettres un large pan de la littérature française d'Ancien Régime, de la même façon qu'il a contribué à faire du Moyen Âge un modèle esthétique et religieux dont le catholicisme canadien-français devait s'inspirer et, de fait, s'inspirera.

Ce texte, que l'on nous donne aujourd'hui à voir dans une édition critique à la fois concise et bien informée, représente bien plus qu'une succession de réflexions élégantes sur l'art de bien dire. Il se veut également le témoin des phénomènes de transferts culturels entre l'Europe et le Canada, puisque les *Entretiens sur l'éloquence et la littérature* constituent une

véritable marqueterie de citations souvent tirées de périodiques français et belges, que les éditeurs ont patiemment relevées et identifiées. La préface éclairante, la transcription minutieuse d'un manuscrit réputé difficile à déchiffrer, l'annotation savante et les belles annexes contenant des lettres de Raymond à La Mennais et à Chateaubriand font de cette édition critique parue dans la collection « L'Archive littéraire au Québec » un modèle à suivre pour quiconque entreprendra de marcher sur les traces des éditeurs de ce texte.

The Art of Losing

Heather Birrell
Mad Hope. Coach $18.95

Lynn Crosbie
Life Is About Losing Everything. Anansi $24.95

Anakana Schofield
Malarky. Biblioasis $19.95

Reviewed by Lorraine York

These three books span generic categories, from Heather Birrell's short stories, to Anakana Schofield's novel, to Lynn Crosbie's ficto-memoir. But what they all meditate upon, in some fashion or other, is, in Crosbie's words, the art of "losing everything." And they are all, willingly or not, inheritors of that paean to loss: Cohen's *Beautiful Losers*, not only in the thematic sense, but in the ways in which they—to differing degrees—play fast and loose with more recognizable, canonized literary treatments of loss.

This is least the case with Birrell's eleven stories in *Mad Hope*. Technically speaking, these are tightly focused miniatures: taut, controlled, economical. They almost all revolve around a traumatic incident of some kind: a neighbourhood child murdered, a student pleading with her teacher to help her arrange an abortion, the murder of a gay teenager. As studies of human relationships under duress, they present themselves with a remarkable clarity. We see these characters living beyond the ending, as it were: carrying trauma into the everyday, or at least wondering how to do so, or struggling not to. The obvious drawback to this fictional structure is that the traumatic incident itself comes to seem a predictable given. But when looked at as experimentation, as a multi-faceted study of human beings in radically wrenched, bizarrely altered situations, these stories begin to look more edgy than their initial, miniature gem-like quality would suggest. At times, the writing, like the traumatic central incidents, loses surprise: "What Jerome said delighted Geraldine absolutely—its insouciance and lack of logic." So far so very, very good. But Birrell takes us too far into explication: "Every now and then, she thought, you bumped into somebody who showed you a different way of living, a fierce commitment to a life that you could never claim as your own. What would the future hold for them both? There was no way of knowing." True enough. But in this story of a middle-aged white woman's meeting with a black teenager in a cancer clinic, the "different way of living," the "fierce commitment" are gradually revealed through the nicely observed contrasts of generational speech, among other devices, and so they do not arguably need to be so fully rehearsed here. But elsewhere in the stories, this kind of exposition sparkles; in "Impossible to Die in Your Dreams," an increasingly drunken Samantha thinks of the young man she meets at a wedding who works in marketing: "Samantha knows next to nothing about marketing and considers this a fault. Enough people seem to do it, all day, for days on end; there must be something molten and mesmeric at its core." The geologic metaphors surprise and amuse: *Mad Men* meets *The Nature of Things*.

In Anakana Schofield's novel *Malarky*, by contrast, dark trauma and domestic drudgery become barely extricable. Set in

Ireland, and experimental in its shifting perspectives, *Malarky* follows the depressive down-spiralling of the never-named Our Woman: a working-class woman whose life is derailed by her husband's apparent infidelity (as bizarrely confessed by a woman she dubs Red the Twit, who confronts Our Woman in a teashop), her husband's death, her discovery of her son's gayness, and her son's death in Afghanistan. Anger and denial vie for dominance in her responses, though these seismic shifts in her domestic world have the effect of also unleashing her own sexuality. Our Woman proceeds, as does Schofield, experimentally, transgressing the very mores that she has seemed to uphold, by initiating erotic play with a Syrian immigrant who works as a security guard in an Irish department store: someone whose hold on cultural legitimacy is shakier by far than hers. He obsessively traverses her body in search of the maternal, as though in search of that denied national legitimacy, whereas she uses his body to explore the nature of her son's gay sex. Schofield is also sure in her intertwining of the psychological and the political; it is not surprising that Our Woman's son, spurned by his parents but especially his father, who rejects him and cuts off his college funds, is left to perform masculinity in a self-destructive rather than erotically creative way: he enlists, is sent to war, and dies. As Our Woman descends further into grief, Schofield's experimentally fragmented style intensifies, and we are left with an indictment of a domestic ordinariness that is cruelly punishing of transgression, whether sexual, cultural, class, or psychic. "I had a husband and a son and they were both taken from me suddenly," reflects Our Woman, "and what have I learned from this? I have learned no answers. I've learned to act rather than wonder. I've learnt only how to misbehave." But what is also impressive about Schofield's achievement is the persistence of her wicked humour amid the depths of grief. When her husband, aghast at her apparent psychological wanderings, takes her to the hospital, Our Woman's voice provides a mordantly funny gloss on his concerns: "There! Whamble! He has it! A Syrian has done this to her. . . .Them foreigners if we let them near our old ladies, sure the wards start filling up is what my husband is trying to tell them." And when he stupidly informs the hospital staff that he has only noticed of late that his wife has stopped eating eggs, and that she has seemed concerned about buying a horse, she rejoices, "An egg! An egg! Surely to God an egg would fix the woman! An egg would heal this mad equine concerned woman!" *Malarky*, a recent and notable addition to the growing field of mad studies—the exploration of oppressive practices directed against those deemed "mad"—explores the uses of humour to unveil and counteract that oppression.

If one is comparing these three books and the challenges of treating grief and extreme loss in fictional form, Lynn Crosbie's *Life Is About Losing Everything* forms an apogee of sorts, an extended keening and outraged howl set up against all that falls away: youth, lovers, friendships, trust, vitality. Like Schofield, Crosbie works with the fragmentary and the episodic; this ficto-memoir is divided into short, stabbing sections of prose, many of which painfully capture a betrayal, a loss, an indignity. And whereas this repetition could have the effect of desensitization or routinization (a risk that Birrell runs at moments), it oddly concentrates this volume into a fictional version of a choral dirge. Beloved people and animals pass in and out of Crosbie's ficto-memoir: a frieze of loss. But as with Schofield's *Malarky*, to sum up Crosbie's *Life Is About Losing Everything* as a portrait of an unrelieved psychic inferno would be to overlook its devastatingly dark comedy. Readers with some familiarity of the Canadian literary world will derive some caustic pleasure at

the moments of sardonic roman-a-clef play. In "And Then He Kissed Me," "Lynn" describes a literary agent's comments scrawled on her manuscripts: "My, aren't we moody? or Well! This will never play with the book ladies." "Lynn," thinking about pleasing these particular consumers, pictures arriving at an airport on her way to a literary festival, being picked up by a woman who asks, "hopefully if I was, possibly, Aritha van Herk?" only to lapse into "a morose silence" when Crosbie reveals her identity.

In one of Crosbie's many laments for a lost friend, "Blue Thunder," she hears the news of his death "as if hearing blue thunder in a dark sky, warning me of other jolts of lightning to come." The description, with its lovely and terrifying synaesthesia, captures the fragmentary, stormy method of *Life Is About Losing Everything*. It also brings to mind the grim comedy of Elizabeth Bishop's brilliant study of loss, the villanelle "One Art." (And here it seems fitting that Crosbie published *Villain Elle*, a collection of poems, in 1994.) Though Bishop's speaker initially dismisses her grief, lightly joking that "the art of losing isn't hard to master," her closing stanza drops us, with her, over the edge into naked loss:

> Even losing you (the joking voice, a gesture
> I love) I shan't have lied. It's evident
> the art of losing's not too hard to master
> Though it may look like (*Write* it!) like disaster.

"*Write* it!" Bishop's inner poet insists, pushing us through the domestic comedy of missing objects, to face unflinchingly the greater loss that domestic comedy discloses. Birrell, Schofield, Crosbie, and the beautiful losers who populate their books look unflinchingly into the face of domestic comedy; they "(*Write* it!) like disaster."

Performance & Precarity

Marie-Claire Blais
Mai at the Predators' Ball. Anansi $22.95

Katrina Onstad
Everybody Has Everything. Emblem $22.99

Reviewed by Gillian Dunks

As Judith Butler argues, individuals who do not "live their gender in intelligible ways" have precarious lives. They are exposed to social misrecognition, violence, and even death. Katrina Onstad's *Everybody Has Everything* and Marie-Claire Blais' *Mai at the Predators' Ball* examine characters whose subversive performance of gender makes their lives precarious, yet Blais finds potential for positive social change in subversive performativity, whereas Onstad does not.

The dust jacket of Katrina Onstad's *Everybody Has Everything* poses the book's central question: can everyone be a parent? The book's implicit answer to this rhetorical question is no. James and Ana, married, middle-class professionals in Toronto nearing the age of forty, cannot conceive. In a convenient plot twist, when their best friends Marcus and Sarah crash their car, James and Ana become the legal guardians of their friends' son, Finn. Ana, a corporate lawyer, struggles to orient herself within her new role as "mother," whereas James, upon losing his job, takes on the role of "stay-at-home-Dad" with aplomb. Sarah, Finn's biological mother, survives the crash, but remains in a coma for most of the novel.

Like Alice Munro, Onstad is more attuned to the subtle complexities of character development than plot. Much of the plot feels shopworn: Finn's arrival in the couples' life reveals their increasing incompatibility, and Sarah recovers from her vegetative state precisely when Ana recognizes she is not interested in mothering Finn. There is another question, though, that the novel poses: why are women expected to be mothers? Ana consistently fails to perform

the "maternal," demonstrating a marked lack of interest in Finn. Furthermore, Ana's professional life proves inhospitable to motherhood—her office, dominated by better-paid male colleagues, causes another female lawyer with children, Elspeth, to pretend she has no children. Although Ana's husband expects her to accommodate a child easily—based on his assumption of women's innate maternal nature—Ana resists constructed femininity. It is only when Ana rejects her husband and child that she gains autonomy, yet Ana remains emotionally unfulfilled at the end of the novel, perceiving only "pointless" white space in the universe around her. Ana's existential angst, Onstad suggests, is a result of her refusal to remain within the confines of constructed gender identity. As such, Ana's life becomes increasingly "unreadable," as Butler claims precarious life is.

Mai at the Predators' Ball unites the narratives of a group of men in drag at the Porte du Baiser Saloon with the story of a teenage girl named Mai. Blais accomplishes this through the use of free indirect discourse. One key Saloon character is Yinn, a costume designer and artist who presents as both male and female throughout the novel. Yinn's name, surely an overt pun on the interconnected, opposing forces of *yin* and *yang*, reflects the social constructions of gender for the drag Queens at the Saloon. Their successful performances of femininity and masculinity de-stabilize notions of innate gender identity. However, such performance is not free of pain: HIV, drug-abuse, and systemic problems that are the result of social injustice mark the lives of these characters. The Saloon is a liminal zone—Blais' frequent references to the hostile world surrounding it, full of abusive johns and harassing police officers, locate Yinn and friends in a world where they are socially stigmatized and exposed as objects for public consumption. The death of the aptly named Fatalité, a performer at the Saloon who has succumbed to AIDS, becomes an occasion for Yinn to make a public bid for equal social recognition. Yinn's elaborate public pageant is motivated by a recognition of "the overwhelming precariousness of all their lives" and a desire to "get back some hope." Although the pageant may not secure the political recognition Yinn desires, Blais locates the potential for positive social recognition within precarious communities like the Saloon. For example, Petites Cendres, a character with HIV at the fringes of Yinn's glittering circle of Queens, nourishes a desire to be *recognized* by Yinn. In the novel's final scene, Yinn makes eye contact with Petites Cendres and waves "tenderly"—a powerful moment suggesting the potential within precarious communities to resist the violence of imposed gender identity and social misrecognition.

Mai's life is also bound by heteronormative gender constructs, but, unlike the Queens at the Saloon, Mai struggles to make her performance a subversive bid for social change. Mai is capable of making mature observations but is limited by a body hovering between childishness and full sexual maturation. Mai's friend, Tammy, oppressed by her parents' patriarchal expectations, takes more action than Mai does: Tammy becomes anorexic, attempting to reject her newly minted hips and breasts in order to emulate the bodies of male rappers, who look "like just a heart with some flesh and skin around it." Tammy's desire for an identity that is not defined by her femininity is shared by Mai and several of her other female relatives, who are unsure of how to be good daughters, wives, and mothers. It is in connections like the ones between Mai and Tammy that Blais locates potential for a re-engagement of gender identity.

Despite the difficulty of Blais' style and the occasional redundancy of Onstad's, both novels do an exemplary job of examining the ways in which the social construction of gender shapes individuals' lives.

Swimming with Feminists

Susan Brown, Jeanne Perreault, Jo-Ann Wallace, and Heather Zwicker, eds.
Not Drowning But Waving: Women, Feminism, and the Liberal Arts. U of Alberta P $39.95

Reviewed by Marni Stanley and Kathryn Barnwell

Stevie Smith's well-known metaphor (which has been reversed for the book's title) places both subject and spectator in a quandary. For the subject far off shore, it is how to communicate one's message to the spectator on shore; for the spectator, it is to correctly interpret the subject's semaphore. Since misinterpretation could have fatal consequences, the spectator can't afford to allow the subject to drown simply to avoid the embarrassment of an unnecessary and unwanted rescue mission. Whether waving or drowning is occurring, attention must be paid.

This anthology purports to be a "progress report on the variety of feminisms at work in academe and beyond," and yet its title's poetic ambiguity suggests that there are many more possible messages from "out there" that need our attention, that a post-feminist safe harbour has not yet been reached, and that a revisiting of Western feminisms' metaphor of first, second, and third waves is called for.

The title of this collection, honouring Patricia Clements, long-time Dean of Arts at the University of Alberta, is most apt since many of the diverse essays it contains have in common an exploration of the use of metaphor as a means of problematizing (or opening up) key markers in feminist praxis—primarily of the last half century in Canada—in both academe and activism. Metaphor prompts theory that in turn prompts strategy. The language we use matters.

For Katherine Binhammer and Ann Shteir, it matters that we abandon the image of a historical progression of feminist thought for a more provocative (and less seemingly judgmental) "all-at-onceness." They remind us that reading Mary Wollstonecraft, for example, as feminist analysis relevant only to her own historic moment is to obscure the ongoing applicability of her work to subsequent feminist thought. We need to be reminded that "feminism's truth is that it must always struggle within contradiction, of acting on behalf of women while it simultaneously erases the category."

Elizabeth Groeneveld, in her essay on feminism's use of the wave metaphor, argues that the image of the wave creates a too simplistic narrative of linear progress that obscures as much as it reveals. "This conceptualization of feminist histories," she writes, "tends to overlook the ways in which the energies within social movements often take multiple forms or are engaged elsewhere at different times and in different spaces." She suggests replacing the wave with Deleuze and Guattari's metaphor of the rhizome, which offers a way to think about the intricate connections of ideas, polydirectional and expansive, often hidden underground, but always present and ready to bloom in the right conditions.

Amber Dean's compelling reflection on the Disappeared Women of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside offers a careful investigation into how much language matters. Hundreds of women didn't simply "disappear"; they "were disappeared" in many ways: through the history and ongoingness of colonization, and through the culture's indifference to the humanity of addicts and sex workers. When attention is finally paid to them on the basis of an appeal to see them as sisters, mothers, and daughters, Dean wonders if this change of language, however strategic, may also contribute to the erasure of the circumstances of their lives and deaths. And, lest we consign their stories to a convenient past, Dean insists that these women haunt us in a present where violence against women is ongoing.

Lise Gotell's essay on the human rights case Nixon v. Vancouver Rape Relief considers how this difficult and very divisive case about whether an MTF trans woman had a right to work in a woman-only private organization "resists a feminist solution." Who defines "woman" as a category, and for what purposes: inclusion or exclusion, the extension of rights or the limitations thereof?

However difficult the swim sometimes seems, feminists in the liberal arts aren't drowning, as long as Canadian institutions continue to employ a range of thoughtful voices such as these, who remind us of the temperature of the water and the hazards therein.

Remapping Chineseness

Weyman Chan
Chinese Blue. Talonbooks $16.95

Lily Cho
Eating Chinese: Culture on the Menu in Small Town Canada. U of Toronto P $24.95

Julia Lin
Miah. TSAR $20.95

Reviewed by Guy Beauregard

In *Transpacific Articulations*, Chih-ming Wang has productively theorized the term Asia/America as "a structure of feeling shaped by colonial histories, imperialist domination, and . . . neoliberalist imaginations." For Wang, this term enables us to rethink "the movement of Asian/Americans as they travel to shake, link, and reconfigure both places of ancestry and residence across the old and new spatialities and temporalities of family, nation-state, and empire." The three books under review help to extend this project by working across the complex terrain of what might be called *Asia/Canada*. In doing so, these texts imaginatively and critically remap discrepant histories of Chineseness in Canada and beyond in sometimes startling new ways.

Julia Lin's debut short story collection *Miah* is not the first fictional text published by a Taiwanese Canadian (a considerable number of sinophone texts have appeared in print), but it is, to the best of my knowledge, the first book-length Taiwanese Canadian text in English to fictionalize the links between Taiwan and Canada. The collection's interlinked stories ambitiously cut across the Pacific, from rural communities in southern Taiwan to Vancouver's West Point Grey, from the factory zones of Shenzhen to East Vancouver. In doing so, *Miah* directly confronts the complexities of Taiwan's modern political history, including the impact of Japanese colonialism (1895-1945) and the damage inflicted on the people of Taiwan during the White Terror (1949-1987) following the Chinese Nationalist takeover. These stories occasionally labour to explain parts of this history, at times obtrusively glossing terms in Hoklo (commonly known as Taiwanese) and Mandarin, and at times oddly using Hanyu Pinyin to romanize the names of characters in Taiwan. But Lin's text nevertheless movingly narrates histories of loss and defiance. As one character, Ah-Bing, declares while being interrogated by Chinese Nationalist police: "I do not belong to the Japanese. I do not belong to the Chinese. I am a Taiwanese who answers only to truth and liberty."

Lin's stories move through these histories and across multiple migrations to Canada, which are often represented with deft irony. When one character, Ah-Hong, boasts to her neighbours in Taiwan that she will be emigrating to Canada, she is met with a blank response until she explains that "[i]t's next to America"—after which she is heartily congratulated. As she departs Taiwan, Ah-Hong "feels herself flying away not only from the oppression that she suffered under the Japanese and the Mainlanders but also from the constraints of male-dominated village life." While she anticipates a "life of liberty and luxury," Lin's text persistently undercuts notions of Canada as a place of

refuge, instead drawing our attention to the various challenges—and the sometimes candidly expressed biases—of a memorable range of characters including "parachute kids" left to be educated in Canada, missionaries who have worked in Asia, and "factory girls" who have made their way from southern China to forge new lives in Canada. Especially impressive is the concluding story "Gentle Warriors," which shows, through multiple points-of-view, how such apparently disparate lives can intersect.

Weyman Chan's *Chinese Blue*, by contrast, puts forth a poetics of non-convergence by persistently tracking the space "between the word and the thing." Chan's earlier work as a poet has quietly gained recognition. His debut collection *Before a Blue Sky Moon* won an Alberta Book Award, and his second book *Noise From the Laundry* was shortlisted for the Governor General's Award for Poetry. *Chinese Blue* is a worthy successor that effortlessly moves across references to pop culture, glimpses of working class family life (evoking, at times the remarkable work of Fred Wah), images of environmental damage (notably in the poem "Alberta blues"), and even a conversation with the late Robert Kroetsch! Chan's text scrupulously approaches the *Chinese* referenced in the collection's title as an unstable referent, noting slyly at one point that "you can't always define it but you'll know it when you see it." But who is authorized to define "it"—and at what cost? Chan's poem "exclusion principle" provides one possible response:

> What sounded like dropped-fork names—
> Ping, Pang, Pong—
> bounding down the stairs
> to the foot of the prairie
> were less than rain to those who came
> and went.

At stake here is not the "more than two thousand years of ancient Chinese tradition" referred to on the back of the edition under review, but instead the inventive ways that Chan's text could help us to envision how such Orientalist framings might be undone.

While *Chinese Blue* maps out what Gerry Shikatani has called the imagination's "vivid disjunctive trajectories," Lily Cho's critical study *Eating Chinese* focuses tightly on one site: the ubiquitous small-town Chinese Canadian restaurant, which Cho persuasively reads as "an awkward reminder of the ways in which modernity sometimes stammers, prematurely announcing the death of that which is not yet dead." For Cho, "these restaurants function as a locus for examining diasporic culture" as well as a way of rethinking "the juncture between old and new diasporas." Cho reads these restaurants as "culturally productive space[s]" that should not be viewed as straightforward reflections of Chineseness or of small town Canadian culture, but instead—following the work of critics such as Meaghan Morris—as resonant cultural sites.

At times, some readers may find the range of textual materials addressed in Cho's study to be somewhat thin, especially perhaps in the discussion in chapter 3 of folk songs by Sylvia Tyson and Joni Mitchell. And it is difficult to imagine any reader being pleased with the multiple errors that appear in the list of Works Cited—errors that could and should have been corrected in the 2012 reprinted edition under review. But despite these apparent and actual shortcomings, *Eating Chinese* is a powerful and rare work of criticism. There are few scholars working in Canada today who are capable of integrating, in such a seamless manner personal reflections, readings of the colonial archive (including, in chapter 1, a brilliant discussion of a panic over food poisoning in British colonial Hong Kong in 1857), contributions to literary studies (including, in chapter 5, a forceful intervention in what Cho calls "the dilemma of Wah criticism"), and discussions of visual culture (including, in the conclusion, an evocative reading of a figure labeled as "a woman in disguise" on the back of a photograph taken in a lumber camp in British

Columbia in 1905). Toward the end of her study, Cho readily acknowledges "other histories yet to be unfolded." In this way, *Eating Chinese* generously points us forward, inviting us to imagine how acts of remembering a past that is not yet past could help clarify "work that has yet to be done."

Indigenous Storytelling

Neil Christopher
Kappianaqtut: Strange Creatures and Fantastic Beings From Inuit Myths and Legends, Volume 1: Giants and the Mother of the Sea Mammals, Second Edition. Inhabit $19.95

Kim Anderson
Life Stages and Native Women: Memory, Teachings, and Story Medicine. U of Manitoba P $27.95

Eden Robinson
The Sasquatch at Home: Traditional Protocols and Modern Storytelling. U of Alberta P $10.95

Reviewed by Nancy Van Styvendale

Neil Christopher's *Kappianaqtut: Strange Creatures and Fantastic Beings From Inuit Myths and Legends, Volume 1* is a collection of stories about two beings from Inuit cosmology: the "mother of the sea mammals," Nuliajuk, and the giants of the north. For the most part, the stories are excerpted from late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century ethnographic texts by Knud Rasmussen and Franz Boas, who recorded and translated the oral stories of Indigenous "informants." Christopher links the excerpts with brief glosses, illuminating major themes such as the power of women, the creation of natural phenomena, and the mistreatment of orphans. The collection is important, amassing out-of-print stories—and often multiple versions of the same story—in one text, but it should be recognized mainly as a compilation of colonial translations of Inuit stories from Inuktitut to English, and from oral to written. And while Christopher references consultations with Inuit elders and storytellers, he includes only a few contemporary narratives. The collection would have been much stronger if, in addition to including more unmediated Inuit voices, the author had discussed the issues and limitations that attend colonial ethnography. Naïveté is also evidenced in diction—for example, the use of "strange creatures" to refer to cultural figures of great importance. However, the book will prove an accessible starting point for those interested in studying Inuit cosmology in general, and the figures of Nuliajuk and the giants in particular.

Kim Anderson's *Life Stages and Native Women: Memory, Teachings, and Story Medicine* also brings together stories, in this instance about the roles and responsibilities of northern Algonquian women (Cree, Métis, Ojibway, and Saulteaux) during the 1930s to 1960s. Like Christopher, Anderson (Cree/Métis) uses non-Indigenous ethnographic texts, but she makes readers aware of their ethnocentric and androcentric bias. Through interviews conducted with fourteen women from the Prairies and Ontario, Anderson puts oral history at the centre of her analysis, illuminating how Indigenous identities were informed by gender and life-stage, and how the women's fulfillment of these roles was necessary to the healthy functioning of their societies. Her intention is decolonization; she shares "story medicines" of traditional (i.e., land-based) practices in order to recover knowledge of Indigenous women's lifeways and inspire current and future generations. While she recognizes the many atrocities of the time, she chooses to focus on empowering narratives, showing the survival of customs and values. She provides context of the kind missing above, discussing ethical scholarship, protocol, and the importance of relationship in the sharing of oral tradition. Readers learn that oral stories are both consistent and flexible: while maintaining core truths, they often change to suit the needs and relationship of teller and listener.

Who is listening thus matters very much to the kind of story that is told and the information that can be shared. Returning to the stories in *Kappianaqtut*, readers would do well to remember Anderson's insights into the living, relational aspect of oral narrative.

In 2010, Haisla/Heiltsuk author Eden Robinson delivered the 4th annual Henry Kreisel lecture. Published as *The Sasquatch at Home*, the lecture revisits ideas raised by Christopher and Anderson's texts such as the role of stories in passing down lessons and cultural values, the importance of relationships to the continued life of stories, and the ways in which place and context shape narrative. Itself a print version of an orally delivered text, *The Sasquatch at Home* contains three episodic narratives (a common structure of oral tradition, where stories are linked thematically rather than chronologically). The major theme of all three, as the book's subtitle suggests, is "traditional protocols and modern storytelling." In the first narrative, Robinson explains how she came to understand *nusa*—the traditional way of teaching Haisla protocols—through a trip to Graceland she took with her mother. While traveling to the King's Manor might seem an unlikely place to learn about Haisla tradition, this is exactly Robinson's point: traditional protocols should not be seen as vestiges of the past; rather, they are an active presence in the contemporary world, carried in stories. The second and third narratives in the lecture continue to explore the relationship between tradition and modernity, turning to the importance of land in the continuation of traditional practices. Land holds stories, connects generations, and inspires contemporary writing: Robinson's novel *Monkey Beach*, for example, preserves Haisla stories rooted in specific places Robinson visited with her father while writing the book. The genius of Robinson's lecture is that it makes the reader/listener "do the work" of making meaning: as in oral traditions, we are called to draw the connections and come to our own conclusions. And as Qitsualik and Tinsley remind us in the foreword to *Kappianaqtut*, "only an individual who has sought out and actively plucked a lesson from interaction with others is one who has truly learned."

Occupying Change

Stephen Collis
Dispatches from the Occupation: A History of Change. Talonbooks $16.95

Reviewed by Julie L. MacArthur

In September 2011, following Occupy Wall Street's takeover of Zucotti Park, similar encampments developed in more than eighty countries around the world, reinvigorating hope in mass political mobilization on the left (broadly conceived). Some of these lasted weeks, others months. In his book on the subject, English professor and Vancouver "Occupier" Stephen Collis offers up a unique and heartfelt window into the rise and fall—or more accurately, transformation—of the Occupy movement. His *Dispatches from the Occupation* consists of "the whole jumble of rants, proclamations, manifestos, thoughts, screeds, and squibs that coursed through one occupier's aching head and heart over some seven or eight months." Collis uses the experience in Occupy Vancouver—presented in a series of blog-post "dispatches"—and surveys radical thought from Slavoj Žižek to Henri Lefebvre and David Harvey in order to draw lessons about transformation and change. A central theme running throughout the text is the dialectical pressures facing activists: reform and revolution, process and message, solidarity and ideological purity. These pressures can lead to the failure of political movements, as they break apart under the weight of internal tensions and state pressure. While he finds hope for creation of a

new and more democratic politics in the dynamism created by these pressures, there are also important cautionary lessons to be learned for new movements.

Collis' text is separated into three sections: 1) theories, 2) dispatches, and 3) theses. The dispatches make up roughly half the pages. They trace the author's enthusiasm and hope for the encampment, through the debates around tactics and messaging to the overdose and death of Ashlie Gough, to municipal election, and to the eviction notice in November 2011. This personal and locally grounded narrative is where the book makes real contribution. Other texts have emerged analyzing the global Occupy movement—including Graeber, Krugman, and Chomsky's *Occupy*, as well as Judy Rebick's *Occupy This*—but Collis' level of involvement and "embeddedness" in Vancouver makes for a unique journey for the reader, as does its rather lyrical style. As such, I can see students of social movements and politics, as well as those interested in activism more generally, finding much to "metabolize" and debate within its pages.

Dispatches does not, however, make for a cohesive argument for what's wrong in the world today (despite the fact it suggests clear points of tension); rather, it presents an insider's account of the dreams and challenges of the Occupy encampment in Vancouver. As a result, it will appeal most directly to those already convinced that revolutionary change to our social and economic structures is necessary. It may also appeal to those interested in "what Occupy was all about," but be warned, the answer is not a simple one. In his discussion of demands, Collis argues that "[w]e demand an alternative. We demand to be able to take time and talk, to figure out what a *real* alternative might be. To work at it, from the bottom up, in tents in the middle of our cities if need be." Readers may also find it somewhat repetitive and in places contradictory (for example, "the tents are crucial" versus "the tents are not the point"); however, for this reader, these represent a fascinating lesson on the "messiness" of shifting challenges and foci throughout the lived process, rather than a serious flaw in the text.

Despite the relatively short life of the encampments, Collis argues the events of Occupy are but one part of a broader wave of mobilizations in recent years: in Tahrir Square and the broader Arab Spring, anti-austerity protests in Greece and Spain. His point rings true. The factors driving these movements—austerity, elitism, militarism, and environmental collapse—are just as resonant two years later. Indeed, these tensions trace back to revolutionary France and the Roman Agora. As I write this, Idle No More is sweeping across Canada and reinvigorating discussions about colonialism and treaty obligations long absent from media attention. At Vancouver's Occupy encampment, discussions linking pipeline expansion to crony capitalism in Canada echo those protesting in front of the Wall Centre Hotel (the site of the Joint Review Panel hearings over Enbridge's Northern Gateway Pipeline) in January 2013. Occupy Vancouver working groups continue to be active in the city and engaged in "solidarity actions" with Idle No More. When viewing the movement through this lens—as a part of an emergent wave of activism—the reports of the death of Occupy seem greatly exaggerated.

Eastern Promises

Lesley Crewe
Kin. Vagrant $19.95

Scott Fotheringham
The Rest Is Silence. Goose Lane $29.95

Kevin Major
New Under the Sun. Cormorant $32.00

Reviewed by Lee Frew

Despite their generic differences, each of these three novels set in Atlantic Canada seeks to resolve its plot with characters achieving some lasting sense of belonging. In Lesley Crewe's domestic romance *Kin*, an extended Cape Breton family serves as the enduring reference point for three generations of its members. Kevin Major's *New Under the Sun*, which can be read as historiographic metafiction, focuses on a protagonist's return home "from away" within a much longer history of human settlement in Newfoundland and Labrador. As a back-to-the-land narrative set in rural Nova Scotia, Scott Fotheringham's dystopian *The Rest Is Silence* plays on the trope of the Canadian wilderness as the therapeutic site for individual regeneration. At the same time that they engage with the cultural tensions of the region, each of these novels also seems to address a much broader desire on the part of the characters to reconcile themselves to specific spaces.

Although Cape Breton Island is the overarching context of Crewe's *Kin*, it functions mainly as a picturesque backdrop to a long series of melodramatic episodes: a golden world in which the trials and tribulations of individual characters affirm an unambiguous faith in the strength and beauty of family. While I admit my own impatience with the "and then" narrative structure of the contemporary romance—and its plodding details, jejune dialogue, clichéd observations, inconsistent pacing, timeworn plot devices, and oppressive sentimentality and nostalgia—I do realize that novels such as *Kin* remain very popular. Indeed, Crewe's previous works have been commercially successful, and online reviews frequently praise her for the familiarity of her characters and the straightforwardness of her prose. Perhaps *Kin* would be of interest mostly to those in need of a "life-affirming" read or an "escape."

Although more literary in scope, Major's *New Under the Sun* might offer the same kind of appeal, as a sustained fantasy of indigenization. To be fair, any shortcoming this novel may have in representing Aboriginal people and indigeneity seems unavoidable. It is to Major's great credit that his novel is well written, nuanced, and compelling. *New Under the Sun* comprises four interwoven narrative sections: "Shannon," the present featuring Shannon Carew's move back to Newfoundland, after twenty years of living in the far North and British Columbia, to take up a position with Parks Canada; "Cormack," the early nineteenth-century letters and journal entries of the historical figure William Cormack, most of which pertain to Shawnadithit, the last living member of the Beothuk First Nation; "Nonosa," an unnamed novel about an Aboriginal leader, his daughter Shawna, and other members of the Maritime Archaic cultural complex that predated the Beothuk; and "Joanes," a short story about a Basque whaler and an Aboriginal woman, Shanawdí, in sixteenth-century Labrador. As the similarities of the women's names suggest, each narrative represents one link on a long chain of basically accidental human presence in the region. The novel thus risks presenting contemporary Aboriginal land claims as moot, especially since, as we are told at the outset, "In Newfoundland nature is a blessed snarl, humans an imposition." If the land will claim no one, no one may claim the land.

The ways in which *New Under the Sun* engages with this minefield of Canadian cultural politics is, as I have mentioned,

inevitably unsatisfactory. First, Shannon's antagonistic view of "Aboriginal matters" as merely a series of "significant obstacles" to her career with Parks Canada is too easily smoothed over by the sexual relationship she strikes up with Simon, the hunky Métis "stakeholder" she must consult for a work project. Although Simon does not oppose her proposal—a reenactment of first contact between Aboriginal people and Norse settlers at the L'Anse aux Meadows National Historic Site—he does object to the way in which it presents a "sanitized version" of colonization. As Shannon remains determined to push her project forward, because "she has always been good at compartmentalizing," the onus then falls on Simon to gently and patiently teach her to understand that colonialism is an unresolved conflict. Just as problematically, the end of the "Shannon" narrative relies on a plot twist—really as *deus ex machina*—in order to bring her thinking around at last. It is only after learning she might have Aboriginal ancestry that she risks her job to help Simon force the Provincial Department of Archaeology to return an Aboriginal skeleton to another Parks Canada site. Until this point, she has refused to help him because "[i]t's not [her] fight." As a character, Shannon has hit the indigenization jackpot, in that she can now claim some form of Aboriginality while safeguarding her white privilege: as she informs Simon of her "newfound heritage," she also maintains that "I'm about as Métis as Snow White." Nonetheless, her belonging to Newfoundland in the end seems to overcome the lifelong alienation she has experienced from family turmoil, estrangement, and out-migration. Whereas she had previously "never defined herself as being from Newfoundland," she at last "sees herself turning into the generic Newfoundlander."

Scott Fotheringham's *The Rest Is Silence* also features a protagonist grappling with his rootlessness and an Aboriginal love interest. The novel is set in the wake of a worldwide catastrophe, in which genetically engineered bacteria have been unleashed to dissolve all plastics. Our narrator has retreated to the Nova Scotia wilderness, where he lives off the land in Thoreauesque fashion, creating a "Forest Garden" by growing his own food and building his own home. He also becomes sexually involved with Lina, a Wendat woman from Quebec, and attempts to come to terms with his father's death. His first-person narrative alternates with a third-person account of the events leading up to the disaster, set in New York City. This second narrative is focused on Benita "Benny" Mosher, a PhD candidate at the Cornell University Medical College (the author's alma mater), who is obsessed with finding a technological fix to the enormous global problem of plastic waste. Much of this narrative concerns Benny's disillusionment with grad school and a love triangle she is involved in, before concluding with her escape from New York once her clandestine research yields its nefarious results.

Fotheringham's engagement with the current environmental crisis is reminiscent of Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*, and like that novel, *The Rest is Silence* presents a horrendous act of terrorism as being motivated from a position of more legitimate concern and advocacy. The end of plastic, to be clear, has dire consequences for the globalized social order since things like computers, transportation vehicles, medical equipment, and food containers can no longer function or exist as such. Benny's narrative, however, turns out to be a cautionary tale about the dangers of unintended consequences—as well as a rejection of techno-science as the answer to our environmental crisis—since we learn that the villain of her narrative, Dr. Leach (i.e., the leaching of plastics, if not also his lechery), has been able to capitalize on the disaster she created. Moreover, he goes on

to be lionized as "The Superscientist Who Saved the World" with his technological wizardry, which amounts to developing new plastics containing antibacterial heavy metals that will poison humans and the environment more than ever.

If I were to take issue with *The Rest Is Silence*, it would be akin to the questions I raise with Major's novel. Fotheringham follows a long tradition of presenting the Canadian wilderness as an antimodern refuge from the feminizing enervation of the city. Urban modernity, symbolized here as the evils of plastic, means "little boys are growing tits from bisphenol A poisoning." Contrasting the attendant confusion, alienation, deception, ambition, and greed that further typify the city, we have in *The Rest Is Silence* a bucolic Nova Scotia countryside featuring straight-talking folks, neighbourly cooperation, and the masculinizing effects of both physical labour and roughing it in the bush. While the role of gender in the novel, and its relationship to the wilderness and the city, is taken in an unexpected and innovative direction, authority and authenticity nevertheless remain grounded in the indigenizing potential of the wilderness. In the same vein, the easy fatalism of the novel's final chapter—"We won't survive" the looming destruction of the world—would too conveniently render historical injustices and the colonial struggle for unqualified belonging quite meaningless. If we have no future, then who really cares about the past? At any rate, *The Rest is Silence* is an interesting read, and it invites further study.

Lives of Boys and Men

Tamas Dobozy
Siege 13. Thomas Allen $22.95

Cary Fagan
My Life Among the Apes. Cormorant $22.00

Russell Wangersky
Whirl Away. Thomas Allen $21.95

Reviewed by Shawn Syms

Contrasting conceptions of masculinity are elucidated in three recently published short-fiction collections produced by Cormorant Books and its parent company Thomas Allen Publishers. In *Whirl Away* by Russell Wangersky, the lives of boys and men in Canada's Atlantic provinces are tinged with physical, emotional, and psychic pain. The male characters that populate Cary Fagan's Giller-longlisted *My Life Among the Apes* execute tiny victories against frustration, alienation, and ennui. And perhaps most startling, the soldiers and citizens of Tamas Dobozy's *Siege 13* experience lives deeply marked by the presence—and aftermath—of the traumatic brutality of the siege of Budapest near the conclusion of the Second World War.

Each book focuses on a particular constituency—Wangersky, East Coasters; Fagan, Toronto Jews; Dobozy, Hungarians both at home and diasporically—to suggest broader truths regarding human experience. The tensions explored in Fagan's work are perhaps the most understated of the three collections. The Toronto-based author of more than two dozen books of fiction, non-fiction, and children's literature is gifted with a subtle, but still frequently unsettling, touch. His stories, which frequently consider Jewish identity, explore notions of pleasure and joy, displacement, and alienation as naturally occurring phenomena in his characters' lives.

A middle-aged man recalls a confusing coming-of-age moment in "The Creech Sisters." Nearly a teen at a Georgian Bay

cottage with his brothers and parents, he becomes erotically fixated upon two neighbouring middle-aged sisters. A schism develops between his parents after the Creech sisters attempt to seduce his father. The attempt to reconcile his nascent sexual feelings for the women with his imaginings of what his father could have done with them turns out to have a life-altering effect for the man, who ends up opting for a life path far different from the rest of his siblings.

"The Floating Wife" explores the implications of one man's choices on his wife and family. Albert Zaretsky leads a double life. By day he is a respected Supreme Court judge but on his own time, he is a magician of a very traditional bent, to the great chagrin of his wife, who eventually leaves him, alienated by his all-consuming hobby. Michael Spearman, who teaches music in a mildewed Hebrew school basement in the tragicomic yet hopeful "Dreyfus in Wichita," combats "the quiet thrumming of disappointment in himself" by fashioning musical theatre from a little-known moment in Jewish American history. The titular character of "The Little Underworld of Edison Wiese" takes a raft of unhappy possibilities—a dead-end job, haranguing boss, disappointed parents, misfit patrons—and transforms them into a thing of beauty when he hosts an unforgettable New Year's soiree in the coffee shop of a subterranean mall in Toronto's PATH system. In smooth, graceful prose, Fagan exposes the reader to men who chart their own unusual paths, rejecting societal definitions of success and failure.

Wangersky's Giller-shortlisted *Whirl Away* is characterized by more overt disquiet. Examining the place of men in both the workplace and the domestic sphere, Wangersky's stories frequently address such themes and topics as anger, violence, loneliness, and death. "Echo" tackles the generational impact on domestic violence through the perceptions of five-year-old Kevin Rowe, who assigns an emotionally discordant musicality to the soundtrack of his father battling his mother yet again: "the deep rumble of his voice from the kitchen, not so much words as a deep straight line. And over the top of it, his mother's thin voice, growing higher and then falling away like a ball bouncing up and down." As the ambulance arrives, Kevin mouths words he's obviously heard in his house before: "Bitch . . . Just like your goddamn mother." The effect is chilling.

The reader is positioned even closer to male violence in "Look Away," told from the point of view of a deeply unreliable narrator—drunken wife-beater Keith Pomeroy. Keith wonders where his wife and two young children have gone, and why they would have left him all alone at the isolated lighthouse where he is keeper. Wangersky crafts a portrait both surreal and disturbing, yet oddly humanizing. From his disturbed vantage point, Keith is convinced Madeline and his two children constantly play tricks upon him, making him the butt of jokes. One moment he can describe his wife's fine looks and lively personality; the next, he strikes her without warning: "I hit her in the face—hard—on a hot July morning when she was three steps up from the bottom of the circular staircase in the light tower." While Madeline bleeds from the nose, Keith rationalizes: "It hadn't ever been quite like this. But it wasn't my fault."

Men and women both suffered greatly in the historic siege of Budapest. Over the course of a month and a half, Soviet forces wrestled control of Hungary's capital city from Nazi Germany near the end of World War II. The result: tens of thousands of deaths and tens of thousands of rapes. The impact of the siege—and its psychic and cultural aftermath spread across time and geography—are the primary sources of inspiration for *Siege 13*, Tamas Dobozy's set of thirteen stories about lives one way or another touched by this period of intense brutality.

Dobozy, a Kitchener-based English and film professor, explores the siege from multiple angles. In "Rosewood Queens," Mariska, a young Canadian woman, struggles to understand her own cultural identity in the face of constant stonewalling from her father Miklós about his experiences during the war. Eventually she becomes an academic and reads in books about "the Red Army, men standing on women's faces while their comrades took turns, girls young as fourteen locked in rooms visited repeatedly, and afterwards the gift of a bayonet slashed from crotch to throat." In "The Animals of the Budapest Zoo, 1944-1945" deaths are individualized and depicted in stark relief, as a team of zookeepers trying to save the animals whilst, all around them, citizens and colleagues are mortally wounded. Amid all the carnage and post-traumatic stress of *Siege 13*, the most fascinating masculine conceptualization arises in the pages of the novella-length "The Beautician." In the early 1990s, Arpád Holló is the caretaker of Toronto émigré hangout the Szécsényi Club. Decades prior he was a censor of Hungarian literature working for the Communist Party, a secret kept from his present-day peers. For years, Holló has worn makeup and has been accused of loving men. While admitting to homoerotic attractions, Holló rejects identity categories, and recounts to a young academic researcher how he embarked on a dangerous sexual affair with his boss' wife. Notions of disclosure and exposure criss-cross as the student must decide whether to reveal any of Holló's confessions to his thesis advisors—or the local Hungarian-Canadian community at large.

While Wangersky, Fagan, and Dobozy each make particularly interesting statements about masculinity and male identities in the course of their work, none of this is to say that they fail to create women characters that are also complex and challenging. Each book succeeds in establishing an internally consistent realm in which character, mood, and theme unite to raise provocative questions regarding not only gender relations but also the broader world in which these are situated.

Shifting Cadences

Rishma Dunlop
Lover Through Departure: New and Selected Poems. Mansfield $19.95

Rishma Dunlop; Suzanne Northcott, illus.
White Album. Inanna $22.95

Proma Tagore
language is not the only thing that breaks. Arsenal Pulp $14.95

Gurjinder Basran
Everything Was Good-bye. Mother Tongue $21.95

Reviewed by Ranbir K. Banwait

A coterie of texts draws attention to a growing body of work by South Asian Canadian women writers. Mediating diasporic sensibilities through a gender-specific locale, each of the following texts differently references how minority writing is fraught with expectations about the representation of ethnicity. As Christine Kim notes in her attention to feminist minority writing and the demands of the literary marketplace in "Troubling the Mosaic," works by ethnic writers often face the risk of being read more for their ethnographic insight into the different communities assigned to them, rather than for their artistic value. When read as "examples of cultural difference," they can be readily consumed for their representation of otherness; this allows the marketplace to assimilate minoritarian texts in a self-validating gesture that, in turn, consolidates dominant views of ethnic difference vis-à-vis whiteness. It is thus of interest to see how questions of form and "cultural difference" coalesce in the texts of Proma Tagore, Rishma Dunlop, and Gurjinder Basran, given media portrayals of South Asian difference in Canada and its association with the spectacle of patriarchy, religious institutions, and the excessive semiotics of the turban.

Tagore's *language is not the only thing that breaks*, a debut collection of poems, refuses to focus on a singular ethnic community, displaying a keen awareness of the global realities of displacement and imperialism through the spatial poetics of the body's fragmentation. Writing, for instance, for Reena Virk or of "disappeared women / driven under dreams," Tagore explores the interlacing of news events within quotidian spaces of remembering and forgetting: "in places where memory is impossible, / your story lives resilient." Tracing the topography of the body through the landscapes that the poet inhabits, *language* recaps racial discrimination and local histories, as well as cross-cultural social and political alliances: "how other bodies hold up / workers reservations." The shifting rhythms of the line breaks sift longing in Tagore's poems, calling for a nuanced reading of "cultural difference" as a part of larger patterns of capital, migration, and labour.

Taking a different approach, Rishma Dunlop's collections, *Lover Through Departure* and her collaborative work with artist Suzanne Northcott entitled *White Album*, scrutinize political and cultural landscapes from the lens of diasporic subjectivities that immigrate, migrate, and travel. *White Album* reflects on girlhood by featuring the historical backdrop of the 1960s. Northcott's paintings punctuate this collection along with the lyrics of some of the most popular songs of the time: "I waltz / the waltz from *War and Peace* amidst the clang . . . / In the kitchen, mother hums through a clatter of dishes / and reports of massacres in Cambodia." By adding a multimedia dimension to the poetic text, Dunlop stacks her archive of the past alongside her review of global events such as the war in Iraq: "Citizens become aliens / women's veils become partitions. / Turbaned men drive taxis, / English a raw tangle of verbs." Indeed, it is precisely Dunlop's exploration of the loss of the familial through the loss of the father in both poetic texts that is lyrically effective. Rendering images of the turban through the lens of mourning, Dunlop situates the turban in its historical and political contexts: "the / teacher would . . . use her / wooden pointer to show the countries / of the Empire / the . . . / red stain that marked them soft burgundy / like the colour of my father's turban."

Conversely, Gurjinder Basran's novel, *Everything Was Good-bye*, complicates such a deconstructive move in its portrayal of a troubled ethnic enclave. The novel offers a coming-of-age narrative of a woman who grows up in BC and whose life criss-crosses the borders of both the white and Sikh communities where she subsists on the margins. Raised by her widowed mother, time and again Meena flirts with the now-familiar trope of the forbidden through her attachment to a white boy. When they meet again years later, the two once more test the limits of what is socially and culturally possible (or suicidal). A perpetually melancholic subject who comes up against the patriarchal structures of her ethnic community and whose romance over-determines the course of her life, Meena embodies both the effects and stereotypes of ghettoization. A part of the novel's appeal to the literary consumer lies in its potential as popular fiction, a testament to an emerging readership of South Asian Canadian narratives.

In negotiating the multiple dimensions of diasporic living, these texts by Tagore, Dunlop, and Basran reflect on the race and gender-nexus in multicultural Canada. In doing so, they ask the reader to be attentive to the punctuating mark of the global on the local and of patriarchy as a pervasive social reality, not one that's only particular to minority communities.

Reflets fictionnels, questions interculturelles

Daniel Castillo Durante
Le Silence obscène des miroirs. Lévesque 27,00 $

Compte rendu par Nicolas Beauclair

Ce roman de Daniel Castillo Durante aborde des thèmes plutôt classiques en littérature, l'identité (ou sa perte), l'exil, les amours déchus, etc., mais avec un regard contemporain aiguisé. Bien ancré dans le vingt-et-unième siècle, l'auteur déploie une interculturalité qui nous mène autant dans les recoins subtils de l'identité mixte du personnage principal, dont les racines se trouvent à la fois à Montréal et en Argentine, que dans les liens qu'il tisse entre la culture populaire et l'érudition.

La double identité du protagoniste, qui nous ramène à celle de l'auteur, Québécois d'origine argentine, nous offre un roman aux accents complexes pour un lecteur qui ne serait pas familier avec la culture hispano-américaine et la langue espagnole. Ponctué de multiples références géographiques, linguistiques et culturelles à l'Argentine, le roman n'est pas pour autant hermétique et reste tout de même accessible au grand public qui saura sans doute apprécier les nombreuses intrigues qui s'entrecroisent et l'humour souvent noir de l'auteur.

La recherche identitaire du personnage principal, portée par la perte de ses papiers en terre étrangère, nous ramène aux grandes questions touchant le véritable fondement de notre identité. Cette perte le met en situation d'apatride sans papier, mais le plonge également au cœur d'un questionnement qui l'amène à replonger ses racines dans cet « entre » de l'interculturalité, à la frontière de ses diverses appartenances.

Cette interculturalité ne se manifeste cependant pas seulement à travers les différents espaces culturels qui ont formé l'auteur et le protagoniste de son roman, mais également à travers l'enchevêtrement de ses références. Passant de la culture 2.0 de l'Internet à des références pointues sur des auteurs plus ou moins connus, il nous mène dans un voyage littéraire fort intéressant faisant écho, de manière assez explicite, à Jorge Luis Borges et à sa fiction d'érudition. D'ailleurs, les connaissances littéraires de l'auteur se révèlent par la maîtrise d'une narration touffue et l'utilisation de procédés offrant une lecture à plusieurs niveaux. Ainsi, le titre du roman renvoie à celui de la dernière fiction de Borges. Le protagoniste découvre d'ailleurs qu'il en est peut-être le personnage principal. On sent également l'influence de Borges lorsque le narrateur fait référence à des œuvres à l'existence incertaine, comme cet ouvrage encyclopédique du dix-septième siècle portant sur les divers fessiers du monde.

En somme, l'écrivain nous offre un roman fort plaisant à lire, mais tout de même exigeant. Les diverses péripéties du personnage principal sont divertissantes, nous tiennent en haleine, et nous donnent en même temps à réfléchir sur des questions profondes qui restent en suspens.

Crossing Race and Nation

Winnifred Eaton; Karen H. Skinazi, ed.
Marion: The Story of an Artist's Model.
McGill-Queens UP $24.95

Reviewed by Mary Chapman

Karen Skinazi's new edition of Winnifred Eaton's 1915 novel *Marion: The Story of an Artist's Model* is a welcome addition to the growing archive of accessible texts by early Canadian women writers. It is particularly welcome because Eaton, although born and raised in Montreal and a resident of Alberta off and on from 1917 until her death, has not been given the attention she deserves by scholars of Canadian literature. Although Eaton is celebrated in the US literary canon, as the first Asian American novelist, she has not figured prominently in accounts of early

Canadian literature. One reason for this critical neglect is scholars' preference for the politically activist work of her "good sister" who, using the pseudonym "Sui Sin Far," defended the diasporic Chinese community while Winnifred chose to fashion a Japanese identity "Onoto Watanna" through the plots and illustrations of her orientalist romances, *A Japanese Nightingale* (1901), *Miss Nume of Japan* (1898), and *The Heart of Hyacinth* (1903), and the staged authorial photographs in which she wore stereotypical Japanese clothing. But another reason is surely because there have not been, up until this point, modern editions of the fiction and non-fiction Eaton wrote about Canada. Her Japanese romances—all of which are set in Japan and feature Japanese and half-Japanese young women courted by Anglo-American men—as well as her middlebrow magazine fiction, and the autobiographical *Me* have all been reissued. However, Eaton's Canadian novels—for example *Cattle* (1924) and *His Royal Nibs* (1925), both of which are set on the Canadian prairies—remain out of print.

Eaton's transnational immigrant bildungsroman *Marion* is the ideal novel through which to reorient scholarly attention toward her complex national and racial identity. Set on the complex political and psychological terrain of the Canada-US border at the turn of the century, *Marion* tells the story of an idealistic young Montreal woman who, like the many authors Nick Mount examines in *When Canadian Literature Moved to New York*, moves to the US to pursue her artistic career. The first third of the novel, loosely based on the life of Winnifred's sister Sarah Eaton Bosse (1868-1938) who moved to New York to pursue her career as an artist, tracks Marion's childhood, in a poor Bohemian Anglophone family with a "foreign" mother, in white, Francophone Montreal. Although Marion is forced by contemporary gender ideology to earn her living not as an artist but as an artist's model and actress, her move to the US liberates her from the racism she experiences in Canada, where she is marked as "other" because of her mother's unspecified "foreignness"; in the US, Marion's "difference" is attributed to her nationality rather than to a more threatening racial difference.

Skinazi's thoughtful and nuanced ninety-nine-page introduction, which includes original illustrations from the serialized novel, provides a rich context in which to read the novel. In particular, she explores two mysteries: the first is the complex mystery of the novel's authorship. As Skinazi notes, when *Marion* was first published in the popular periodical *Hearst's*, it was advertised as "[a]nonymous master-fiction" by a writer hoping to "strike out along the new lines unhampered by a literary reputation." However, when *Marion* was published in book form the following year, the cover identified two authors: "Herself and the Author of 'Me,'" referencing an anonymous autobiographical work Eaton had published the year before and perhaps Sarah herself, who may have provided the "simple language" from "notes and journals that she kept over the years." The second mystery is the novel's own coyness about the protagonist's racial identity. Skinazi reads *Marion* as a passing narrative in the sense that it "passes" as a novel unconcerned with race, but is in fact, through its focus on artistic representation, appearance, difference, and performance, all about the politics of otherness in turn-of-the-century North America. *Marion* is an ideal text to teach in a course about early Canadian identity, immigration, or transnationalism.

Le Canada francophone à la portée des étudiants

Geoffrey Ewen et Colin M. Coates, dirs.
Introduction aux études canadiennes : histoires, identités, cultures. PUO 59,95 $

Compte rendu par Françoise Le Jeune

L'ouvrage de 303 pages se présente sous la forme de vingt chapitres rédigés en français par des spécialistes reconnus des domaines et thèmes traités. Tous sont enseignants dans des universités francophones du Canada et, à ce titre, les chapitres qu'ils proposent sont rédigés clairement et simplement pour un public d'étudiants francophones de premier cycle. C'est d'abord le public que ciblent les auteurs de cet ouvrage, puisqu'ils destinent ces textes à des étudiants qui suivent un cursus en études canadiennes. L'ouvrage est cependant très accessible au grand public qui y trouvera des points de vue éclairants sur des aspects contemporains du Canada francophone.

C'est avec un soin pédagogique et une réflexion didactique que la progression des chapitres est organisée. Les étudiants et enseignants intéressés par les études canadiennes trouveront dans ce volume une approche pluridisciplinaire propre à ce cursus aujourd'hui, puisqu'il s'agit de maîtriser à la fois des connaissances en histoire, civilisation, sciences politiques, économie, sociologie, arts et littérature du Canada. Les vingt chapitres de ce volume couvrent donc l'ensemble de ces disciplines et sont regroupés sous quatre grandes parties qui représentent les quatre angles d'approche de cet ouvrage collectif. Les auteurs ont choisi d'aborder dans l'ordre les thèmes de : l'histoire, les identités nationales, les identités sociales et la culture.

Les directeurs de cette collection de textes, Colin M. Coates et Geoffrey Ewen, sont partis du constat que plusieurs ouvrages récents et pluridisciplinaires, publiés en anglais, répondaient aux besoins des étudiants anglophones, mais qu'aucun texte de même ampleur et avec le même soucis pédagogique ne présentait le Canada contemporain aux étudiants francophones. Plus précisément, l'objet des auteurs invités à participer à ce volume est le Canada francophone que le lecteur découvre ici sous ses multiples facettes et identités. Plus globalement, le lecteur est amené à réfléchir au rôle et à la place du Canada francophone dans la construction du pays et à s'intéresser à la participation des citoyens francophones dans les grands enjeux de société au Canada.

L'ouvrage adopte une approche résolument diachronique dans les premiers chapitres puisque c'est l'histoire du « fait français » au Canada qui est présenté depuis le contact avec les autochtones, l'histoire de la Nouvelle-France, en passant par la Confédération, la Révolution tranquille, l'émergence du multiculturalisme politique de Trudeau, jusqu'aux grandes réformes sociales, économiques et politiques actuelles, dont les auteurs analysent l'impact sur les sociétés francophones du Canada : au Québec, dans les Maritimes, dans les communautés francophones minoritaires de l'Ontario, des Prairies, chez les Métis ou les Inuit du nord du Québec.

L'ouvrage propose dans les parties 2, 3 et 4, une vision très claire sur l'état des lieux du Canada francophone contemporain au cœur d'un Canada en mouvement. Le pari est donc réussi puisque les étudiants francophones de premier cycle trouveront les chapitres sur les questions des identités et ceux portant sur des exemples de migrations, particulièrement intéressants. On aurait souhaité en lire davantage dans la section 3 sur les « identités sociales ». Par ailleurs, il faut souligner l'apport de la quatrième partie qui propose, ce qui n'est pas souvent le cas dans ce type d'ouvrage, des extraits d'œuvres littéraires et artistiques comme autant d'horizons à explorer en dehors du cadre des disciplines « classiques ».

Cet ouvrage pourra donc être recommandé dans les bibliographies des cursus en études canadiennes, mais également dans les cursus d'histoire et de sciences sociales. L'ouvrage ne suffira pas néanmoins à couvrir une analyse complète du Canada contemporain puisque l'accent est volontairement mis sur le Canada francophone. Une initiative qu'il faut souligner.

Indigenous Identities

Paula Anca Farca
Identity in Place: Contemporary Indigenous Fiction by Women Writers in the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.
Peter Lang $74.95 USD

Reviewed by Nancy Van Styvendale

Identity in Place focuses on the relationship between place and identity in novels by eight contemporary Indigenous women writers: Louise Erdrich (Chippewa) and Linda Hogan (Chickasaw) from the United States; Lee Maracle (Stó:lo) and Jeannette Armstrong (Okanagan) from Canada; Alexis Wright (Waanji) and Doris Pilkington (Martu) from Australia; and Patricia Grace (Ngāti Toa, Ngāti Raukawa and Te Āti Awa) and Keri Hulme (Kāi Tahu) from New Zealand. In these former colonies of the British Empire, Indigenous peoples have been displaced from their lands and identities. Paula Anca Farca argues that Indigenous women's fiction responds to and resists these losses, modelling how individuals can reconnect with their lands and identities, even if some may not have a homeland or home to return to. Places are not only geographical locations, she argues, but territories of the mind, rooted in memory and imagination and central to the creation—and re-creation—of Indigenous identities. *Identity in Place* highlights how places both shape and are shaped by the experiences, traditions, and stories of Indigenous peoples.

The volume analyzes well-established novels alongside those in need of further study, with each chapter devoted to a single author and novel. Farca could better explain the rationale behind her text selection and chronology, and her argument would benefit from a more complex synthesis of the chapters. Still, she provides useful and detailed readings, pointing to how each novel maps a unique approach to reclaiming place and identity, through journeys both real and imagined. In some novels, Farca observes, going home marks a return to Indigenous identity, as in Hogan's *Solar Storms* (1995), where after a childhood in foster care, the protagonist returns to her people and discovers herself through the land and its stories. In other texts, such as Wright's *Plains of Promise* (1997), Pilkington's *Caprice: A Stockman's Daughter* (1991), and Maracle's *Daughters are Forever* (2002), violent pasts or traumatic separations make homecoming difficult or impossible. In these cases, Farca argues, memory and imagination facilitate healing through psychic return. In *Caprice*, for example, an Aboriginal Australian woman visits her ancestral territory and imagines the history and people from which she was removed as a child, while in Maracle's novel, a Salish woman finds healing by revisiting memories of her violent past. In her concluding chapter, Farca turns to an analysis of place and reconciliation. Her discussion of Keri Hulme's *The Bone People* (1985) shows how Māori and European characters come together to create new places where they can coexist, mirroring the challenge of the postcolonial nation.

While previous studies of homecoming literature have, for the most part, been focused on the plight of male protagonists, Farca's work highlights the importance of women's texts and female protagonists. Unfortunately, the author herself does not sketch this critical context, nor does she seem aware of distinctions made in

the fields of postcolonial and Indigenous studies. She uses the term "postcolonial" uncritically, overlooking the shared *settler colonial* history—and current conditions—of the four countries under discussion. This oversight extends to the book's theoretical approach, which collapses postcolonial and Indigenous theories and, surprisingly, lacks any significant consideration of Indigenous theories of place (outside those articulated through the novels). Farca includes Indigenous literary nationalists like Craig Womack and Jace Weaver in her discussion, but a deeper understanding of Indigenous sovereignty and the nationalist position, as well as debates in the field more generally, would have helped circumvent not only the book's elision of Indigenous scholarship on place/land, but also its inconsistent attention to tribal specificities and particular historical/cultural contexts.

Secret Lives of Letters

Roger Farr
IKMQ. New Star $16.00

Andrew McEwan
Repeater. BookThug $18.00

Christine McNair
Conflict. BookThug $18.00

Angela Szczepaniak
The Qwerty Institute: Annual Report. BookThug $25.00

Reviewed by Melissa Dalgleish

What language does when no one is looking is anyone's guess, but four new collections imagine what goes on in the secret lives of letters—pull back the wrappings and trappings of daily dialogue to see what can be discovered about the hidden character of characters and examine the conflicts that arise when our purposes for language, and its purposes for itself, are at odds.

Angela Szczepaniak's second collection, *The Qwerty Institute: Annual Report*, is a dispatch from the institute where the poet "has been employed" for "most of her life"—within the structure of language itself as a manufacturer and consumer of linguistic products. Szczepaniak's lexical imaginings take the evocative potential of typography to its (il)logical limit, populating the pages of a graphic mixed-genre collection (part report, part comic book, part detective mystery, part advertisement) with letters come to life. Letting characters stand in for characters, *Qwerty*'s Detective I encounters the femme fatale F in a noir mystery that plays on the indefiniteness of the word their coupling produces; the poster boy for cosmetic typographical enhancement is Blake, an ordinary C who strikes out with women until he acquires a saucy prosthetic *cédille.* But belying the playfulness of the collection is an undercurrent of anxiety about the dangers of letting language take control: archivist Hillary Brown breeds "clerical parasites that slowly turned his flesh to paper"; a not-so-imaginary "innovation that paved the way for all of us to folder-and-file every aspect of the human mind and body"; a textual transformation already almost possible in a world where filching files is implicated in identity theft and where our identities must be proven by official documentation.

IKMQ, Roger Farr's second major publication, consists of sixty-four short passages of prose-poetry—discussions, experiments, recipes—collaboratively performed by the characters (in both senses of the word) I, K, M, and Q. The volume's cover image—a 1940s adding machine with the collection's title photoshopped over its original logo and the number sixty-four on its display—suggests the formulaic nature of Farr's conceptual poetics, and some of the constraints that guide the collection's organization are obvious: each section is titled after one of the characters and contains sixteen poems; all poems are written in the third person (which is easy to forget if one forgets that I is a character and not a

pronoun); poems begin with the letters I, K, M, and Q in repeating sequence where I always gets the last word. Like much conceptual writing, *IKMQ* seeks to discover how language will push back against linguistic and formal constraint, how it will reshape itself around barriers and boundaries imposed by the author. Christian Bök remarks that the distinct character of each univocalic chapter in *Eunioa* "proves that each vowel has its own personality, and demonstrates the flexibility of the English language." In turning characters into characters, Farr makes the same discovery—K is "a well-kept, hard-working, Kafkaesque study in contrasts"; M is "more mysterious, an esteemed, determined, . . . and unkempt *poet maudite*" (sic). As in *The Qwerty report,* where Detective I proudly boasts of his pronominal status—"I'm my own word, baby"—Farr's I is particularly complex, his name blurring the line between the conceptual and the expressive, the character I and the poet's I/eye. In "Against Expression," Farr acknowledges the difficulty of avoiding expression (so tied up with the I) and the value of constraint in achieving this end—the characters distill expression out of the poem like one distills whiskey, but when M and Q believe that the process is done, "I knew that if the goal was a completely clear and tasteless product, this procedure would have to be repeated 63 times, until all traces of the originary substance had been removed." But while distilling expression is an exercise in simple chemistry, "The Rules" and "Art as Technique" align poetics with pig slaughter, contrasting the formulaic nature of constraint-based poetics against the messiness of language itself.

In Andrew McEwan's first collection, *Repeater,* "code is conceit" and constraint used to program poetic code into computer code. In the first section, McEwan uses the ASCII code for each letter of the alphabet as the basis for 8-line acrostics. Within the bounds of this constraint, which forces the creative variability of poetry to accommodate itself to the rigid binaries of computer code, "words across page make themselves" and lines iterate like automated sequences of code. What is revealed in these iterations are the uncanny links between human and computer, between animate and mechanical, between expressive language and functional code: "birds stream in formation," their spatial positioning a coded communication. The seemingly unique individual is nothing more than "a fill-in-the-blank projection of collected atoms," a semi-random assemblage of genetic code more similar to programming than we might like to admit. *Repeater*'s epigraph asserts that "[t]he codes covered here are the beginning of a crude alphabet for our new machines' pidgin." As machines become more human and humans acknowledge their mechanical affinities, as humans language accommodates itself to the necessary rigidity and structure of computer language into order to be mutually intelligible, the creative variability of language comes into question—are we doing things with machines, and with words, with code? Or are machines and their language doing things with us?

Christine McNair's debut collection *Conflict* discovers in language "an insistent refusal to silence or to shift," as well as "the impossibility of erasure and a gritty resistance" to outside intervention. In a world with "No More History"—one unlike our own, where "uncaptured moments / do not exist in a world without catalogue," where if it isn't on Facebook, it didn't really happen—the documentary impulse is discovered to be what holds the world together and its inhabitants "survive on the tatters / of evidence." But language, like history, refuses to be fully silenced: in the graphic beauty of "[Excised] [Excised]," which replaces each word of a letter with "[excised]," meaning seeps up through the gaps left by the censors and belies the

statement that "an absence is simply an absence." "Archaeology" uncovers "the remnants of action spread thick / in silt layer: lyric scrawls." McNair's "lyrical rhetorical / kernings" also imbricate the individual and the textual, life and language, suggesting that life is not fully extinguished until its textual traces are whited out—in order to "unmake me," the speaker of "Provenance" exhorts the reader to

> rake eraser
> till paper is pressure-burnt,
> a thousand times crossed over,
> take my name
> from the indexes

But, as she concludes in "Anti-Statement," even erasures have echoes—"a low-grade fever of a tune," "stringed words floating," meaning to be found even in "the depth or shade of ink." Language persists, lives a life of its own, sometimes "trapped . . . in the space between breaths" and other times exceeding the grasp of those who ostensibly control it in order to shape worlds and works of its own creation. It is only under its "watchful eye," as Szczepaniak calls it, that these four collections come into being.

DOLAM

Janine Gallant et Maurice Raymond, dirs.
Dictionnaire des œuvres littéraires de l'Acadie des Maritimes du XXe siècle. Prise de parole 39,95 $

Compte rendu par Vincent Bouchard

Constituant un répertoire d'œuvres appartenant au corpus littéraire acadien, le *Dictionnaire des œuvres littéraires de l'Acadie des Maritimes du XXe siècle* (*DOLAM*) confirme un champ littéraire et participe à sa promotion. Se concentrant sur un corpus établi après 1958, il offre néanmoins une perspective historique en mentionnant les premières publications, telle *Le Drame du peuple Acadien : reconstitution historique en neuf tableaux et une pose plastique de la dispersion des Acadiens* (Jean-Baptiste Jégo, 1932). Le dictionnaire s'intéresse en détail aux écrits confirmés (dont les œuvres principales d'Antonine Maillet, Raymond LeBlanc, Herménégilde Chiasson, Gérald Leblanc, France Daigle, entre autres), mais également à différentes formes de littératures, dont le journal de Léonard Forest, *La Jointure du temps* (1997).

Dans cette anthologie, la sélection ne s'est pas faite sur la base d'une définition ethnique de la littérature acadienne, mais en fonction de l'interaction des œuvres et de leurs auteurs avec « l'Acadie réelle ». Janine Gallant et Maurice Raymond ont défini trois critères de sélection : les œuvres dont l'auteur est né et a vécu en Acadie; les œuvres dont l'auteur a vécu en Acadie, écrivant sur son expérience acadienne; finalement, les textes publiés en Acadie. Cette dernière catégorie permet, par exemple, de mentionner des écrivains cadiens tel Zachary Richard (*Faire récolte*, 1997) ou Jean Arceneaux (*Suite du loup*, 1998).

Outre un résumé, chaque fiche s'attarde sur des aspects différents (questions de production ou de réception, analyse du style, etc.), permettant ainsi de souligner la spécificité de l'œuvre. Par exemple, au sujet

de *L'Acadie perdue* de Michel Roy, Mar L. Johnson aborde la question du style après avoir rappelé le contexte politique indispensable pour comprendre cette œuvre, c'est-à-dire l'émergence d'un nationalisme acadien (qu'il compare au nationalisme québécois). Ainsi sa présentation d'une esthétique morcelée, entre une voix « de l'historien critique », mêlée à « celle du polémiste politique » et celle de l'« intellectuel du peuple frustré » (*L'Acadie perdue* de Michel Roy, 1978), prend tout son sens. De même, concernant les *Complaintes du continent* de Gérard Leblanc, François Paré montre la médiation de l'espace dans l'écriture : « les lieux familiers du quartier monctionien ne cessent de s'élargir, de prendre de l'amplitude. . . . Être ici et maintenant, dans l'instantanéité du quotidien, c'est déjà être ailleurs, hors de soi-même, inscrit dans la durée des lieux : "ici espace demeure" ». Relayée par ce constat essentiel, l'idée de permanence s'oppose au déracinement onirique, dont la poésie de Leblanc est partout l'exercice (*Complaintes du continent* de Gérard Leblanc, 1993).

Le thème central de la question de la langue d'écriture traverse cet ouvrage, abordant la question de la langue parlée, ainsi que celle de la survie d'une communauté menacée sur différents fronts : à ce sujet, la présentation des *Confessions de Jeanne de Valois* d'Antonine Maillet est particulièrement pertinente. De même, la question de l'invention linguistique est mise en valeur par Chantal Richard dans la présentation du plurilinguisme de *Bloupe* : « La langue élaborée par Babineau ne peut pas être considérée comme représentation mimétique du parler oral chiac, mais un effet de style recherché » (*Bloupe* de Jean Babineau, 1993).

L'introduction écrite par Maurice Raymond, proposant un survol riche de la littérature acadienne et reposant sur la citation des principales analyses de la littérature acadienne constitue ainsi une excellente mise en contexte à tout séminaire s'intéressant à la culture acadienne. Plus généralement, cet outil pédagogique sera un excellent support de promotion d'une littérature encore très jeune, afin de participer à la diffusion et à la reconnaissance d'un champ littéraire trop négligée (en France notamment). Ce dictionnaire confirme que la littérature acadienne est bien vivante, qu'elle se diversifie et travaille à sa reconnaissance : comme le montre la mutation actuelle du réseau d'éditeurs acadiens, l'institution littéraire est, malgré les difficultés, en plein développement.

Future Futurist

Irene Gammel and Suzanne Zelazo, eds. *Body Sweats: The Uncensored Writings of Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven.* MIT P $35.00

Reviewed by Ella Ophir

For all its flamboyance, the Baroness' name (a legacy of the last of three ephemeral husbands) may be of only passing familiarity to many scholars of English modernism, perhaps by association with Djuna Barnes, who was her editor and agent. But the Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven was a force in avant-garde Manhattan, where she lived from 1913 to 1923. Though she learned English only after coming to America in 1910 at age thirty-six, she was for a time the most frequently printed poet in *The Little Review,* her work appearing alongside instalments of James Joyce's *Ulysses* and surpassing it in every sort of provocation. Irene Gammel, who wrote the Baroness' biography, has now, with Suzanne Zelazo, collected and edited with impressive care the work to accompany the life.

The Baroness was not just a poet but a Dadaist performer who "lived life as art" and whose boundary-blurring work, Gammel and Zelazo argue, was thoroughly "embodied." How then to interpret and present what remains when that body is gone? In response, they have produced a book that aspires to re-embody the writing

with its own solidity, artistry, and visual force. This weighty, strikingly designed, richly illustrated volume displays the Baroness' physicality and multi-modal aesthetics through photographs and film stills of her exuberant, defiant poses, nude and in outrageous costumes of her own design; through images of her Dadaist assemblages; and through dozens of reproductions of the poem manuscripts in her artful, energetic hand, many illustrated in ink or paint.

A hundred and fifty poems and critical pieces appear here, most previously unpublished. Describing the works as "rhizomatic" and "antilinear," the editors have arranged them not chronologically but in ten loosely thematic sections, from the opening salvo of "Coitus is Paramount" to the penultimate "Art is Shameless." The explorations of aesthetics, the natural world, or the city are no less "corporeally charged" than the poems of love and the body, but the strategy helpfully reveals the internal range of the work, and allows for separate groupings of the sonic and visual poems. The Baroness is a lean, taut, modernism of explosive energy and frequent wit. The poems are spare and rhythmical, nearly shorn clean of syntax, and marked by occasional rhymes, novel portmanteau words, and an "elastic" dash that marks beats, skewers words, and severs lines.

Pugnacious, satiric, and unabashed, the Baroness' work helps to restore a sense of the anarchic and liberatory energies of modernism. Here too, however, are hauteur, contempt, personal attacks, and anti-Semitism. The editors deliver as promised the writings "uncensored"— complete with the blasphemies and obscenities that provoked the New York censors, but also with all that is likely to alienate contemporary readers. They propose only that we consider how the prejudices and hatreds are on the one hand anathema to her own "integrative" aesthetics, and on the other hand part of "Dada's militant arsenal."

The Baroness lived on the knife-edge of sanity, "driven nuts," Ezra Pound suggested, by her uncompromising "principle of non-acquiescence." She spent her last years struggling to survive and died without seeing the collection of her scattered and disorganized work, a task she had entrusted to Barnes and called "desperately necessary." She embraced the ephemerality of bodily performance, but written words remained her bid for that ultimate defiance, of time, and with this edition she wins it. She called herself a "future futurist"; a world that has come to understand punk, her editors contend, is finally ready for the woman who walked the streets in 1921 with her head shaved and shellacked vermillion red.

Of Love, War, and Stories

Shree Ghatage
Thirst. Doubleday $29.95

C. S. Richardson
The Emperor of Paris. Doubleday $25.00

Reviewed by Maude Lapierre

C. S. Richardson's *The Emperor of Paris* and Shree Ghatage's *Thirst* have much in common: as love stories that emphasize the importance of narrative, they also document the fractures created by the First and Second World War respectively. However, while Richardson's novel is structured around the inevitable encounter between the two lovers, Ghatage's text drives toward their separation.

The Emperor of Paris functions through multiple glimpses into the lives of various middle- to lower-class Parisians at the beginning of the twentieth century. The narrative focus is mainly on the Notre-Dames, a family of bakers whose son, Octavio, will inevitably meet Isabeau through the unintended help of a bookstall owner, a homeless painter, a forgotten book, and a fire in Octavio's library. Before the

lovers meet, Richardson constructs them as sharing a similar tendency to mask their perceived flaws through stories and storytelling. Octavio's flaw is mostly invisible; he suffers from an inherited condition known as "word blindness," which renders him practically illiterate. Through the tale of the emperor of Paris, his father teaches him his storytelling technique, which requires images and newspaper photographs to create narratives that will prevent others from noticing that they are illiterate. Once the newspaper photographs become traumatic reminders of the First World War, the Notre-Dame men begin to visit the Louvre, which is how Octavio and Isabeau, an avid reader and museum employee, first notice each other. The daughter of clothes designers, Isabeau cannot be incorporated within their glamorous world because of a disfiguring facial scar. Since Octavio had begun to collect books following his father's death, readers know the two lovers to be perfect for each other: "She—was a reader. He had a library." The novel then presents the multiple and fortuitous actions that will ultimately lead to their encounter. Because *The Emperor of Paris* shuns the clichéd representation of the Parisian flâneur, it constitutes the most convincing portrayal of urban life in a realist, non-experimental form. Numerous experiences are juxtaposed to provide a complex picture of the city, where the characters, limited as they are by their economic status, do not know their way beyond a single district.

Similarly, Ghatage's *Thirst* focuses on love, but it also features the losses and sacrifices that accompany conflicting desires. It opens with a scene in which an unidentified Indian man has been rendered amnesiac following a hiking accident in Wales, and is thus currently residing at the home of Mr. Owens and his mentally ill daughter, Catherine. Feeling claustrophobic in the village, the young man is desperate to return to London to find out who he is, but before leaving, he proves unable to resist Catherine's sexual advances. This lapse is particularly unfortunate, as Baba remembers who he is as soon as he arrives in London. At this point, the narrative returns to India in the months preceding Baba's departure, where details concerning his arranged marriage to Vasanti, as well as his reasons for leaving India for England in the middle of the Second World War, are revealed. Initially hostile to the marriage because of his imminent departure, Baba cannot help but be ultimately seduced by his bride, who proves skilled at fostering intimacy by extirpating stories and memories out of her husband. While Baba grows more hesitant to leave for London, it is his father's refusal to forsake his homosexual relationship that drives his decision to depart. His memories recovered, Baba wishes to return to India, but is prevented from doing so because he learns that Catherine is pregnant. An earlier promise "never to abandon his children" then conflicts with his love for his wife, and drives the novel's dramatic conclusion. Ghatage's novel then successfully explores conflicting thirsts, those desires that inevitably come at the expense of others, particularly since Baba is unable to reconcile tensions. In this way, *Thirst* resists facile conclusions as sacrifice comes to represent the cost of love.

Both novels are written in elegant prose. Yet, they contain the same conceptual problem: because they privilege the experiences of the male lover, they create an unbalanced account of the desires that drive the narratives. In both novels, it is the men who tell their stories, and the women who listen to them, which casts them in a passive role. Nonetheless, *The Emperor of Paris* and *Thirst* successfully provide insightful and subtle critiques of the violence which marks their politically charged setting, while remaining concerned with their characters' immediate experiences of love and loss.

Kroetsch and Bakhtin

B. Hariharan
The Carnival World of Robert Kroetsch.
Creative, n.p.

Reviewed by Joel Deshaye

This book is about the novels of Robert Kroetsch as they relate to Mikhail Bakhtin's conceptions of the carnival and dialogism. B. Hariharan's method is to interpret Kroetsch's style of postmodernism and its puns, substitutions, and reversals. The main contribution of the book is to extend Dale Bauer's feminist critique of Bakhtin's theories to Kroetsch's novels, which, in Hariharan's view, help to correct Bakhtin's omissions by demonstrating the compatibility of feminism with dialogism.

Hariharan asserts that *The Carnival World of Robert Kroetsch* has a different purpose, which is to define through Kroetsch what comes after postmodernism: "To understand what might come next, to look beyond the fashion and the language of a particular period, we need to be equipped with a more comprehensive 'story grammar'" (13). Hariharan does little to explain this usage of grammar or how it might explain what comes after postmodernism at the levels of narrative or individual words:

> The feast of language is . . . a confusion of tongues. In other words, body regenerates both language and story and, at the same time, language is returned to the body. . . . A "grammar" of puns, jokes, and wordplay thus exposes the underlying function of the "bawdy" in carnival by showing how the body is necessary to a regeneration of the spirit. (17)

If Hariharan means to answer his question of "what might come next" with his many statements of this kind, then I would argue that the puns, substitutions, and reversals he observes and extends are aspects of postmodernism and other period styles, not a new phase in the development of modern writing.

After introducing his main concerns, Hariharan devotes the majority of the next chapter to his reading of other critics. It serves as a literature review but shows how few of his sources date from the 1990s and 2000s. For a book published in 2012 *The Carnival World of Robert Kroetsch* has few contemporary references.

The remaining chapters are thematic readings of Kroetsch's novels that might have been easier to follow had they included more introductory and transitional sections. Using keywords of structuralism, Hariharan claims that his book "attempts a synchronic description in each chapter of parts of the system peculiar to all of [Kroetsch's] novels, as well as a diachronic description of the evolution of these elements" (16). But the emphasis is much more "synchronic" than "diachronic" even though a more diachronic analysis could provide a line of argument that would show the development of Kroetsch's work and might even lead to a plausible theory of what might come after it.

Given its synchronicity, perhaps not surprisingly Hariharan's book depends on metaphoric writing about language. Hariharan frequently personifies his writing so that it has the desire of and for a body. Only on page 79 does he finally admit: "But surely this is to speak metaphorically. The only bodily form that the word can literally take is that of the text. So language merely appears to perform in bodily ways." But after this statement he immediately returns to his personifications, without further remark on the limitations or advantages of ideas that metaphor can generate.

Ultimately, Hariharan suggests that "Kroetsch engenders in his heteroglot discourse a potentially feminist perception of the word and a world transformed through art" (176). This is when he is saying what not enough others are saying. Concerned with showing Derridian "hostipitality" here, I am nevertheless glad to get a book from a distant foreign press by an author

who attests to the significance of Canadian studies abroad even when the field has lost many of its resources to our federal reallocations.

Love Narratives

Helen Humphreys
The Reinvention of Love. HarperCollins $17.99

Nancy Richler
The Imposter Bride. HarperCollins $17.99

Reviewed by Susanne Goodison

The characters in *The Reinvention of Love* search for an authentic self through writing and relationships. The central love story is revealed in layers with counterpoints illuminating the relationships between Charles Saint-Beuve, Adèle Hugo, and Victor Hugo prior to Hugo's success. As Charles and Adèle move toward an affair, it's clear that each seeks an internal locus of power and independence from Hugo's narcissistic personality, but both of them fail. Their affair revolves around Hugo, despite Adèle's perspective that her affair provides moments when she is free to be the agent of her life, to be herself. She also has to acknowledge the futility of her attempt: "Was I merely a trophy to be flourished and fought over in this contest between Charles and Victor? Was everything really about literature after all?" So it is. Superficially, Adèle is a female muse, but we see the lines between writing, economics, and personal character blur for both men throughout the novel. While the affair itself is only short, it inspires much of Charles' creative work and lives in the imagination of both lovers. They think about and meet each other at key moments in their lives and always their thoughts illustrate the story of who they wanted to be, not who they are.

The Reinvention of Love is the reinvention of self through the re-telling of the touch, rapture, and damage of love. The novel is based in historical record, and the author has gone far in her attempt to inhabit the voices of the less famous protagonists. She uses their words, even translating Charles' poetry. Yet the historical forces seem peripheral to the individual love story, and this creates a problem: Adèle's attempt to escape Victor's self-centredness is best enjoyed if the reader likes Charles. And truth be told, I didn't. He's self-aware, loyally committed to his illicit love, physically rare, and generally doing the best he can under the circumstances he's born into. Except for the self he displays when he is with Adèle, he is generally as narcissistic as Hugo, and utters too many seemingly profound statements about the nature of love and writing. Charles' words and voice carry a nineteenth-century aesthetic with them, which may reduce this story's reach.

On the other hand, the history told through *The Imposter Bride* is recent so that there is no distance from the characters, and the individual story is one to break your heart. Lily Azerov Kramer leaves her husband and her daughter Ruthie when the baby is two months old. Ruthie has had no contact with her mother except through a series of rocks that arrive in the mail, a completely opaque communication that nevertheless comforts Ruth during her search to understand her abandonment and to feel her mother's love. Yet the reader is more sympathetic to the damage her mother causes because of her history as a Jewish refugee from Poland.

The novel is written episodically so as to make the reader discover things as slowly as Ruthie herself does. Much of this work is done through two extended and evolving metaphors. Both start as objects Lily Kramer has touched. Meaning is added over time and through the interpretative touch of others. Alone, Ruthie is unable to parse these objects into the connection she desperately wants but can rarely feel. She knows they're significant, but she doesn't understand how; she doesn't have enough facts. First are the

rocks that her mother sends her that are fraught with "a secret, unique communication between my mother and me." These rocks could not be more different from the uncut diamond that Lily Kramer left behind; Ruthie is given it at sixteen. That diamond, "nothing in it but sorrow," is the first clue to the truth of who Lily Kramer is.

Second, there are two notebooks, again given to Ruthie at sixteen, one written in Yiddish (a language she does not speak) and one in which there is no writing. Whose journal is the first? Is it literature? Who is the woman author? Read by other characters, segments of the journal appear throughout the story, each time offering clues, setting up false trails. The seemingly empty journal also confounds: "I had once thought that maybe [Lily] had written in it using invisible ink, and that that was why she'd left it behind. Because she knew some day I'd figure out the solution to making the ink visible." When it is clear the solution is beyond her, sixteen-year-old Ruthie tries to use it herself, but fails: "It was as if the pages were already filled." Another character gives Ruth the insight to the relationship between the two metaphors: to cut the diamond into beauty, the artist must know the diamond's "inner landscape" intimately; the journal's story can't be freed until someone understands it as well. The uncut diamond bears silent witness to the story Ruth's mother lived; the unwritten journal bears witness to the overpowering desire to reach into those silences and speak what is witnessed. The novel speaks to the role of the artist in bearing witness to history, personalizing it, releasing it for others to experience.

The real and imagined answers to the question of Ruthie's abandonment are less important than the fleeting moments of connection, of acceptance, of love that they reveal. In *The Imposter Bride*, as in *The Reinvention of Love*, love's narrative drives the characters and the readers through history to art.

The Presence of Absence

Mark Anthony Jarman, ed.
Coming Attractions 10. Oberon $19.95

Clark Blaise
The Meagre Tarmac. Biblioasis $19.95

David Helwig
Mystery Stories. Porcupine's Quill $27.95

Reviewed by Graeme Northcote

"*Punto in aria* means 'stitches in the air,' a fabric that is defined by what is missing, a pattern fabricated around empty space." This pattern, which lies at the core of *Mystery Stories*, is woven throughout both *The Meagre Tarmac* and *Coming Attractions 10*. These works reflect on the tangible presence of absence in our lives. Each collection elegantly and powerfully articulates how lives and loves are defined by what is missing.

In Clark Blaise's *The Meagre Tarmac*, the focus is on the absence of place, belonging, and a fixed cultural identity. Blaise invites readers into a series of shifting perspectives surrounding the Waldekar family, the Gangulys, and the Nilingappas, as he explores each family's attempt to recover (or forget) what has been lost as they struggle to situate themselves in terms of time, culture, and identity. Defined in relation or reaction to where they come from and who they were, the rich characters reveal that the only distance that matters is the distance between people. Blaise meticulously conveys a sense of connection and isolation in the lives of Indian immigrants who are detached from their former lives and country, "untethered to any earth," and yet are shaped and guided by that absence. Heritage becomes contested space, as an Indian boy reinvents himself in America and his family wages a legal war over their ancestral estate in India. Another emigrated Indian searches Italy for a resting place for his uncle's ashes, and in doing so discovers familiarity embedded within the foreign. These narratives are woven around a deep

but subtle connection to place as a lost home that nonetheless crosses distance. Such connection is beautifully contrasted by the way the opening stories fracture a single family's narrative into multiple perspectives, illustrating the divide that separates people from one another and rendering it more tangible than any geographical border. In the end, *The Meagre Tarmac* is like a slow exclamation caught halfway between a sigh and laughter, between hope and despair, connection and dissonance.

David Helwig writes with similar flair and skill. *Mystery Stories* is structured around the absence of people. The first piece contains elements of a formulaic mystery and a ghost story, but holds back from committing to either. The mystery is left nebulous and uninvestigated while the ghost's presence is ambiguous and uncertain. It is the perfect guide for how to approach the subsequent stories. *Mystery Stories* is not about answers. It is about questions. And it is about ghosts, fading into memory and leaving empty places in their wake. The reader is left to contemplate these stark, pale absences.

In one story, a criminal with an unknown past occupies a house for its absent owners, caring for a dog with a missing leg and a pony deprived of its sight. Like this motley assembly of characters, the stories of this collection are designed to be whole and incomplete at once. Whereas Blaise hints and alludes with subtle grace, Helwig boldly gestures straight towards the missing pieces of his tales, shaping stories around them like a magnifying glass. With what reads as supreme confidence, he directs the reader to these empty spaces. In doing so, he replicates the whimsical scene from the first story, where a man plays music on a broken piano, heedless of the missing keys. There remains a persistent sense of mystery, a discordant chorus of possibilities that keeps the stories fluid and dynamic without lapsing into incoherence.

Coming Attractions also evokes the absence of moments in time. The three authors respectively explore the empty spaces and temporal gaps that exist within the past, the present, and the future. Alexander MacLeod's harsh and vibrant stories are notable for the complete absence of clear endings. A tavern brawl escalates out of control; a young woman swims for her life and that of her would-be boyfriend; a wife and husband wait in the hospital at their ailing infant's bedside. Then . . . Nothing. Nothing. Nothing. Not even "The End." MacLeod denies the reader any sense of closure by abruptly, almost brutally, cutting each tale short at the very peak of narrative tension. The narrative gap that closes each story constructs the future as an empty space, into which we might project both hopes and fears. Ultimately, the silence at the end of these tales serves to remind the reader that closure is a lie, that uncertainty is an inevitability of fragile life.

By contrast, Wasela Hiyate situates the past as the source of narrative tension in her stories. The empty spaces left by loss function as the thematic core of each tale. She explores the nature of regret and doubt and shows how absence is the substance of so much human emotion. Hiyate's narratives are ghost stories in the vein of Helwig's collection. They reveal that the present is haunted not only by that which has been lost, but also by that which *could have been*.

Théodora Armstrong draws the collection, as well as the exploration of absence, to its natural conclusion. The future is unknowable. The foundations of our past are constructed around pockets of nothingness. Whether a young boy weaves tales to conceal his crimes or a father is determined to maintain the facade of a happy family, human experience is articulated as *punto in aria*, stories fabricated around emptiness. Armstrong focuses on the holes in these narratives and the strain that causes them to slowly but inevitably tear apart. In doing so, she seems to ask if we are really anything more than the narratives we tell.

Framing Violence

Kathy Kacer
Restitution: A Family's Fight for Their Heritage Lost in the Holocaust. Second Story $19.95

Shelly Sanders
Rachel's Secret. Second Story $12.95

Eva Wiseman
Puppet. Tundra $9.95

Reviewed by Norman Ravvin

Books for young readers about Jewish historical catastrophe make up an increasingly varied and challenging genre. Acceptability and subject matter shift, as authors embrace the Holocaust, and, in more recent work, the pogroms that took place in Poland, Russia, and the Ukraine following the 1881 assassination of Czar Alexander II, and into the post-revolutionary period. One of the notable shifts is the manner in which authors frame their material.

In Canada, three quarters of a century ago, Jewish children read about pogroms in Yiddish, in the specific context of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century political and military events. Jewish leftist political parties in the Russian empire supported anti-Czarist mass movements, so Jewish youth found themselves a part of key socialist, Zionist, and anarchist organizations. A 1932 edition of historian Simon Dubnow's *Idishe geshichte derzeilt far kinder / Jewish History Told for Children* sets the 1903 Kishinev pogrom in which forty-nine were killed, hundreds wounded, Jewish businesses and homes pillaged, in this context.

Rachel's Secret, a young reader's novel by Shelly Sanders, tackles the pre-1903 period in Kishinev, and offers a dramatic and detailed depiction of the pogrom and its aftermath. In Sanders' rendering, Jews are largely poor, ghetto-dwelling, traditional people against whom public ire has been raised by a blood libel. Sanders' *pogromchiks* include groups of disgruntled young men in "long red blouses and tall boots," the "uniform of mass hatred." A few chapters are devoted to back room discussions between police and imperial governors, which suggest official machinations behind the violence. But these are not the main themes of Sanders' narrative. She is intent on rendering pogrom violence graphically; she is deft at framing her narrative through the experiences of teenage boys and girls, but without a consideration of ideological or anti-imperial motivations. Her main character's understanding of events is informed by her innocent romance with two non-Jewish boys, one of whom is the victim of a would-be blood libel killing. Through Rachel's friendship with these boys, Sanders depicts righteous gentiles, and the capability of young people to recognize the faults in their parents' world.

Eva Wiseman's *Puppet* is a much weaker book dealing with similar themes. It is based on an actual blood libel trial, which took place in Hungary in 1882 and 1883 and gained countrywide attention. *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe* highlights the groundbreaking role of forensics in the investigation of the libel accusation, but in Wiseman's rendering, accusers and do-gooding defense lawyers shoot from the hip like characters gleaned from Gunsmoke. Small town non-Jews refer to the "Jew butcher," and others express themselves using odd antique phrases: "Don't be daft, girl. . . . What do you think I am about my dear?" A young reader could not take much away from *Puppet* regarding the specifics of Jewish daily life in central Europe aside from the notion that most non-Jews viewed their Jewish neighbours as something akin to space aliens.

Kathy Kacer's *Restitution: A Family's Fight for Their Heritage Lost in the Holocaust* is set in Prague before the Second World War and in Toronto in the late 1980s and early 90s. Although it recounts actual events, it does so using all the key elements of fiction—dialogue, flashbacks, character development,

and suspense. Kacer is a prize-winning writer of books for young readers dealing with the Holocaust, but *Restitution* is presented as her first book on such material for adults. In fact, it is suited to both adults and advanced younger readers, because it tells an intriguing story well, but also because it strives to educate the reader about Jewish life in pre-war Czechoslovakia, the threat to Jews in central Europe under Hitler, modes of resistance and escape, as well as the experience of Jewish immigrants to Canada at the time of World War II. Kacer's story follows a Czech Jewish family's efforts to recover four paintings left behind as they fled Europe days before the outbreak of war. Her approach exemplifies the demands of historical writing, as well as the ability to educate while offering a thoughtful and suspenseful narrative.

National Cosmopolitanism

Will Kymlicka and Kathryn Walker, eds.
Rooted Cosmopolitanism: Canada and the World.
U of British Columbia P $85.00

Reviewed by Emily Johansen

Over the last twenty years, there has been an explosion in critical accounts of cosmopolitanism. This work has done a good deal of important re-imagining of the descriptive and normative possibilities of cosmopolitanism. Yet, for the most part, cosmopolitan theory has had difficulty articulating the relationship between the cosmopolitan and the nation-state. While critics such as K. Anthony Appiah have made compelling arguments for the overlapping possibilities of cosmopolitanism and patriotism, rejecting a view of the two categories as antithetical, this work has remained both relatively abstract and grounded in liberalism's emphasis on the individual. Thus, *Rooted Cosmopolitanism*'s focus on a particularly Canadian modality of rooted cosmopolitanism and its articulation in policy and public action provides a potentially fertile resource for Canadian scholars of cosmopolitanism.

In their introduction, Will Kymlicka and Kathryn Walker credit Appiah with the phrase "rooted cosmopolitanism," understanding it as an "outward-bound cosmopolitan perspective [that] requires and involves the very roots it claims to transcend." While the phrase actually originates with Mitchell Cohen (1992), Appiah's popularization of the term has, as they rightly suggest, proven central to cosmopolitan criticism as it explores the relationship between cosmopolitanism and the nation-state. The various explorations of rooted cosmopolitanism found in this collection point usefully to the many tensions that surround the concept: does it privilege banal forms of nationalism? Does it remain so ephemeral in its notion of rooting as to limit its moral and ethical weight? The critics featured in the collection offer useful reflections on these points, as well as many others.

This last point—the ephemerality of rooted cosmopolitanism—is one, however, that the collection could usefully address more directly. The notion of roots at work throughout this collection is, for the most part, one that locates roots in immaterial concepts. Critics for whom roots evoke a material, even ecological, connotation will find this collection mostly silent on this sense of the word. Deleuzian notions of roots and territorializations are similarly absent from the collection. Given the collection's broader focus, as the subtitle suggests, on "Canada and the World," it would have been interesting to have a more specific sense of the material extension of such a relation. How, for instance, is Canadians' belief of themselves as cosmopolitan reflected in their arrangement of national space? How does it shape their incursions into global places? These points are broached in various places, but further attention to them would have been

an intriguing counterpart to the more immaterial roots the text explores.

This silence on roots as material is related to the text's broader silence on colonial, postcolonial, and neo-colonial histories. Despite calling for a "postcolonial cosmopolitanism" in the introduction, few of the essays draw on a recognizably postcolonial framework in their consideration of Canadian cosmopolitanism. This is particularly noticeable in the almost complete absence of First Nations peoples in this text. Given ongoing First Nations' struggles for self-governance and land claims, a struggle that many groups have put explicitly in conversation with global fights for Aboriginal self-determination (consider, for instance, the work of Ravi de Costa), this would seem like a key test case for the Canadian state's avowed cosmopolitanism as it grapples with its colonial past and present. Similarly, while the text addresses the Taylor-Bouchard report in a couple of places, it does not take up the context in which the report emerged, notably the extreme application of reasonable accommodation to Muslim populations in Herouxville. These contexts seem integral to a truly postcolonial rooted cosmopolitanism. Indeed, they serve to highlight the necessity of thinking about cosmopolitanism as a relationship between a liberal universality and contextualized roots.

Overall, while *Rooted Cosmopolitanism* makes a useful intervention for scholars of Canadian studies, this is a collection that literary scholars may find less broadly useful. In addition to a very specific focus on Canadian forms of cosmopolitanism and its policy repercussions, this is a text very much directed towards scholars of political philosophy and sociology. Charles Blattberg's contribution, "We Are All Compatriots," explicitly rejects the potential of cultural texts—particularly literary ones—to provide any kind of meaningful and lasting cosmopolitan affiliation. Privileging, instead, the conversation as a more effective means of producing cosmopolitan attachments, "We Are All Compatriots" suggests that we "approach [stories] hermeneutically rather than aesthetically, critically rather than empathically, for only this allows them to contribute to the development of a durable, rather than fickle, form of caring." No doubt literary critics of affect would take issue with this rejection of the affective component of cultural practice.

Indeed, Blattberg goes on to suggest that "durable caring . . . is what accompanies the sharing of a good in common with others, which can, after all, be the basis of a kind of friendship—and friendship is, of course, a thoroughly practical, as distinct from natural or aesthetic, thing." As many postcolonial critics have pointed out, friendship and conversation are tricky models for a postcolonial politics given the way they tend to make invisible the power relations that necessarily shape these interactions. Moreover, as Yasmeen Abu-Laban's contribution, "A World of Strangers or a World of Relationships," suggests, the introduction of affect might actually be a way to attend to these power differentials: "because an ethics-of-care perspective is attuned to relationships and contextual details, as well as power, obligations, and policy," it "holds considerable promise for dealing with the challenges that gender—and other unequal relations of power such as 'race' and class—pose to our understanding of both social reality and global justice."

Kymlicka, Walker, and the other contributors provide a useful interrogation of what cosmopolitanism signifies in a Canadian context. Their suggestion of the way that cosmopolitanism is integral to most ways of understanding what it means to be Canadian leads to a provocative re-examination of this particular form of patriotism. Nonetheless, this is a contribution that will be of primary interest to those whose work focuses on Canadian studies, rather than those who work more broadly on cosmopolitanism.

Comme un roman

Dany Laferrière
Journal d'un écrivain en pyjama.
Mémoire d'encrier 24,95 $

Compte rendu par Jorge Calderón

Dans *Journal d'un écrivain en pyjama*, Dany Laferrière continue à brouiller les frontières entre les genres littéraires. Par le titre, nous pourrions nous attendre à lire un journal personnel soit réel, soit fictif. La collection dans laquelle l'éditeur a publié le livre est réservée, quant à elle, aux chroniques. La quatrième de couverture présente le texte comme une réflexion sur la lecture et l'écriture, donc comme un essai. Dans une série de dix points, Laferrière offre des conseils sur l'écriture et des points de vue sur la lecture que nous pouvons classer plus généralement dans la catégorie des aphorismes. De plus, Laferrière présente son projet d'écriture comme un « . . . journal [qui] n'est qu'une collection de notes d'écriture et de lecture, prises au fil des jours, et qui ne sont destinées qu'à moi, ou du moins au jeune écrivain que je fus ». Néanmoins, il affirme un peu plus loin dans le texte le besoin qu'il ressent d'écrire un roman : « Moi, j'ai besoin que ce soit un roman pour avancer dans mon travail. Je n'ai pas assez de rigueur pour écrire un essai. »

La question de l'ambiguïté générique traverse ainsi l'œuvre de Laferrière, il explique cette tension par le désir de liberté : « Je me sens totalement libre. Est-ce pourquoi j'affirme que tous mes livres sont des romans? Même ceux qui ressemblent à des essais critiques. Au fait, j'aime me sentir libre. Je n'aime surtout pas qu'on m'impose des règles. J'essaie constamment de créer un espace où je pourrai vivre selon ma vision des choses. » Nous comprenons donc que le brouillage des frontières génériques vise une revendication absolue de la liberté littéraire.

Le *Journal d'un écrivain en pyjama* peut donc être lu comme un roman. Cependant l'auteur présente à travers 202 fragments, qui sont définis comme des « mini-chroniques », une réflexion sur l'art et bien sûr plus particulièrement sur la littérature. Si nous nous limitons aux références françaises, le texte s'inscrit donc dans la tradition de Diderot, de Flaubert, de Proust, de Gide et de Duras. Lafferière, quant à lui, est un lecteur fasciné par la littérature latino-américaine, états-unienne, russe, japonaise et même gréco-latine. Chaque fragment est ponctué par ce qu'il appelle une « note musicale », c'est-à-dire un court paragraphe dans lequel il propose une réflexion mise en parallèle avec la mini-chronique qui la précède. Par exemple à la suite de la mini-chronique numéro 96 sur « [l]a mémoire de l'enfance », il ajoute la note musicale suivante : « L'enfance est le temps de la vie qui passe le plus vite mais qu'on garde en soi le plus longtemps; pourtant, ce sont ceux qui ne l'ont pas connue qui s'en souvienne le plus. » Cette note complète, nuance et déplace quelque peu la réflexion générale sur l'enfance présentée auparavant.

Dans son texte, l'auteur explique clairement la raison pour laquelle il a décidé d'écrire ce livre : il voulait mettre en relief l'osmose entre fiction et réflexion. Cette osmose prend parfois la forme d'un duel « entre le moi critique et le moi écrivain ». L'interpénétration et le conflit entre la réalité, la fiction et la réflexion font partie du projet littéraire de l'auteur depuis la publication de *Comment faire l'amour avec un nègre sans se fatiguer* en 1985. Afin d'explorer cette tension créatrice, l'auteur joue entre les différents niveaux fictionnels en questionnant la frontière entre l'homme réel, la figure publique de l'écrivain, le narrateur et le protagoniste. Une autre stratégie est de brouiller la frontière entre, d'une part, la réalité et, d'autre part, l'imagination ou le rêve. Laferrière fait par exemple référence aux dieux du vaudou qui sont pour lui des dieux de la nuit, donc les dieux d'un monde rêvé : « Legba est mon

favori — il se retrouve dans la plupart de mes romans à cause de sa posture moderne. Il est le dieu qui se tient à la frontière du visible et de l'invisible. Celui qui vous ouvre la barrière si vous cherchez à passer d'un monde à un autre. C'est lui le dieu des écrivains. »

Le *Journal d'un écrivain en pyjama*, fait de mini-chroniques et de notes musicales, est une synthèse remarquable des œuvres de fiction et de la réflexion artistique de Dany Laferrière. C'est un livre indispensable pour tout lecteur qui s'intéresse à l'œuvre de cet écrivain. Le livre pourrait aussi être une introduction fort intéressante pour les lecteurs qui aimeraient découvrir l'œuvre de Laferrière.

Euphorie hivernale

Stéphane Ledien
Un Parisien au pays des pingouins.
Lévesque 23,00 $

Compte rendu par Benoit Bordeleau

C'est par le biais d'un peu moins d'une centaine de textes brefs que l'auteur Stéphane Ledien partage son amour du froid et de la neige. Ce Parisien d'origine, publicitaire et critique de cinéma, qui a fait de Québec sa ville d'adoption, fait le récit de son acclimatation au Québec. Le livre s'ouvre d'ailleurs sur la découverte (traumatisante), dans « Machines de guerre », du boucan que peuvent faire les déneigeuses en pleine nuit. Ce premier texte donne le ton : après le choc thermique viendront les chocs linguistiques. Le « *chum* » et la « blonde », les « bobettes », la « tuque », la « *slush* » et autres « Tabarnouche! » s'offrent comme des passages obligés.

Les récits d'*Un parisien au pays des pingouins* font la part belle à l'émerveillement devant les grands espaces. Dans « Souper en ville », l'auteur a tôt fait de remarquer que les expéditions se déroulent souvent au quotidien, évitant ainsi de tomber dans une vision romantique des territoires vierges. Si des figures telles que la « cabane au Canada » et celle du « coureur des bois » sont conviées, c'est rarement pour les glorifier. Elles servent de prétextes à des réflexions sur des réalités banales, (le pelletage de la neige, par exemple) et révèlent en même temps les écarts avec Paris.

Si la tonalité générale des récits penche vers l'euphorie, l'auteur se garde de ne voir que le côté rose — ou plutôt blanc! — de la vie québécoise. Si son pays d'accueil le met dans la posture du découvreur, il n'en reste pas moins qu'une certaine nostalgie de la mère patrie se dessine en arrière-plan. Ainsi y a-t-il un peu de Québec dans Paris et vice-versa, chaque endroit devenant la mesure comparative de l'autre. Enchanté par le côté chaleureux des Québécois, par la facilité des contacts entre voisins (au contraire de l'Hexagone), Ledien note aussi la difficulté, pour certains compatriotes français, d'entrer dans un nouveau cercle d'amis. Le peu de soin apporté à la présentation des vins trouvés en épicerie n'impressionne guère, mais quel accès à la diversité des plaisirs viticoles!

Stéphane Ledien signe ici un premier ouvrage honnête, où les textes parfois inégaux, dans cet ensemble volontairement éclaté, s'achèvent plus souvent qu'autrement sur un bon mot, ceci ayant pour effet de créer une redondance plus ou moins heureuse. Il faut toutefois souligner son usage habile des stéréotypes et sa capacité à démonter les idées préconçues de part et d'autre de l'Atlantique pour mettre en relief les mauvais plis et les bizarreries de chacun. S'il fallait trouver une moralité à ces récits qui se consomment à petite dose, c'est qu'il convient à tout un chacun de faire de son quotidien un terrain de jeu.

Évocations de l'absence

Jérémie Leduc-Leblanc
La Légende des anonymes et autres promenades.
Triptyque 18,00 $

Compte rendu par Philippe Archambault

La Légende des anonymes et autres promenades est un réseau de relations, dans le sens de récits mais aussi de liaisons, qui nous fait découvrir un microcosme de destins croisés, une communauté d'amis, d'amants et de familiers. Les nouvelles de Jérémie Leduc-Leblanc se lisent comme une série d'adresses et de témoignages — surtout amoureux —, où l'un parle à/de l'autre en son absence. L'autre sera parti ou sur le point de partir; l'autre sera au loin ou dans une proximité silencieuse; l'autre sera mort ou irrémédiablement perdu. L'absence a différents visages, mais pour le présent (comme on dit l'absent) qui est dans le désir et la parole, l'absence de l'autre signifie toujours : *tu n'es pas là.* Ainsi, malgré la diversité des narrateurs — la polyphonie narrative — le recueil possède une extrême cohésion thématique. Ces histoires, qu'on dirait murmurées s'il n'y avait pas en elles une espèce de cri étouffé, sont autant de variations sur le thème du rapport intime à l'autre, sur l'attachement et le déchirement, la jouissance et la privation. S'il est vrai que toutes ces histoires s'adressent tant aux pieds qu'aux yeux, qu'elles retracent les itinéraires « de fuites, de courses effrénées, d'exils et de départs », les qualifier de « promenades » relève d'un usage approximatif ou ironique du terme; quoi qu'il en soit, le titre du recueil met le lecteur sur une fausse piste. Certes, plusieurs personnages de Leduc-Leblanc déambulent comme d'autres écrivent, mais la marche est pour eux soit un pis-aller — en attendant de, à défaut de —, soit une forme erratique de recherche ou encore un mode d'approche, une manière d'aller à la rencontre du monde. On ne croise nul protagoniste qui prend l'air pour le plaisir (qui se promène donc), mais on aperçoit des êtres pris dans un va-et-vient constant entre le passé d'une relation et le présent d'une parole solitaire; des êtres qui ne cessent de tourner autour d'un espace vide. Avec la parole, nous en sommes tous là, à tourner autour (du pot), accablés par ce fait inéluctable et parfois cruel : après le dernier mot, tout reste à dire. *La Légende des anonymes et autres promenades* est un bon premier recueil de nouvelles qui a su éviter les écueils et les pièges du lyrisme, sans toutefois atteindre cette justesse dans le propos et l'expression qui bouleverse, qui ne laisse pas indemne.

Post-Abyssal Thinking

Hester Lessard, Rebecca Johnson, and Jeremy Webber, eds.
Storied Communities: Narratives of Contact and Arrival in Constituting Political Community.
U of British Columbia P $34.95

Grace Li Xiu Woo
Ghost Dancing with Colonialism: Decolonization and Indigenous Rights at the Supreme Court of Canada. U of British Columbia P $85.00

Reviewed by Élise Couture-Grondin

Despite Canada's engagement to change its relations with the First Nations, notably through the institution of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the government still denies Aboriginal sovereignty and auto-determination in the land defined as Canadian territory. *Ghost Dancing with Colonialism* and *Storied Communities* aim to address this urgent question: Can the Court, as well as the process of reconciliation itself, become postcolonial?

Grace Li Xiu Woo starts from the contradictions between the enshrinement of postcolonial principles and their difficult application in the current practices of the Supreme Court of Canada. She develops a chart analysis in which she attributes a score to the Court's judgments, based on

their colonial or postcolonial legal practices. Drawing on Thomas Kuhn's paradigm theory, Woo explains the ambivalence between the rupture from and the continuity of colonial structures of domination by the slow pace of paradigm changes, which are embodied and embedded processes. For instance, the judges' intention to follow postcolonial legality can be undermined by their personal inexperience with intercultural relations, by the law's self-referentiality, and by structural impediments against working on a more equal footing with their Aboriginal peers.

Woo's contribution is twofold. On the one hand, she argues that such changes need to be carefully worked out within the institution. Her description of existing postcolonial practices and postcolonial historical precedents in the English legal system (through the Magna Carta, the Oath of Allegiance, or the Coronation Oath), as well as in the democratization movement, intends to show the Court's possible choices in practising postcolonial law in accordance with its own internal logic. On the other hand, she acknowledges the limitations faced by the Court when trying to change the nature of the relations between the government and First Nations. Recognizing this failure, she concludes that the required paradigm change cannot come from within the structures of the law alone: it must also be a political choice that would bring into practice the principles already recognized by the Canadian government.

Storied Communities highlights the political and healing power of narratives found on the margins of the legal system. The challenge for what the authors call a "politics of narrative" is to re-examine local stories within Indigenous and immigrant communities in order to "generate new narratives upon which to build an Indigenous political future and within which to articulate an Indigenous conception of postcolonial justice." Thus, *Storied Communities* acknowledges the law's failure, not because it dismisses its role in our communities, but because it advocates a more comprehensive view of postcolonial justice and reconciliation—one that cannot be defined only in terms of settler language and rhetoric.

Storied Communities reveals a particular link between colonialism, law, and identity construction. Brenna Bhandar criticizes the political rhetoric surrounding sovereignty claims, which, she contends, no longer correspond to the multiple layers of power diffracted through our understanding of the land. Moreover, this rhetoric presupposes an a priori sovereign subject, based on liberal democratic principles, that paradoxically undermines the elaboration of a political subjectivity. Bhandar goes further, arguing that the limitation of postcolonial criticism to the issue of Aboriginal rights versus Canadian law and legal structures leads to a juridicalization—the increasing tendency to go to court to solve problems—and a juridification—the imposition of a single model of legal identities on all subjects—that depoliticizes the effort to articulate postcolonial justice or reconciliation.

Kim Anderson explains the specific violence against Indigenous women as an effect of both colonialism and the imposition of a European masculine subjectivity rooted in capitalism. She argues that the re-appropriation of the elders' narratives could contribute to ending the violence inflicted on women and on the land. Likewise, Johnny Mack contends that, by re-appropriating their stories, Aboriginal people could "occupy a non-imperialized subject position."

Storied Communities contributes to the field of reconstruction of a decolonized subjectivity for a postcolonial present and future, where Indigenous communities can reconstitute a sense of community and participate in legal discussions from their own position and historical notions of

justice. In order for postcolonial reconciliation to happen, acknowledgement of the failure or limitations of Canadian law may well be needed; but also, as the authors of *Storied Communities* argue, it requires an engagement with what Boaventura de Sousa Santos calls post-abyssal thinking—that is, seriously taking into account local stories and cultural translation, in order to ground postcolonial practices of justice within the Court and within broader definitions of community.

Copyright and Canadian Publishing

Eli MacLaren
Dominion and Agency: Copyright and the Structuring of the Canadian Book Trade 1867-1918. U of Toronto P $45.00

Reviewed by Sara Bannerman

Many in the publishing industry today argue that longer and stronger copyright is key to the success of the publishing industry. In *Dominion and Agency: Copyright and the Structuring of the Canadian Book Trade 1867-1918*, Eli MacLaren attempts to explain the early failures of the Canadian publishing industry, asking why the creation of the Canadian state in 1867 was not accompanied by the simultaneous rise of Canadian publishing. Copyright law, he argues, is responsible for having arrested the development of Canadian publishing and Canadian literature. At the same time, he argues that *lack of* copyright contributed to the literary success of certain authors.

Caught between British and American copyright systems that granted copyright in large markets when first publication in Canada did not, Canadian authors were forced to look to foreign publishers to obtain copyright and publication in larger markets, and many emigrated as a result. Canadian publishers, unable therefore to compete in the production of original Canadian works, were also largely shut out of the market for reprinted British books. Imperial copyright law held back Canadian publishers, while American publishers, who did not recognize international copyright until 1909 and who conditioned recognition of Canadian copyright on American manufacturing until 1962, flourished by selling unauthorized reprints of British books on both sides of the border. American legalized piracy, MacLaren argues, laid the groundwork for a successful publishing industry in the United States (as it did in other countries as well, including Scotland and Ireland) by allowing publishers to accumulate the capital and other means to embark on original publishing. Canada was prevented from following this path by Imperial and international copyright law.

MacLaren's detailed account of the winding path of Canadian copyright between Confederation and 1918 centres on two key moments in Canadian copyright history. Much of the book deals with the conception (chapter 1), achievement (chapter 2), clarification (chapter 3), and impact (chapter 4) of the Canadian Copyright Act of 1875, which was a limited and somewhat unsuccessful attempt to solve the problems of Canadian publishers that ultimately served British publishers more than Canadian ones. The book also deals with the Canadian Copyright Act of 1900 (chapter 5), which was much more successful in allowing Canadian publishers to republish foreign works. It was the 1900 Act that effectively established the agency system in Canada.

MacLaren also points to several examples where failure to secure American copyright actually bolstered the success of Canadian authors. He highlights Ralph Connor (chapter 6), whose success has usually been ascribed to the humour and morality of his writing and characters, and the ability of his stories to connect with readers in the midst of the cultural upheaval of the time. MacLaren argues that these were not the

only reasons for Connor's success; Connor had no copyright in the United States as a result of the fact that he published in Toronto and failed to simultaneously publish an American edition of his first novel, *Black Rock: A Tale of the Selkirks* (1898). This allowed the unauthorized reproduction of his work throughout the United States. The inexpensive reprints of his work sold throughout the United States and Canada assured Connor's literary career. They did not, however, assure the security of Connor's Canadian publisher, nor of the Canadian publishing industry, both of which remained precarious despite having made crucial editorial contributions to Connor's success.

MacLaren's is a thoroughly researched, detailed, and clear-sighted account of the early history of copyright in Canada. It is an important contribution that contains significant insight into the development of publishing in Canada.

Reading for the Birds

Travis V. Mason
Ornithologies of Desire: Ecocritical Essays, Avian Poetics, and Don McKay. Wilfrid Laurier UP $48.99

Reviewed by Tina Northrup

A new addition to a burgeoning Environmental Humanities series, Travis V. Mason's *Ornithologies of Desire: Ecocritical Essays, Avian Poetics, and Don McKay* makes a significant contribution to ecocriticism in Canada. The book opens with the proposition that ecocriticism is able "to read across genres and disciplines, to listen to many different stories, and to speak/write polyphonically." Throughout, Mason works to prove his point by engaging in the cross-disciplinary, multi-vocal scholarship he proposes. Organized thematically around leitmotifs such as nesting, naming, flight, gravity, and birdsong, his chapters draw from literary theory and criticism, scientific studies, and in-the-field experience to illuminate Don McKay's poetry and poetics through varied praxes of observation and classification. In so doing, Mason demonstrates a number of ways in which literary criticism can profit from closer collaboration with scientific research and methods, and the result is a highly informative study that offers memorable new readings of McKay's well-known body of work.

One of the book's explicit purposes is to encourage "an ecocritical attention related to McKay's poetic attention"— the epistemological approach that McKay defines as "a sort of readiness, a species of longing which is without the desire to possess." Mason argues that, while on the one hand "[t]he precision and accuracy of McKay's language invite attentive, respectful dwelling upon the earth," on the other, his use of metaphor and other rhetorical figures highlights "the paradoxical role of language as straightforward, communicative, denotative medium and as problematic, metaphorical, connotative medium." All of which is to say that McKay's poetry invites readers to learn the proper names of things—an ethical practice that, for McKay, is akin to recognizing the Levinasian Face—while at the same time asking us to remember that language always bears some relation to power. In situating McKay's poetics as a model for scholarly work, Mason splices factual information with reflections on the nature of knowledge production.

A less explicit, but no less determinant goal of the book is to foster ecological pedagogies, both in the field and on campus. With the latter in view, Mason asks: "how many lecturers consider the dynamics of soaring in 'The Second Coming,' or contemplate the physics of buckling in 'The Windhover,' or explore the evolutionary biology of birdsong in 'To a Skylark'?" Those who profit from Mason's research will certainly be in better positions to do so. Chapters on notes and birdsong offer

particularly convincing models for exploring how poets and readers might learn to listen to the natural world. Illuminating the mimetic form of McKay's "Song for the Song of the Chipping Sparrow," for instance, Mason draws out "the common onomatopoeic renditions of the white-throated sparrow's song":

> David Allen Sibley identifies it as a "high, pure whistle *sooo seeeeeee dididi dididi dididi*" . . . and it has famously been translated as "Old Sam Peabody Peabody Peabody!" and, north of the forty-ninth parallel, as "Oh Sweet Canada Canada Canada!" The first two notes sound, to human ears, like a doorbell's slightly drawn-out ringing, *dinnggg-donngg*, and hence the speaker "leap[s] up inferences"—
>
> Where there is a doorbell
> there must be a door—a door
> meant to be opened from the inside.

One drawback of Mason's exegetical (and largely celebratory) approach is his tendency to take McKay at his word when discussing his artistic and intellectual investments. This is nowhere more obvious than in his representations of McKay's distinctiveness from Romantic precursors and postmodern contemporaries. Despite suggesting numerous points of similarity between McKay, Wordsworth, and Clare, for instance, Mason ultimately reiterates McKay's disavowals of subscription to Romantic thought and practice, which tend to be depicted as "self-serving lyric posturing." Other passages dismiss postmodernism similarly, and, in moments such as these, Mason passes up opportunities to interrogate McKay's categorizations of his own work, and to plumb further depths of his aesthetic and epistemological debts.

With that said, Mason's insights are more numerous than his passes, and *Ornithologies* breaks new ground elsewhere. McKay's work has never had such a detailed equipment of ornithological knowledge brought to bear upon it, and that in itself is enough to make the book a valuable resource. The study also shares a significant characteristic with the works of some other young ecological scholars in Canada, insofar as it blends scholarly and artistic form. Interspersed between the book's conventionally academic readings are three "ecotones"—chapters that take up Mason's desire to merge ecocritical and poetic attention by narrating, and eventually versifying, his own critical enterprise. Through the self-reflexive persona of a character named BC (birder-critic), Mason presents an autobiographical account of his apprenticeship as a student of poetry and nature. Although referring to oneself in the third-person risks its own brand of self-service, the gesture is obviously meant as homage to McKay's signature blend of creative and critical styles. Mason joins a long tradition of writers who look to McKay as an example of conscientious thought and instruction, and *Ornithologies* is a substantial contribution to an emergent critical project of recognizing (and thereby helping to inscribe) McKay's definitive influence over the growth of eco-poetics and -criticism in Canada.

Voyage au Kanyada

Melchior Mbonimpa
La Tribu de Sangwa. Prise de parole 23,95 $

Compte rendu par Vincent Desroches

Canadien d'origine burundaise établi à Sudbury, où il enseigne, Melchior Mbonimpa publie ici son cinquième roman, apportant ainsi une contribution majeure à la littérature burundaise, qui en est à ses balbutiements, et une pierre de plus dans le courant de la littérature canadienne qu'on a décrit sous la bannière de littérature migrante.

Le roman suit plusieurs générations d'une famille originaire du Kenya, dont une branche s'est installée au Canada, en

Colombie-Britannique. Le roman débute en suivant les aventures de Zamba, qui réussit bientôt à émigrer au Canada, mais en laissant la belle Assia, enceinte, derrière. Quelques années plus tard, Assia meurt et son fils Manéno est élevé par son puissant beau-père, Sangwa, qui donne son nom au titre du roman. Zamba reste seul et s'effondre. Il se laisse aller à la dérive jusqu'à la rencontre de Mireille et sa fille Mélanie. Avec le temps et la venue de son fils Manéno au Canada, une branche canadienne de la « tribu de Sangwa » se forme et tisse des liens avec la partie de la famille restée au Kenya.

Le mérite du livre se situe dans cette volonté de traduire la réalité de la vie des immigrants africains au Canada d'une part et les difficultés de la vie au Kenya, à la fois pour les Kenyans eux-mêmes mais aussi pour les Canadiens qui s'associent à eux pour soulager la misère qu'ils voient et créer des centres communautaires sur place. Tout au long du récit, on voit se tisser des liens d'affection et de parenté de plus en plus étroits entre les deux espaces, jusqu'à créer une appartenance double. On devine l'intention et la sincérité de l'auteur dans ce projet.

Bien que l'écriture du roman soit toujours claire et précise, le style est souvent assez abrupt, surtout dans le traitement de la temporalité. La narration passe vite sur une cascade d'événements puis tend à s'empêtrer et s'enliser dans des dialogues souvent banals. La mort d'Assia, et plus tard celle de Sangwa lui-même, sont annoncées dans une seule ligne, de façon assez déconcertante. Mais une fois habitué à ce rythme, on finit par adhérer au récit.

Il y a aussi la question de la langue. Bien que l'histoire se passe dans deux espaces anglophones, l'auteur évite presqu'entièrement d'en faire état, créant ainsi une curieuse fiction linguistique. Tous les dialogues sont en français, le nom des Canadiens rencontrés par Zamba en Colombie-Britannique sont Mireille, Mélanie et Réal, et le lecteur n'a jamais l'impression que le passage d'une langue à l'autre est un obstacle ou une contrainte nécessaire. Il s'agit peut-être d'un problème proprement canadien qui serait parasite au projet principal du roman, mais le lecteur francophone peut rester insatisfait devant cet escamotage.

Dans l'ensemble, *La Tribu de Sangwa* est un roman qui se défend, malgré ses faiblesses, et qui mérite d'être diffusé largement au Canada et en Afrique.

Grandbois méconnu

Patrick Moreau

Alain Grandbois est-il un écrivain québécois? Quelques réflexions sur notre littérature à partir des Voyages de Marco Polo. Fides 12,95 $

Compte rendu par Michel Biron

Un ami qui s'occupe d'une revue littéraire québécoise se plaignait récemment de l'absence totale de réaction suscitée par un numéro de sa revue consacré à une littérature étrangère. Quand il n'est pas question de notre culture, constatait-il avec dépit, personne ne s'intéresse à ce qu'on écrit. La seule façon d'échapper à ce silence, c'est de toujours et encore parler de nous-mêmes, de n'évoquer le reste du monde qu'en regard de notre culture. Est-ce pour cela que l'étonnant ouvrage de Grandbois consacré aux voyages de Marco Polo n'a jamais vraiment trouvé ses lecteurs? Telle est la thèse de Patrick Moreau, professeur de littérature au Collège Ahuntsic, dans un petit ouvrage aux allures d'éditorial, intitulé *Alain Grandbois est-il un écrivain québécois?* Façon habile mais paradoxale de ramener au contexte national une œuvre québécoise qui, pour une fois, ne parle pas (explicitement) de nous — de le faire en proclamant haut et fort que nous avons eu tort de ne pas l'intégrer au corpus national. Façon paradoxale, car l'auteur « québécise » une œuvre qui ne demandait pas à l'être — et se trouve à confirmer que lui-même

ne parvient à nous intéresser au texte de Grandbois qu'en montrant que le Québec ne s'y est pas intéressé.

Le véritable objet de cette plaquette n'est toutefois pas Grandbois lui-même, mais l'institution littéraire québécoise, à laquelle s'attaque Patrick Moreau, lui qui s'en était pris il y a quelques années à l'institution scolaire québécoise dans *Pourquoi nos enfants sortent-ils de l'école ignorants?* Trois « maux » l'agacent tout particulièrement : l'égalitarisme, le présentisme et le populisme. Les manuels ou les anthologies destinés au collégial placent à peu près sur le même plan les classiques et les *minores*, ils canonisent des textes récents et ils évitent les œuvres réputées difficiles, car moins accessibles au « grand public » ou à l'élève. Une œuvre d'ici ne serait vraiment « québécoise », conclut-il, que si elle respecte ces trois critères. D'où l'exclusion de livres comme ceux de Grandbois qui ne répondent à aucun de ces critères.

Avec une modération exemplaire — qui contredit en partie le style accrocheur et pamphlétaire du titre — l'auteur n'a aucune peine à nous convaincre que la littérature d'ici obéit à des critères d'évaluation qui sont souvent loin d'être littéraires. Mais le choix du *Voyage de Marco Polo* (1941) est-il le plus probant à cet égard? On aurait aimé que Patrick Moreau explique l'admiration qu'il éprouve pour ce récit curieux (il le qualifie de chef-d'œuvre), érudit sans doute, mais plutôt livresque et dépourvu de l'intensité qu'on trouve dans *Né à Québec* (1933) centré sur la figure de l'explorateur Louis Jolliet. Grandbois lui-même avait des réserves sur son *Marco Polo*, qu'il jugeait surchargé d'événements. Quant à savoir si Grandbois est bel et bien un écrivain québécois, la question est d'autant plus surprenante que l'auteur des *Iles de la nuit* a été le modèle par excellence des poètes du pays durant les années 1960. Là aussi, on aurait aimé avoir quelques explications additionnelles.

Archives Matter

Linda M. Morra and Jessica Schagerl, eds.
Basements and Attics, Closets and Cyberspace: Exploring Canadian Women's Archives.
Wilfrid Laurier UP $85.00

Reviewed by Cristina Ivanovici

Drawing upon the contributions of two groundbreaking essay collections, *Working in Women's Archives: Researching Women's Private Literature and Archival Documents* (Buss and Kadar 2001) and *ReCalling Early Canada: Reading the Political in Literary and Cultural Production* (Blair et al. 2005), to archival and Canadian studies and feminist scholarship, *Basements and Attics, Closets and Cyberspace* revisits the creation of and research conducted in Canadian women's archives. This scholarly collection of essays includes contributions from various cultural agents—writers, archivists and researchers—involved in the creation and institutionalization of archives, thus highlighting the complex processes of depositing, retrieving, evaluating, and investigating different types of archives available in Canada.

Organized according to "three axes of understanding," namely "Reorientations," "Restrictions," and "Responsibilities" associated with personal, literary or institutional archives, *Basements and Attics* theorizes archives as non-neutral sites, and articulates archival work as open to critical interpretations and methodologies. The interrelations established between these three parts emphasize the research potential of Canadian women's archives, agencies and ideologies, methodologies, and practical aspects at work in special collections. By examining archival and research practices, most articles primarily discuss how archival materials are organized, accessed, valued (culturally, economically or individually), and interpreted. They also address how writers, archivists, and researchers can

deal with gaps, multiple identities and complex discourses encountered in both print and alternative archives, and investigate how previous readings of archives can (mis)construct authors' professional career or communities' cultural status. Therefore, each section explores alternative research by highlighting the resourcefulness of publishers' archives, private collections, or digital repositories. The contributions included in "Reorientations" and "Responsibilities," for instance, constitute excellent "how-to" guides for researchers interested not only in how archives problematize (dis)location, representation, and cultural translation, but also in ethical (re)readings of an author's literary career.

In "Reorientations," several essays engage with writers' and scholars' experiences of working either in or with archives. Daphne Marlatt discusses how fonds contribute to community formation, and touches upon how donors need to address privacy issues when depositing papers in official institutional archives. Cecily Devereux analyzes eBay as a non-conventional or alternative archive which operates "according to principles similar to institutional archives," thus reproducing representations of the "Indian maiden" according to a white colonial economy. Karis Shearer and Jessica Schagerl, in their study of Sina Queyras' blog *Lemon Hound*, advocate for this digital form "to be accepted as a legitimate archive of the times," and emphasize the potential of non-print archival materials. Catherine Bates argues that two short stories by Alice Munro and Marian Engel encourage readers "to make connections between the archive and waste." Hannah McGregor problematizes Nelofer Pazira's artistic archive as a site of information which complies with Canadian discourses that legitimize the "War on Terror." Similarly to other writers' contributions included in this collection, Penn Kemp's essay reflects upon the cultural and economic values traditionally conferred to handwritten or typed materials versus digital documents to be included in special collections, and discusses the process of transferring a writer's papers from a private to a public space.

These issues of what types of "materials" and whose artistic production are valued, how "materials" are catalogued and to whom they are made accessible are further explored in both "Restrictions" and "Responsibilities." Most studies included in these two sections deal with the complexities of creating, depositing and cataloguing an archive. "Restrictions" and "Responsibilities" discuss negotiations and contradictions involved in ethical readings of archives—even when the author refuses to deposit Canadian women's archives in a specific site—and highlight problems to be encountered on accessing, using, and interpreting Canadian women's archives, as showcased by Ruth Panofsky and Michael Moir's examination of how restrictions placed in literary archives determine alternative research paths and methodologies. In exploring how national archives construct Florence Carlyle's cultural production, Susan Butlin's essay points out an institutional disregard of popular commercial culture and illustrates how special collections prioritize the creative process versus economic aspects, a particular genre, or gender. In her study of *Telling It* as an oral research site, Andrea Beverley concludes that "particular complicated silences" enable "both the possibilities and vulnerabilities of cross-cultural feminist dialogue." In the third section, "Responsibilities," the contributors demonstrate that different types of archives also determine alternative forms of reading (in) archives. By discussing how Alzheimer's disease leads to gaps in her mother's personal correspondence, Kathleen Venema's essay emphasizes how memory significantly functions in the creation and reading of an archive. In their individual chapters, Sally Clark, Julia Creet,

Catherine Hobbs, Karina Vernon, and Susan McMaster demonstrate that "even a decision *not* to deposit papers with a particular institution or an institution's refusal of papers becomes a comment in itself" which implicitly reflects associations, values and priorities.

Basements and Attics, Closets and Cyberspace therefore serves as an essential guide in defining what constitutes an archive—as an ideologically and culturally constructed site—and in addressing pertinent challenges encountered both in the creation and study of Canadian women's archives, and also those presented by the advent of new technologies. However, more essays could have engaged with how the increasing lack of financial support will impact upon extant and future archives. In addition, the book ignores how archives can be fragmented beyond national borders. Although Ruth Panofsky and Michael Moir, in their study of archival restrictions, and the co-edited collection itself allude not only to an international community of scholars interested in literary archives deposited in Canada, but also to "globalizing trends that invite reconsideration about archives in national terms," *Basements and Attics, Closets and Cyberspace* mainly includes contributions from Canadian scholars and archivists, and explores archives located in Canada. Whereas the collection explores diverse methodologies, the case-study structure could have allowed additional space to discuss how Canadian women's archives might appeal to large communities of scholars (especially outside a non-Anglophone community) and to analyze transnational relations (particularly in the case of publishers' archives) which might be established, for instance, in the construction and reading of archives.

Le Canada anglais

Susan Margaret Murphy
Le Canada anglais de Jacques Ferron (1960-1970). Formes, fonctions et représentations. PUL 39,00 $

Compte rendu par Gillian Lane-Mercier

Que les lecteurs du livre de Susan Margaret Murphy, *Le Canada anglais de Jacques Ferron (1960-1970). Formes, fonctions et représentations*, soient ou non familiers avec les œuvres de cet écrivain, ils sont fortement interpelés dès la couverture où figure, à côté d'une photo de ce dernier, telle une réponse à une question contenue dans le filigrane du titre, cette citation a priori sans appel : « "Nos ennemis, qu'est-ce que vous voulez, ce sont les Anglais." — Jacques Ferron ».

Mais ces lecteurs feraient bien de se méfier de déclarations qui, faisant mine de refuser le dialogue, semblent annoncer par là une démonstration dont la conclusion serait connue à l'avance. Car Murphy s'est lancé un tout autre défi : plutôt que de prendre cette phrase de Ferron au pied de la lettre, elle s'est donné pour objectif de reconstituer les multiples dialogues — sous forme de rencontres, de correspondances, d'essais polémiques, de dédicaces, d'épigraphes en anglais, de personnages anglophones plus ou moins fictifs, d'extraits non traduits de poèmes anglo-canadiens — que Ferron n'a cessé d'entretenir avec cet Autre ennemi. Ce faisant, elle cherche à mettre au jour la profonde ambivalence d'une citation que d'aucuns ont pu considérer comme emblématique des convictions nationalistes de Ferron et, partant, de son rapport, hautement polarisé et antagoniste, aux Canadiens anglais.

Aussi les lecteurs découvriront-ils dans cet ouvrage dense, patiemment documenté, une analyse minutieuse et tout en nuances visant tantôt à combler des lacunes d'ordre biographique — notamment en ce qui a trait aux relations réelles de Ferron avec des anglophones, dont le professeur de droit et poète Frank Scott qui a servi de modèle

aux personnages « écossais » de *La Nuit*, *La Charrette* et *Le Ciel de Québec* — tantôt à remettre en question des lectures critiques jugées trop étroites, en vue de pousser plus loin les recherches sur la présence du Canada anglais chez Ferron. Dans cette optique, Murphy révèle le caractère foncièrement dialectique de l'imaginaire littéraire ferronien, incapable de se passer d'un ennemi qui fait partie intégrante non seulement de sa propre identité, mais aussi de l'histoire et de l'identité collective des Québécois depuis la Conquête.

D'où l'ambiguïté des images textuelles du rapport à l'altérité qui, selon Murphy, coïncide avec une véritable quête d'identité dominée par le masque, le jeu, le double, l'hypocrisie, l'ironie, la fausse neutralité et l'amour-haine; autant de thématiques et de stratégies discursives qui, en dépit de la charge polémique et de l'animosité dont elles peuvent se lester, sont symptomatiques d'un désir de dialoguer avec l'Autre. À ce titre, Murphy insiste sur la figure du passeur chez Ferron, qu'il soit anglophone bilingue, voire « enquébecquoisé », traducteur, comédien ou schizophrène, dont le rôle consiste à introduire un tierce terme au sein de l'opposition entre le Soi canadien-français et l'Autre canadien-anglais susceptible de la problématiser et, par là, la défaire.

Il convient de souligner la méthodologie retenue par Murphy qui s'inspire de la « critique du bon sens » préconisée par Ferron lui-même. D'une part, il s'agit de respecter le caractère autobiographique de l'œuvre ferronienne. Ceci l'amène non seulement à éclairer, grâce à des lettres inédites ainsi qu'à des entretiens avec des personnes l'ayant connu, certains aspects de la vie et de l'œuvre de Ferron, mais aussi à tenir compte de données biographiques des anglophones à qui il a dédié ses livres (Peter Dwyer, Scott Symons, Betty Bednarski) ou qui lui ont servi de modèle (Frank Scott, Frank Archibald Campbell, Duncan Campbell Scott, Frederick George Scott). D'autre part, il s'agit de rappeler des circonstances sociopolitiques ayant marqué les rapports entre anglophones et francophones, soit surtout la Conquête, la rébellion des Patriotes, l'exécution de Riel, la Confédération canadienne et la crise d'Octobre, ce qui permet de faire foisonner les parallèles entre les littératures canadienne-anglaise et canadienne-française, l'histoire du Québec et du Canada et les (re)lectures ironiques ou fantaisistes effectuées par Ferron.

C'est ainsi que Murphy tisse une riche toile de fond, aussi érudite que multidimensionnelle, à partir de laquelle s'érigent ses analyses textuelles dont le mérite réside dans la perspective intertextuelle adoptée. Car si le dialogue, malaisé et conflictuel, entre Ferron et les Canadiens anglais évolue en fonction de ses relations personnelles et des événements qui ont secoué la société québécoise au cours des années soixante, il évolue également au fil de l'œuvre, chaque essai, chronique, lettre, pièce de théâtre, conte, roman participant à sa façon de cette quête identitaire où se noue et se dénoue le rapport à l'Autre, dans toute son ambivalence. Seule une analyse intertextuelle attentive aux moindres fluctuations des images de l'altérité dans l'ensemble de ses écrits permet d'appréhender, outre la complexité du rapport intime de Ferron au Canada anglais, les enjeux littéraires, politiques et historiques qui le sous-tendent.

Et voilà où réside la force de la démonstration de Murphy, qui déjoue avec intelligence, subtilité et un brin d'ironie — elle fait elle-même partie de ces Anglais si détestés — les attentes du lecteur interpelé par la citation de la couverture. Sans être originale sur le plan théorique, sa démonstration l'est de par la « fluidité » de la méthodologie et l'envergure des connaissances littéraires, critiques, biographiques et historiques que celle-ci implique. À cet égard, l'analyse des rapports entre Ferron et son « frère ennemi », Frank Scott, suivie de celle, en tous points admirable, des trois romans

du « cycle Scott » qui en est tributaire, lesquelles, prises ensemble constituent simultanément la partie centrale de l'ouvrage de Murphy et la clé de voûte de la problématique de l'altérité chez Ferron, représentent, avec le recours à des documents inédits, une contribution incontournable aux études ferroniennes.

Location, Location

Donna-Michelle St. Bernard
Gas Girls. Playwrights Canada $16.95

Dawn Promislow
Jewels and Other Stories. TSAR $20.95

Reviewed by Julie Cairnie

As a Canadian who researches Southern African literature, I am keen to read texts that might illuminate the connections between these seemingly disparate locations. Two recent books, Donna-Michelle St. Bernard's play *Gas Girls* and Dawn Promislow's collection of short stories *Jewels* hold much promise. Both texts raise questions about location and perspective: *Gas Girls* presents a troubling view of contemporary Zimbabwe for Canadian theatre audiences, while *Jewels* complicates perspective when imaginatively revisiting 1970s South Africa.

Gas Girls is part of an ambitious project—the first of fifty-four plays about Africa that St. Bernard plans to write. The idea for the book and series was conceived before she visited a single country on the continent. The play is a creative response to something the playwright read about *actual* women who trade sex for gas along the Zimbabwean border, but bears little if any resemblance to Zimbabwe. In *Gas Girls,* people eat cassava, whereas the staple in Zimbabwe is *sadza*, a stiff maize-meal porridge. There are several references to a beach, but Zimbabwe is landlocked. Imperial measures are used, but Africa (with the exception of Liberia) is fully metric.

More significantly, characters speak a pidgin English that in no way resembles the English spoken in Zimbabwe, and would be an affront to many Zimbabweans. An intermediary language ("kitchen kaffir") was used during white rule, but hasn't survived. English-language Zimbabwean literature typically creates an English mingled with Shona or Ndebele to depict rural or uneducated folk; they have their own language. Adding to the stereotypical representation, men and women in the text are presented as having loose sexual morals and there is one instance of rear penetration. Representations of sexuality—particularly from outsiders—is a sensitive topic, given that "Africa" has for centuries been presented as the site of sexual deviance. The continent has been historically linked to disease, most recently AIDS, because of perceptions of loose morals and animal-like practices. Countless inaccuracies and familiar stereotypes render St. Bernard's Zimbabwe no place and a synonym for African immorality.

Jewels is a much more subtle and intelligent study of location. Without exception, the fourteen stories that comprise the collection look at the apartheid past from a vantage point in the present, sometimes from overseas (Canada is implied through references to "snowflakes" and "northern light") and sometimes from a place of social change (post-apartheid South Africa). Most compelling is that stories and lives are interlinked, connected in ways that are ironic in the context of 1970s South Africa. Apartheid enforced separation and prohibited cross-racial exchange. Black Consciousness pushed liberal white writers to avoid representing black characters and experiences. *Jewels* registers these defining features of 1970s South Africa, but assumes some (not all) black perspectives and writes the past in such a way that disparate lives are connected in intimate and meaningful ways.

The ethics of representation might lead readers to assume that first-person narration is reserved for white characters

and third person for black characters, but Promislow does not tolerate Manichean binary logic. Some stories use first person to tell black characters' stories ("Billy" and "Just a Job"), while third person is employed to tell white characters' stories ("Somewhere"). Many of the stories overlap. "Billy" and "Our Story/His Story" document a white family's intervention to treat their employee's child's malnutrition. Billy, an artist in Johannesburg, chooses to "draw the stories my mother told me," rather than the story of exceptional white benevolence. "Our Story/His Story" tells an almost identical story, about Jimmy, but focuses on the white family and the limits of white benevolence (a theme in many of the stories). The narrator tells us, "Jimmy's story is the one that I myself cannot tell." Similarly, one of Promislow's young white characters wants to communicate with a young black activist from her youth: "She would like to have told him that nothing she saw was as interesting, or as important, as what she left behind."

She never does, and perhaps in the end it is the work required to connect disparate locations, stories, and lives that links *Gas Girls* and *Jewels*. My worry about St. Bernard's play is that the Canadian audience will feel removed from the characters, but also compelled to contribute to a condom-distribution fund or an AIDS-awareness campaign, confident that its own sexual mores and linguistic codes are intact and sufficiently sophisticated. My preference for Promislow's collection of short stories is that it complicates the possibility of ethical communication between disparate groups, but doesn't dismiss it as historically fated to fail.

Histories of Girlhood

Susan Swan
The Western Light. Cormorant $29.95

Tess Fragoulis
The Goodtime Girl. Cormorant $21.00

Reviewed by Hannah McGregor

The unexpected synchronicity of two of Cormorant Books' new novels can be summed up in a pair of scenes in which their young protagonists survey other women's bodies. On a spring day in the late 1950s, twelve-year-old Mary Bradford observes her aunt and housekeeper walking ahead of her: "You couldn't see much of my aunt's bottom in her pretty sundress, but Sal's heart-shaped rump was evident in her worn jeans. . . . I admired their feminine curves, and my own body, with its straight angles, felt like a crude approximation of theirs." In a parallel scene, set thirty years earlier and halfway around the world, young Kivelli Fotiathi observes the body of her friend and rival in a public bath: "Kivelli looked at her friend's breasts, large as a pregnant woman's, then at her round and smooth belly which would never bear children. . . . Despite her small breasts and narrow hips, for the first time in Marianthi's presence, she felt like the larger woman." Both of these moments of examination are charged with desire, competition, and fascination, reflecting the ambivalent relationships between women in the midst of a patriarchal society—and both speak to the novels' fascination with how women come of age in worlds dedicated to often violent forms of masculinity.

Susan Swan's *The Western Light* and Tess Fragoulis' *The Goodtime Girl* use historical fiction to provide female perspectives on highly masculine worlds—the former small-town northern Ontario in the 1950s, the latter Smyrna, Piraeus, and Athens in the 1920s. In so doing, Swan and Fragoulis demonstrate their young protagonists'

uneasy, contingent relationships to their cultural and historical moments. Both novels examine how young women's emergent subjectivities are shaped by the contours of the societies in which they are raised, the gendered identities available to them, and the social crises that unsettle these accepted identities.

For Swan's protagonist Mary, this crisis is the arrival of John Pilkie, "The Hockey Killer," in her hometown of Madoc's Landing. Pilkie, who has been deemed criminally insane for the murder of his wife and child, is being transferred to the local psychiatric hospital. As a Madoc's Landing native, however, he is hopeful that his return will gain him a sympathetic audience in his quest for a case review—something which was, at mid-century, unavailable to convicts deemed insane. Pilkie's arrival brings into focus Mary's latent sexual awakening and her dissatisfying relationship with her inattentive workaholic father, a local saint of a town doctor. The doctor's discomfort in raising a daughter by himself is the narrative starting point of Swan's earlier novel, *The Wives of Bath* (1993), to which *The Western Light* is a prequel.

Swan's new novel is a tentative, fraught coming-of-age story about the complications of Mary's desire—for the athletic and charismatic Pilkie on the one hand and her elusive father on the other. Mary's tangled relationship to these two men is refracted through a small town's passion for hockey as a dominant form of masculinity, an obsession that causes her father, Morley, to support Pilkie's quest for a case review in exchange for Pilkie's agreement to play for the local hockey team that Morley coaches. Swan's representations of the two male figures emphasize them as opposing poles in Mary's desire. Pilkie is larger than life, often more caricature than character, a careening pile of masculine stereotypes with his "dapper racoon coat and chocolate-brown Fedora," his "shiny cowlick" and "manly grace," and a charming attentiveness to the awkward young Mary (nicknamed Mouse). Morley, on the other hand, is distant and inaccessible, as much for readers as for Mary. He drifts in and out of scenes, disappearing for whole chunks of the novel and rarely speaking or acting for long enough to develop any density as a character. Instead, he is an amalgam of reputation and local legend, like the time he talked Pilkie's mother through removing her son's appendix in the middle of a snowstorm. Mary is a character caught midway between childhood and adulthood, and that liminality is expressed primarily through her wavering desires for these two men, and through her narrative's wavering capacity to represent exactly what it is she wants.

Similarly, Mary's awareness of the sexual politics around her—of her aunt's frustrated longing for a newspaper editor who has married somebody else, or the tangle of desire between the housekeeper Sal and three different men, including her father and Pilkie—shifts between childish incomprehension and the retroactive wisdom of her adult narrating voice. On an outing with the adults, she observes the strap of her aunt's sundress fall down, "exposing half her breast": "Suddenly, nothing felt the same." She recognizes only retroactively "that the atmosphere was charged with sexual tension." When, in the brief prologue, Mary suggests that "the world has changed so much that what I'm about to tell you may as well have taken place a couple of centuries ago," that irreconcilability of then and now reflects the shift from childhood to adulthood as much as the distance between past and present.

Small-town, hockey-loving northern Ontario in the 1950s is a masculine-dominated world within which Mary and the other women in her life struggle with their agency and their desires. Where Swan's evocation of a young woman's coming-of-age is full of a sublimated violence and

eroticism, those forces come to the fore in Fragoulis' account of the 1920s *rembetiko* scene in Piraeus, a harbour city that saw a massive influx of immigrants in the wake of the Greco-Turkish War. Her protagonist Kivelli is one such immigrant, a wealthy young Smyrnean debutante-turned-refugee in the wake of the 1922 Great Fire of Smyrna. The novel charts Kivelli's transitions from accomplished coquette to impoverished and traumatized refugee to the famed siren of the Smyrnean diaspora: transitions structured by her shifting relationship to various forms of violent masculinity. As a debutante, Kivelli is a skilled flirt and manipulator of men's desires, a talent that becomes pivotal to her survival when she is thrust into the world of prostitution, seedy taverns, and *manghas*, or knife-toting "tough guys."

As Kivelli's understanding of the power dynamics around her develops, she discerns the various guises this masculine violence takes on: from the murders she witnesses in taverns; to her rape by her first bandleader; and, more insidiously, to the manipulations and cruelties of intimate relationships represented in the figures of the Smyrniot, a famous songwriter whose popular lyrics are in fact written by his wife, and Diamantis, a charming musician whose charisma masks a deep and misogynistic self-importance. Against these dominant male figures, the developing friendship between Kivelli and Marianthi, the Smyrniot's un-credited wife, forms the novel's backbone. This female bond provides a counter-narrative of Kivelli's growth as she shifts her loyalties from the men who can help her survive to the women who can teach her to forge an identity for herself beyond her culture's patriarchal strictures.

Culturally, geographically, and historically specific details provide the scaffolding for the narratives of both Swan and Fragoulis. Swan revels in the register of ironic familiarity, layering on references to the newly invented snowmobile and debates about the relative merits of Maurice "The Rocket" Richard and Tim Horton's. In contrast, Fragoulis operates in a more pedagogical mode of cultural explanation, with an appendix defining the Greek terms that litter the novel, many referring specifically to the *rembetiko* scene (we learn about musical instruments like the *bouzouki* and the *baglamas*, as well as the words for wine, hookah, and prostitute). This density of historical and cultural detail stands in marked contrast to the relative thinness of Kivelli as a focalizing narrator. An entirely outward-looking character, struggling to forget her past—"a monstrous task, as arduous as collecting a lifetime's worth of details in a notebook she intended to destroy"—and to avoid both introspection and intimacy, Kivelli extends that coldness to the reader. Distant, often cruel, always selfish, and remarkably uncurious about the people around her, she provides a stilted perspective through which to encounter this world. Swan more successfully navigates a similar narrative impasse: her protagonist Mary is obsessed with a father who is frequently described but so rarely encountered that he achieves no vibrancy as a character. However, this is an effect that serves to make the final section of the book, with its sudden switch to the present tense, all the more viscerally engaging. Both novels ultimately use their selective silences and limited narratorial perspectives to their advantage, however, charting the deformations and stultifying effects of girlhood and young womanhood in a violent patriarchal culture. Their richly imagined historical settings render these portraits all the more vivid and, ultimately, disturbing for their realism.

Le Corps du Christ

Larry Tremblay
Le Christ obèse. Alto 20,95 $

Compte rendu par Julia Hains

Le Christ obèse poursuit les réflexions théâtrologiques sur la pratique corporelle (le théâtre du corps) entreprises par Larry Tremblay dans ses textes dramatiques antérieurs tels que *Le Ventriloque* ou encore *Abraham Lincoln va au théâtre*. C'est cependant le genre romanesque qui accueille ici le travail de la métaphore, que couronne l'oxymoron; le titre, qui installe la figure de ce christ étrangement « obèse », pointe d'emblée un questionnement théologico-philosophique fondamental : qu'aurait été l'histoire sans le sacrifice christique de la chair?

Tout en évitant de verser dans le manichéisme — ou inversement, dans l'holisme —, Tremblay renouvelle, voire pervertit l'articulation indépassable du corps et de l'âme, et de ses corollaires (la douleur, la morale, le bien et le mal) à travers l'étrange relation de fusion / confusion qui s'établit progressivement entre Edgar, trente-sept ans, et Jean, la « victime » qu'il recueille chez lui : *il sera son sauveur*.

C'est que la découverte de ce « Christ de viande » installe une distance dans le corps d'Edgar, laquelle engendre sa réflexion, sa prise de conscience du « moi », qui se traduit chez lui par le mutisme et le soliloque. Il semble que cette expérience introspective de l'altérité procède d'une certaine analyse de la psyché névrotique et nécrosée, qui trouverait une manifestation dans la notion freudienne d'inquiétante étrangeté; la découverte de la « fille » ensanglantée et empalée du cimetière neuf mois après le décès de la mère d'Edgar suscite chez lui des affects — la pitié, mais principalement la culpabilité — qu'engendre la confrontation au retour de son même, de son semblable. Au fil d'une lecture erratique et labyrinthique — à laquelle participe le recours sensible à l'analepse —, on voit se déployer les complexes infantiles refoulés d'Edgar, qui sont intrinsèquement liés au sentiment que sa mère a voulu se débarrasser de lui à l'âge de deux ans. Le récit fonctionne comme si la mort permettait de dévoiler les squelettes qui habitent la vie du personnage, une vie dominée par une incapacité à changer — attitude symptomatique d'un fatalisme génétique, celui du *Fatal Foetus*.

L'écriture de Larry Tremblay est anatomique puisqu'elle participe d'un processus de dissection : celui du corps. Ainsi la corporéité d'Edgar se trouve-t-elle éparpillée, décentrée, à l'image de ce Christ en décomposition, en putréfaction. La multiplicité de membres engendrée par cette atomisation du corps, rendue manifeste à travers les intitulés des trente-quatre chapitres du roman, demande à être analysée et recadrée. « Le gâteau », « La perruque », « La barbe », « Le préservatif », etc. constituent autant de morceaux de quotidienneté qui témoignent de la violence perpétrée lors de l'acte « métaphysique » du morcellement, lequel permet de resensibiliser le lecteur, de faire naître le questionnement. Si *Le Christ obèse* appartient, d'une certaine manière, à la mythologie personnelle de Larry Tremblay, c'est que les motifs associés à la transsubstantiation nous sont livrés avec tous les paradoxes qui les composent et les questionnements qu'ils soulèvent.

Comic Timing

Glenn Willmott
Modern Animalism: Habitats of Scarcity and Wealth in Comics and Literature.
U of Toronto P $29.95

Bart Beaty
Comics Versus Art. U of Toronto P $29.95

Reviewed by Beverley Haun

Each of these books draws attention to graphic texts, a type of literature that was seen during the modern period as being

distinct from high art, but that is now being framed by postmodernism as worthy of serious study. Beaty interrogates the specific historical and social processes that have devalued and that are now re-evaluating comics as a cultural form. Willmott posits new ways of reading past and present works in both canonized and marginalized genres with an eye to what they communicate about adapting to changing landscapes.

Glenn Willmott's *Modern Animalism* offers an elegant new reading of the modern era through an ecological lens. It provides a framework for tracing modernist and postmodern literary challenges to the consumer ideology of abundance and scarcity and the concept that we need economic growth to prosper. He does this through a spectrum broad enough to include Batman and Winnie-the-Pooh.

In examining modernist arts, Willmott reminds us of their position in history. High art, as a subject to study in the academy, and the notion of the canon in high art, were both formed during the "long" modern period, and are thus both tangled within the ideology of modernism. As modernism recedes into the past and becomes an historical period, we are more readily able to see its diversity of voices as well as its "silences." One significant silence Willmott identifies is a lack of concern with perceptions of scarcity. He demonstrates how modernism imagines an open, abundant world and sees scarcity as a construct of human economic choices that can be made or unmade. In contrast, postmodernism imagines a finite planet and a haunting end to growth. Willmott's interest in how the modern period represents abundance and scarcity, and responds to both, expands beyond the canonical high art of the period to include popular cultural expressions. Here he contrasts the inaccessibility of high art and the skilled labour required to access its semiotic productivity with the greater accessibility of popular cultural production and postmodern cultural production including replication across new media.

Four kinds of economic wealth production and their concomitant forms of scarcity are considered in Willmott's analyses: habitat, consumer, welfare, and natural production. He focuses on the refusal to equate consumerist abundance with fulfillment. He finds two expressions of new types of wealth. The first is often achieved through modern asceticism, "imaginative renunciation" of, and exile from, the normalized economic structures shaping perceived needs and desires, and a quest for alternative ways of life within newly imagined landscapes of scarcity. The second is "imaginative adaptation" triggered by a sense of historical rupture, such as a nuclear apocalypse, and the need to learn to live with less and find satisfaction in interactions in habitat and not in the possession of objects.

Willmott begins by exploring the need for, and invention of, strange new styles, often found in image-based narratives, to envision a fulfilling life amidst scarcity. In the second chapter, the search for alternative forms of wealth and satisfaction find a common iconology that the reader is invited to identify with. This includes problem creatures who synthesize the human and the animal, or the human and the technological, or sometimes all three, and who are usually placed in experimental habitats. Identified by their activity rather than their property, these figures model how to be satisfied with doing rather than having.

The third chapter considers how the quest for a new order of things plays into contemporary imaginations of time and history, and also examines scarcity as an historical concept. The new order, especially in comics, often asserts the power of an individual or collective withdrawal where fulfillment is found through work. Willmott points out that all animalized superheroes fall into this category. Batman, Spiderman, and

Wolverine thrive in a niche habitat, apart from, yet in the interstices of, the worlds they must renounce. Within the continuum of this new order, scarcity has been represented as a condition for adaptation. "We are forced by the image of a small planet with finite resources to feel our economic life increasingly as a pact with nature rather than a conquering of it."

The final chapter moves to children's literature where Willmott notes that interactions between various species and their natural environment have always been a central theme. However, literary studies has until recently failed to recognize the substance in both children's books and comics. "Children recognize continuity and connection with other species and differences from them and thus understand themselves as imbedded in an ecology of subjects among species." He argues "that this curiously overlooked dimension of modernist primitivism is the proper end of modernism itself, in which a once elitist appreciation of the difficult merges with a postmodern commitment to the accessible."

As he highlights the ecology of the subject in children's literature, Willmott turns to the work of Emmanuel Levinas who, during the modern period, and after the historic rupture of World War II, based a philosophy of ethics on the need to see one's self—to see humanity—in the face of the other. Willmott powerfully notes that the increasing circulation of graphic narratives collapses the distance between the written gesture and the more readily accessible image. Furthermore, he stresses that it is not just in the face of the human other where we must seek recognition, but in all faces, animals too. C. S. Lewis' Narnia stands as an example of this vision where an ecology of subjects among diverse species is forged in order to ensure survival.

Throughout the texts examined in *Modern Animalism*, Willmott sees problem creatures as reflecting the plasticity of the human in the modern age. But in his focus on this aspect of the modern age and beyond, he is overlooking the strong tradition of human hybrid images that went before, not only in the oral traditions of cultures across the globe, which he does fold into his discussion, but more specifically, in the myriad images of the hybrid green-men and wildman carved into the stone of tenth- to twelfth-century churches across Europe. These images, still standing today, infused the imaginations of western cultures across time before the advent of mass literacy, industrialization, and the canon that eventually grew out of the texts that followed. In this context, the plasticity of the human in response to scarcity identified by Willmott is more a return to a past strongly connected to nature and annual cycles of abundance and scarcity. Willmott traces the increasing presence and new formulations of problem creatures in newly styled habitats and sees in them a way of recognizing and accepting that the dominantly white Euro-American model of growth economics must be set aside if we hope to ensure survival of our species on the planet. Implicit in this argument is that white European dominance must also be made to wane, to renunciate, and to adapt.

Comics Versus Art, Beaty's sociology of comics in the twentieth century, examines the auction house and the museum, rather than the comic book store and convention, in order to investigate the shift in attitude about key artists in the world of comics. Beaty's nine-chapter long detailed study begins with a comic panel appropriated into a work of high art by Lucy McKenzie (2004). In his intriguing analysis of her painting, he draws together many of the arguments about comics that inform the rest of his book. He follows with definitions of comics in the twentieth century and explains why they have been excluded from the canons of high art. Reasons include a perceived lack of artistic seriousness, their

mass production, sexually lurid and violent content, and thematic complexity. He then offers a new reading of comics rooted in the sociology of art, arguing, "comics are best understood as a distinct field of cultural production." Beaty identifies tensions in the boundaries separating high and low art pertaining to comics, teasing out artists' and critics' initial attempts to institutionalize comics, not as a legitimate cultural form in their own right, but rather as source material for high art to appropriate.

Beaty's study turns to the development of comic fandom and the ways it worked to reify select cartoon artists, "pencillers" such as Carl Barks and Jack Kirby after World War II. He then considers key works in the comic form that are being drawn into a more traditional literary canonical fold. Here he visits George Herriman's *Krazy Kat*, Al Feldstein and Bernard Krigstein's short story "Master Race," and Art Spiegelman's *Maus*. In particular, Beaty draws attention to the differences between "fannish" epistemologies written about "Master Race" and the scholarly discourses generated in response to *Maus* to highlight "the persistence of legitimating hierarchies in the critical vocabulary."

Beaty then expands the definition of comics by examining the relationship of cutting edge comics, contemporary illustration and design, and the world of collectible vinyl designer or artist's toys. He turns from the new forms of comics developing in the postmodern era to the reception of comics in the art world. He considers especially the role of auction houses during the 1990s in legitimizing comics by lending an economic rationale to the conceptualization of them as art. Beaty points out that by, "positioning comic books, and original comic strip and comic book art, as both collectible and investment worthy, auction houses, and particularly Sotheby's, helped transform the comics world." He also examines the low art value attached to comics as cultural objects, particularly in light of theories of fetishization, nostalgia, and kitsch. In his penultimate chapter, he sheds more light on the ways comics have become institutionalized through a detailed examination of several museum exhibitions and their catalogues that position comics within the context of high culture. The underground cartoonist Robert Crumb is given special attention as the subject of the most museum retrospectives of any American cartoonist. Crumb's portraits of human weakness are identified as being part of his greater art world appeal.

Beaty concludes by looking to the future of comics in relation to high art through the work of Chris Ware, cartoonist and essayist. It is through this dual participation in the comics discourse that Ware is identified as building a bridge between low art into the world of high art and academic acceptance. If there is any weakness to identify in this excellent investigation of the world of comics, it is a technical one. The reader can be frustrated by the limited number of cartoons and the small size of the ones provided to illustrate Ware's work as well as that of the preceding cartoonists under discussion.

In writing a history of the ways the comic world has been taken up during the modern era and beyond through a sociology of art perspective, Beaty has made a valuable new contribution to the study of the comic form. By creating an ecological literary framework through which to reconsider the modern era as well as contemporary narratives, Willmott has tapped into the discomfiting zeitgeist of our time and shaped a discussion to which literary scholars can add their voices.

Racing for the Prize

Michael Boughn

I recently was "short-listed," as they say, for a big literary prize. How big is big, you well may ask. Big enough to get my name on lists in a bunch of newspapers across Canada, but "big," as we all know, is a relative term inflected by a lot of different factors. For instance, is the prize for poetry or fiction? In the current world of literary value, the biggest prize for poetry, even if the pot is richer, will never be as big as any prize for fiction. Smaller fiction prizes provide endless material for cultural pundits to speculate on in the arts sections of newspapers across the country. Fiction prizes even have their own season—headlines announce "the race is on," and photographs of serious-looking writers sport captions indicating who has pulled ahead. Like horses. Or dogs chasing fake rabbits. They are interviewed and profiled endlessly. Poetry prizes and their nominees, meanwhile, languish far down the page in long, unadorned lists somewhere under the nominees for children's lit.

The big prize I was nominated for was a poetry prize, so even though it was referred to as "prestigious" in a congratulatory form letter from the large cultural institution proffering the prize, things soon sank into a slough of silence as the fiction contests heated up and speculation intensified as to who would win the most races this racing season. Still, even though it immediately was swallowed by the Poetry Cone of Silence (PCS), the nomination did cause me some discomfort because it was a big prize for poetry and a couple of years before I had made a public statement making fun of such prizes.

I made that statement when my previous book of poetry, a swell if obscure little book called *22 Skidoo*, received a swell, if obscure, little prize called The Friggin (yes, that is an anagram). The Friggin Prize was not a real prize, although I did get a shiny sticker for the front cover of my book (that's another story) and fifty bucks for beer, but it wasn't real enough, in the scheme of prize quiddities, to deserve even a long list, much less a short one. In fact, the somewhat sassy slogan of the Friggin Prize was, "No long list; no short list; no guest list; just the Friggin Prize." It was obviously an insouciant little prize with something of a chip on its shoulder, and it called for an acceptance speech equally insouciant and chippy, which I happily composed.

I was fortunate because it was a somewhat scandalous time for poetry prizes and I was handed some juicy material for the speech which, in the true spirit of the Friggin, made fun of all those big prizes and the culture of commercialized writing they seem to reflect. In England, for instance, a contestant for the position of Oxford Professor of Poetry, admittedly not a prize in the literal sense, but certainly a plum with lots of prize-like trappings, was busted for slandering another distinguished poet competitor in order to better her chances

for the job, an act more appropriate for a boardroom brouhaha than a poetry contest. In Canada, meanwhile, the same big prize I got nominated for was awarded to a young man whose writing teacher/mentor was on the jury that made the award. She had also written the introduction for the same book. When it was suggested that this might be construed as a form of blatant nepotism, that the relations were a little too close for justifiable comfort, she turned on her accusers like a cornered wolverine (how's that for a cool Canadian simile), damning them with the vicious label "dada poets," apparently a state of literary being that mellifluous lyricists hold to be in ultimate bad taste. But then, as one of those Dada artists, Max Ernst, once said: "Art has nothing to do with taste. Art is not there to be tasted." Except, perhaps, in Manitoba.

I pointed to these and other prizes in the Friggin Acceptance Speech as examples of a writing culture that has lost sight of poetry's mission because it has become focused on prizes and races, so much so that many people have begun to write with the prize in mind. I did have a good time poking fun at them, but beneath that fun lurked some potentially serious issues about the relation of commerce to art. Such issues have been around for a while now—at least since Michelangelo bitched about what a drag it was to have to adjust his work to the philistine expectations of his patrons—which we have largely lost sight of since everything, including poetry, has become professionalized with its own university programs, career courses, and commercial measures of success of which the *prize* has become a key indicator. A recent issue of *Arc* ("Canada's poetry magazine") focused on prizes and contests, for instance, contains a story by John Barton ("Getting on the Island: Literary Contests as Reality TV on The Aquarium Channel™") about a "famous" poet who introduced himself to another poet (his guest) at a dinner party by demanding to know how many awards he had won. It is not hard to find something to make fun of in such a culture.

Of course, once I got short-listed for the big prize I was soon hoisted on my own petard. Some blogger who no doubt Googled the nominees as soon as the lists were published, joyfully discovered my Friggin Speech and reprinted two paragraphs under the heading "Michael Boughn's Gov-Gen Acceptance Speech?"

> And then, of course, having the judges that bestow the prizes for literary excellence write the excellent introductions to your excellent book before they give you the prizes for your excellence—that too is literary excellence above and beyond the normal kind of excellence which is usually just kind of run of the mill. . . .
>
> We, however, are here because we know better. Poetry is not about truth or beauty or, heaven forbid, making things out of words. It's about getting the prize. It's about being on the committee that gives out the prizes so you can make sure your friends and students get the prizes, because if they don't get the prizes, then what the hell does that say about you?

Whether that would have been my Governor General's acceptance speech is now a moot point. I have done more outrageous things at various points in my life, but in this case I probably wouldn't have, if only out of courtesy to the Governor General, who, after all, is the representative of the Queen to whom I swore allegiance in 2001. It took me thirty-five years to come to an understanding that would permit me to take that oath in good faith, and being a poet, that is someone who takes—or at least ought to take—words seriously, I am not about to violate it now.

No doubt the blogger who posted the excerpt would have seen this as "selling out," a thought that crossed my own mind, however briefly, causing the discomfort I mentioned previously. The phrase, "selling

out," describes a debased relation between art and commerce. It is implicitly premised on the idea of a certain potential authenticity to art, or at least a value that, if not transcendent, or grounded in some realm beyond the quotidian, is at least outside the market, including the prize market. Exactly what that value is remains difficult to put your finger on. It seemed the blog positioned the quote in such a way as to accuse me of inconsistency or hypocrisy, of abandoning my personal values (there's that word again) in order to reap the recognition and money—especially the money—that goes along with a big prize. It is easy to be insouciant and sassy when there is nothing at stake, but will you stick by your words when there is dough on the table? What about your personal values then?

The idea lingers in some circles that art—at least certain kinds of art—ought to be a bastion of integrity against the prostitution of mind and spirit that capitalism offers up as culture. That was the implicit idea at the core of the Friggin speech. Selling out has to do with tailoring your work to a market, consciously or unconsciously adjusting your creative decisions, in order to maximize the work's attractiveness to potential buyers (or prize awarders). But as much as artists need to create they also have to eat, and if you are not independently wealthy or supported by someone who has a regular job, presumably selling your art helps in that regard. If you can sell it, at least you can go on making it rather than starving to death in a grubby basement apartment while the world waits with bated breath to find out who is going to win the latest literary contest.

But is art—all of it—just another commodity in the market to be produced and consumed, a race for the prize, or does it still potentially lay claim to some other realm or mode of existence? While it is fashionable in some intellectual circles to go on about the end of authenticity and originality, the death of the author, and so on, real writing does go on and I don't mean by that the kind of writing associated with the phrase "Writers and Poets." "Writers and Poets" is a nonsense phrase invented by the hordes of graduates from arts management programs to explain what they are supposed to manage. When I raised this issue in a public forum, asking what poets are presumed to do if not write, there was general agreement that the word "poets" in this context means people who do not earn money from writing, whereas writers, at least potentially, do, a crucial distinction for arts managers. Arguing that that was not a bad thing, a terrific poet (Peter Culley) who writes books that those who award prizes are apparently severely allergic to, responded by arguing that in fact "poetry is being ruined by people who are trying to turn it into a 'real' & non-fucked (commercial) activity instead of the art form reserved for deadbeats & losers who don't want to be bothered by worrying about asshole audiences. . . ."

The writing that is at stake in Culley's thinking is of another order than the one implied in "Writers and Poets," one that has recourse to a sense of . . . what are you going to call it if not *authenticity* or *integrity*? Well, say attention, attention not merely to some thought of the world arranged in an aesthetically pleasing formation that can win a prize. Culley's thinking has this writing taking place at a point where every word resonates with a field of meaning that opens up to the extraordinary and uncontainable complexity of the sounding of the world—that kind of attention, the kind where every choice, which is to say every word, opens the sentence, the line, to what is always opening beyond it. There is an adventure in that that most prize awarding panels find, well, stupefying, because mostly they have been trained to read (and write) a conventional (prize-winning) verse that is taught in the professional writing programs that the judges have been trained in.

It is hard for me to argue with Culley's point, given my own writing, notwithstanding the—I think "fluke" would work adequately here although someone else has suggested "luck" as more appropriate—of the big prize nomination. Not that *Cosmographia—a post-Lucretian faux micro-epic* didn't deserve it, if only for being the only post-Lucretian faux micro-epic ever written not only in Canada but the whole world, but the flukiness of the process as a whole is legendary among those who have participated on various art booty panels—not that it could be otherwise, though it does seem usually dominated by a certain narrow range of sensibility. Brian Fawcett, in an essay called "Why Sharon Thesen doesn't win poetry prizes," locates four crucial characteristics of the prize winning sensibility: 1) earnestness, free of all irony; 2) an addiction to repetitious tropes illustrative of the poet; 3) the ability to campaign tirelessly for themselves; and 4) a craving for public recognition. I think you could safely add a fifth, which would be the deep, heartfelt belief that intimate revelations of their inner most selves are endlessly interesting.

There is a marvellous little set piece near the beginning of Elmore Leonard's crime novel, *La Brava,* in which the two main characters, Tony La Brava, a secret service agent turned art photographer, and his new lover, the aging film star Jean Shaw, discuss responses to a recent show of La Brava's work. After going through a list of art-speak comments—"His work is a compendium of humanity's defeat at the hands of venture capital"; "He sees himself as dispossessed, unassimilated" —La Brava responds with classic naïve anti-art speak, "I thought I was just taking pictures." And then he goes on to relate a further overheard conversation in which a man said, "I think he takes pictures to make a buck, and anything else is fringe."

Of course, making a buck had to come up. Even in pulp fiction, the dirty bottom rung on the ladder of literary excellence, any discussion of art will lead into the quagmire of its relation to money and commerce—maybe *especially* because it is pulp fiction, whose very existence is presumably premised on commercialism—work done for money, for a market. La Brava's response would be shocking in high art circles: "I would've kissed the guy," he says, "but it might have ruined his perspective." Even more so than the proposition that there is such a thing as "just taking pictures," La Brava's open embrace of the idea that it is not only OK to make a buck with your art, but actually a good thing, pushes the conversation into a zone that resonates beyond the apparent commonness of the situation, given that the book we are holding as we read is precisely analogous, written no doubt to make a buck.

Is La Brava just an art whore—and naïve to boot? Is Elmore Leonard just using a character to justify his own selling out? A turn in the conversation complicates things when La Brava introduces Walker Evans into the equation. Evans, of course, was the ultimate American art photographer, connected at least briefly to Stieglitz and the New York art crowd of the 1920s and 30s. He rejected the artiness of that scene to do "documentary" work for the Farm Security Administration, work that came to visually define America in the Great Depression and reorient the art of photography. He was Emersonian in his commitment to the common and the low, virtually paraphrasing Emerson in his 1969 book on photography: "After a certain point in his formative years, [the photographer] learns to do his looking outside of art museums: his place is in the street, the village, and the ordinary countryside. For his eye, the raw feast: much-used shops, bedrooms, and yards, far from the halls of full-dress architecture, landscaped splendour, or the more obviously scenic nature."

La Brava quotes Evans to the effect that

his photographs, like Evans', are "images whose meanings exceed the local circumstances that provide their occasion." What exactly is this *excessive meaning*, and what is it doing in a piece of low-rent genre fiction about murder, duplicity, and mayhem? For La Brava, it seems to define the very possibility of art—certainly his art—that the most common image, or the image of the common, can be informed by a power, a force, utterly unique and independent of the photographer. Evans was moving counter to the elaborate romanticism of Steichen and the artiness of Stieglitz, a genuine low art. What he achieved is often referred to as "realism," but I think it is closer to what the poet Charles Olson—roughly Evans' contemporary—called *objectism*.

Objectism was the name Olson gave his push in poetry away from the lyrical (which he saw as an interference, much as Evans saw Stieglitz's carefully crafted art shots) and toward his sense of the unique and specific revelatory force any object projects in the world—and by object he meant persons as much as stones or Mayan artifacts—the utter specificity of each element of the world, each object. Olson, in a letter to Robert Creeley, cites this as "to force the particular to yield dimension." That yielded dimension seems to me analogous to Evans' "meaning which exceeds its occasion." Olson elsewhere writes of it in terms of what he calls a secularism that loses nothing of the divine.

Walker Evans fought against what he saw as commercialism his entire artistic life, even as he sought to sell his art, to make a living from it, and complained about the difficulty of that. This is not the same "commercialism" that bothers Peter Culley—not exactly, anyway—though it is not the same as the commercialism La Brava embraces either. Culley, I think, is concerned that the bounds of the work might be set by some other demand or attention than what is specific to the work at any moment—the thought of some reward, whether money or a prize. La Brava embraces the idea that if you do your work, you should be rewarded for it, an idea Walker Evans shared.

So while part of me cringed at the announcement of my nomination, anticipating the blogger's accusation of hypocrisy and commercial sellout, wondering briefly if I should withdraw my name, another part of me virtually swooned with excitement at the thought of this reward for my work. There is no question it feels great to have your book named among five out of hundreds as deserving of special attention, even if it was a fluke and the notice quickly disappeared in the Poetry Cone of Silence (PCS). Poetry will never be as financially rewarding as La Brava's photographs, but after labouring at it for almost 50 years and making some interesting things out of words from time to time, it is nice to be recognized, however fleetingly. There is no profound, unprincipled inconsistency between that pleasure and the sentiments of the Friggin speech, and even if there were, who cares? As Emerson famously said in his defence of self-reliance and the necessity to be true to the force of the moment, consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds. Marcel Duchamp, yet another Dada artist, put it somewhat differently, but to much the same effect: "I have forced myself to contradict myself in order to avoid conforming to my own taste."

But for all the pleasure of being noticed and put into those lists—however unadorned and far down the page they were—there were also drawbacks. The worst part was the inevitable competition that situation breeds, no matter how hard one tries to resist it. That is not exactly selling out, but in some ways it is worse. I do believe that poets are not in competition with each other. The very nature of the process that I love—the fidelity to the opening, to the emergence of form, the language of that—is destroyed by competition that sets

your work against the work of someone else in order to determine which is the "poem of the year," as if there was some actual measure whereby one could be judged against the other, as if poetry existed in a market. Even our Oedipal relations are not quite competitive—we embrace those who came before us, honour them and incorporate them into our work with loving attention.

Or maybe not. Peter Quartermain calls me on that, reminding me that competition among artists is inevitable in some sense and not necessarily a bad thing: "Bunting once told me," he writes, "that he thought Shelley's last gasp as he drowned must have been 'destroy all my work' because it doesn't (couldn't) match the work he loved: that ambition is in a different arena than the marketplace or the sports stadium has to offer, and of course one competes. But not to put down the other, but to say 'hey look at this!' the pleasure one takes in one's own work." It is hard to argue with that, but I don't think this is the nature of the competition involved in a culture of poetry contests, of which the big prize is the ultimate expression. I was recently sent a flyer titled "A Year of Deadlines / A compendium of poetry competitions in Canada." Under headings including National, Provincial, Regional, and Cities, no less than 75 different poetry contests are listed on what looks like a page from the want ads in the daily newspaper. While Bunting may have been right about Shelley's last thoughts, it is rather difficult to imagine Shelley pondering whether to submit "Prometheus Unbound" to the *Malahat Review* long poem prize or the *Arc* poem of the year award. He was far too busy writing.

At the risk of seeming arrogant, it seems doubtful to me that most of the poets entering the 75 contests even know what "Prometheus Unbound" is, much less have read it. Reading the great poetry of the past is not a requirement for an MFA, and most creative writing classes are too busy searching for a catchy simile to worry about what the great artists of the tradition have done or how their own work might relate to that. This is not a question of high or low culture or commercial or non-commercial art. It has to do with Culley's sense of the transformation of poetry by the great cultural machine made up of creative writing classes, MFA programs, university degrees in poetry writing, and the infinitely expanding world of professionalized contests, in which the like-minded reward each other for making pretty things.

I suppose what's at stake here are differing senses of competition, probably related to the etymological divergence at the root of the word. To petition together—to try to mutually attain, to seek together—still lurks in *competition*'s possibilities and in Quartermain's thought of a different arena. But in our world of commercial determinations, the rivalry invariably ends up in the marketplace. That competition belongs to another world—business or sports, institutional conflict—and to put poets in a situation that encourages that is an arts management notion designed for marketing purposes. It degrades the writers, turning them into tokens in a race that doesn't even really exist, since the arts managers know who won from the git go.

It is also a drag being turned into a loser when previously you were happily doing your work with no thought of winning or losing or beating or being beaten. As someone who had previously been through the race for the big prize mentioned to me, it is a process designed for the production of losers. If we want to award laurels for great poetry (and we should), it would be far better for the writers (if anyone actually cares about the writers) to simply announce the winners and the runners-up—or maybe 5 winners—and then organize celebrations of their accomplishments. There are no losers in that scenario, only winners—but there are, unfortunately, reduced marketing

opportunities. Which brings me to the point. The Literary Racing Season, it turns out, is really not so much about Literary Excellence as it is about marketing products, both the books themselves and the digestible visions that populate them. It is finally just a way to sell books (not necessarily a bad thing, although easily accomplished in other ways) and guarantee jobs for arts managers (well, we could probably do without that), while reassuring everyone that the situation is under control and help is on the way. In so far as the culture it generates gives rise to a sense that the value of writing can be measured through prizes and awards, it is utterly destructive and we need to rethink how to do it.

An Invitation to Half-Breed Heaven: The NAISA *Ball Metif*

Susan Gingell

The joyful and vigorous notes of a half-breed ball sounded out Metis hospitality at the concluding feast of the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association (NAISA) conference in Saskatoon, June 13-15, 2013. Maria Campbell, well-known Metis community worker and author, organized a staggeringly generous 10-course meal. She also summoned to Saskatoon a star-studded array of Metis talent from as far away as Ontario and British Columbia to perform for NAISA visitors to this territory and for local guests.

Known as *aen ball Metif* in Michif, this evening of traditional food, fashion, music, dance, and visual art blending into contemporary expressions of Metisness made abundantly clear the continuity and inventiveness of this lively culture and the warm, open-hearted nature of those Metis who are proudly contributing to its vitality today. The organizers used the occasion to teach Metis history and culture to locals and those who had travelled from Indigenous territories as distant as Aotearoa/New Zealand, Australia, Fiji, Malaysia, Taiwan, Hawaii, Mexico, and the Sápmi territory in northern Scandinavia, not to mention various parts of the non-Indigenous world.

The printed program traced the roots of such balls to the feasting and dancing at the prairie meetings of the buffalo or York boat brigades. Sometimes the people danced "around a campfire, the dirt floor of a large log cabin or a frontier ballroom," but the only requirements for a Half-breed ball were "a space, two or three or four fiddle players, and people who could 'step,'" often until their moccasins were worn through. For "more than 200 years, all visitors including Chiefs, explorers, adventurers and traders . . . and a steady stream of lesser European Royalty were regaled with a 'Halfbreed Ball' upon arriving or departing a Metis community." Although guests to the NAISA conference were welcomed by the University of Saskatchewan's Department of Native Studies, which is celebrating its 30th anniversary; the University at large; and various scholarly institutions, nothing matched the marvellous Metis community effort to teach all attendees something of the rich depths of Metis hospitality and culture before sending them off in high Metis style.

From the moment guests stepped into the hall of St. Paul's United Church in Sutherland, our immersion course began. We were greeted by fiddle music and Metis people in traditional dress, many proudly wearing the gorgeously beaded clothes that gave the Metis the name the Flower Beadwork People. Everywhere were the multi-coloured sashes that have become national symbols. Campbell's transcription of a Metis oral story, "La Beau Sha Shoo" (The Beautiful Song), in *Stories of the Road Allowance People*, tellingly reveals that in the aftermath of the Resistance at Batoche

the Canadian army recognized these sashes as such by confiscating them:

> dah soldiers dey catch up to dah peoples dat was running away
> an dey take all dere guns an bullets. An dah soldiers
> deh take dah sashes too.
> Boy dats funny isn it.
> Why would dey take dah sashes? (53)

As the feast went on, a multimedia pageant of song, dance, poetry, and fashion unfolded. Community members modelled Metis clothing across the years in a fashion show enabled in part by Jocelyn Pambrun. The pagent, which was co-scripted by Campbell and Indiginous artist and University of Manitoba Native Studies and Women's and Gender Studies professor Sherry Farrell Racette, and narrated by Racette and Karon Shmon, Director of Publishing at Gabriel Dumont Institute, the pageant also featured readings of Gregory Scofield's poetry, jigging, fiddling, and songs both traditional and contemporary.

The walls of the feasting hall, surmounted by banners with the infinity symbols of the two versions of the Metis flag and a giant Metis sash, had been turned into an art gallery for the evening. And what a stunning display it was! Among the works by 12 Metis artists were the exquisite paintings of Farrell Racette and Christi Belcourt with their variant visual echoes of beadwork style; incisive political collage by Jane Ash Poitras; a blue horse dream vision painting by Neal McLeod; and a fabulous fusion of traditional and contemporary in Cruz and Judy Anderson's collaborative tanned-hide mural, whose graffiti-style rendering of Cruz's first name turned out on close inspection to be composed of subtle beadwork done by his artist mother, also the curator of the ball's gallery. Much of this visual banquet was on loan from the Gabriel Dumont Institute, one more indication that the event was a community-animated affair.

The feast began with 17-year-old Rajan Anderson-Dornan's expert fiddle call to order, which was accompanied on keyboard by his mother, sociologist Dr. Kim Anderson. Campbell gave words of welcome, Rose Richardson offered an opening prayer, and meadowlark-voiced Krystle Pederson sang "Li Lord Selkirk at Fort William, or *La Danse des Bois Brûlés*." Attributed to the Métis bard Pierre Falcon, this 1816 song is a rendering of a ball at which Metis men were "in a sense asked to dance to the tune of the colonizer" (Sinclair and Cariou 17) who, in the wake of the Battle of Seven Oaks, had just seized the fur-traders' fort as part of an attempt to quell the unrest in Metis country. Those who know the lyrics would have appreciated the song's place on the programme because the men "insist on dancing and playing music in their own traditional ways, despite Lord Selkirk's objections" so that the ironic dialogue reveals "the Métis asserting their . . . autonomy in the face of a colonizing presence" (Sinclair and Cariou 17).

And the food, the food beggared description. The signature ingredients of the dishes were harvested according to protocol, and all we ate spoke both its freshness and the skill of its community cooks to our taste-buds. The wait staff, which included professors, lawyers, doctors, and other professionals, served up a succession of treats, beginning with meatballs in savoury broth with unsweetened doughnuts—*les boulettes et li beignes*. Accompanied by young Dornan's virtuoso take on "Isbister's Waltz" and "Sicilian Rigadoon," this first course was followed by baked whitefish with wild rice casserole and wild cranberry sauce, and then beaver loaf (now that's a mean meatloaf!), beaver tail (surprisingly sweet and rich), muskrat paté (subtle and delicious!) with wild berry chutney and trapper's bannock. Giving us some digestive space between these courses were the fashion parade that marked the emergence of the Metis people and the rise of Metis nationalism, and readings of Scofield poems by Anderson and

film, television, and video producer and director Wil Campbell (yes, he's Maria's brother and also husband to Jocelyn Pambrun). We cleansed our palettes with wild lowbush cranberry ice, while operatic singer Gilbert Anderson performed a medley that showcased the classical, Cree, Scottish, and Irish components of the Metis repertoire. Then it was on to buffalo tongue, venison meatballs, and three sister salad, an elaborated melange of the corn, beans, and squash of central Turtle Island/North American Indigenous origin. This course was accompanied by the Red River jigging of Compaigni V'ni Dansi [Come and Dance Company] artistic director and Canada Council award-winner Yvonne Chartrand, partnered by the multitalented performer Joseph Naytowhow.

At other points in the program, Naytowhow's acting and dancing skills were further showcased. He delightedly helped bring to life the famous picture of the top-hatted, moccasin-wearing Métis man with his two wives, *Métis en compagnie de ses deux épouses* (Library and Archives Canada C-046498). Then he did a star turn as independent Metis trader James Sinclair crashing a Hudson's Bay Company party in order to present his beautiful young daughter, attired in a New York ball gown and long gloves. Oh, and moccasins, like her formally attired father. Graphic examples of *métissage* if ever there were any!

We segued to *tortière* with beet horseradish relish while catching glimpses of Metis history through the parade of clothing worn during the camps and settlement era. Then it was time for wapos [rabbit] du moutarde with baked bannock and a sampling of twentieth-century Metis attire. Pederson's calling of Don Freed to the feast by singing his haunting ballad of the St. Laurent Metis, "When This Valley," acknowledged some of the enduring pain of Metis history. A blueberry ice palatte cleanser was admirably accompanied by the display of the elegant lines and beadwork of contemporary Metis couture by Jennine Krauchi and by Modeste Mackenzie's traditional broom dance.

A Metis friend at our table, June Scudeler, kept time as the meal progressed, announcing "Do you realize we've been eating for two hours?" Then it was two and half, and three, as we were treated to roast buffalo with roasted root vegetables and *le grens* (ground chokecherries, which provided a tangy way to get our fibre), and the best-tasting blueberry pie I have ever had in my life. The closing musical strains taught us first that when Arlo Guthrie adapted the traditional Metis ballad "Red River Valley," he ushered "the halfbreed who loved you so true" to the wings and installed in her place a loyal cowboy. Next we learned that antiphony or the call-and-response genre is also part of the Metis vocal repertoire, here powerfully rendered by Cyndy Doxtator and a company of harmony singers.

And then came the chance to work off at least a few of the calories we'd consumed as we were invited to move to the auditorium for an old-time dance. Live music provided by Metis country star Donny Parenteau and two backing musicians was performed in front of tall panels bearing examples of Farrell Racette's painting in the narrative tradition, and half-breed ball hosts and guests mingled in a new way.

Half-breed heaven, Scofield tells us in "I've Been Told," can be initially recognized by the spirit of Gabriel Dumont "at the gate /calling 'Tawow, tawow' [Come in, come in, welcome] / toasting new arrivals" (12-14). Inside, the poet writes, you'll find fiddles, swirling skirts, premier jiggers, "grannies giggling in the kitchen" (23) and "an endless brigade of happy faces" enjoying a seemingly endless party. I now have an even richer sense of what half-breed heaven looks, sounds, smells, tastes, and feels like, because in addition to what I'd already been vividly told by Scofield, the woman who

currently lives at Gabriel's Crossing and her generous community, invited me—along with over a hundred others—in for an evening's visit!

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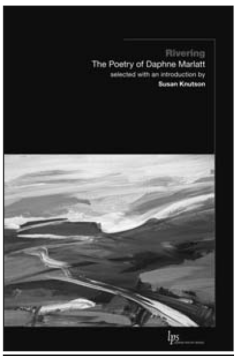

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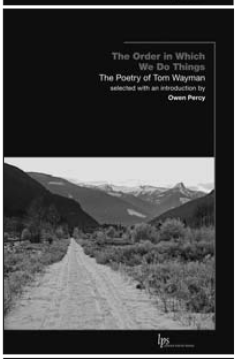

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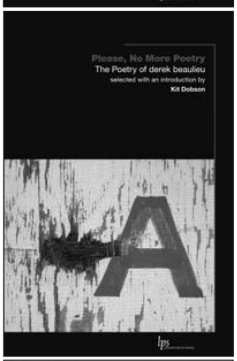

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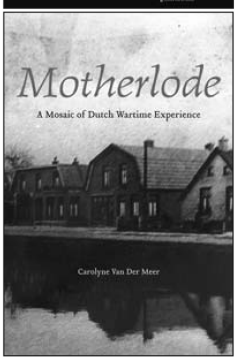

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– Steven Manners, author of *Ondine's Curse* and *Valley of Fire*

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May 23, 2014, marks the centennial anniversary of the "*Komagata Maru* Incident," which involved the arrival and subsequent expulsion of hopeful South Asian migrants looking to join a modest South Asian community already settled in the Dominion since the turn of the century. This Special Issue looks to the *Komagata Maru* as the symbolic marker of South Asian Canadian migration history as a "one hundred year" phenomenon. We invite submissions on all topics related to South Asian Canadian literature and culture, in terms that are as expansive, varied, and richly textured as the "centennial" history of South Asian Canadian settlement might imply. We welcome papers that examine under-represented genres; new critical, theoretical, comparative, or inter-disciplinary approaches to works by canonical or emerging authors; and contributions that help broaden our understanding of the texts, contexts, innovations, and hermeneutics of South Asian Canadian writers.

Contributors are encouraged to propose papers focusing on canonical and/or lesser known authors. Examples include (but are certainly not restricted to) Sadhu Binning, Rana Bose, Randy Boyagoda, Cyril Dabydeen, Ranj Dhaliwal, Farzana Doctor, Rishma Dunlop, Anosh Irani, Surjeet Kalsey, Rohinton Mistry, Shani Mootoo, Michael Ondaatje, Anita Rau Badami, Ajmer Rode, Shyam Selvadurai, Priscila Uppal, M.G. Vassanji.

We welcome submissions in English and in French. Submissions should be 6,000-8,000 words, including Notes and Works Cited, and should conform to the *MLA Handbook*, 7th edition or *Le guide du rédacteur*, 2nd edition. Please submit essays electronically via Word attachment to scl@unb.ca.

Deadline for submissions is 15 August 2014, with publication scheduled for 2015. For more information, including suggested topics, visit the journal's website at http://journals.hil.unb.ca/index.php/SCL/ or contact

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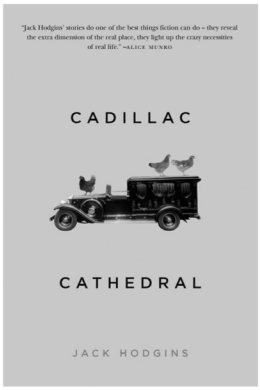

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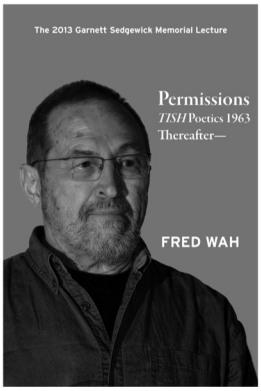

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