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Editorial

Guy-Guys, CWILA, and Going Down the Hall to the Archives

Laura Moss

On September 25, 2013 a short interview published in *Hazlitt*, Random House Canada's online magazine, sparked a giant controversy. In the interview for a recurring feature entitled "Shelf Esteem," "a weekly measure of the books on the shelves of writers, editors and other word lovers," Governor General's Award-winning author David Gilmour was asked by Emily M. Keeler to discuss the contents of the bookshelves in his office at Victoria College, in the University of Toronto, where he teaches. His comments about literature and the classroom ignited a media firestorm. People took particular exception to his point that "I'm not interested in teaching books by women," clarifying that "when I was given this job I said I would only teach the people that I truly, truly love. Unfortunately, none of those happen to be Chinese, or women. Except for Virginia Woolf. . . . I say I don't love women writers enough to teach them, if you want women writers go down the hall. What I teach is guys. Serious heterosexual guys. F. Scott Fitzgerald, Chekhov, Tolstoy. Real guy-guys. Henry Miller. Philip Roth" (qtd. in Keeler n. pag.). He also explained that "I haven't encountered any Canadian writers yet that I love enough to teach" (qtd. in Keeler n. pag.). Gilmour's comments immediately raised the ire of people across the country. While a few supporters defended his academic freedom and a few more raged against the politically correct mafia and the "feministas" who criticized his points about women writers, the majority of responses took the form of commentary on the sexism and racism evident in Gilmour's interview, many of them coming from right down the hall.

The simple question I want to address here is the one a dentist friend of mine asked me the other day while we were watching our sons play soccer. Why does anyone care what David Gilmour thinks? It is a good question. A minor writer gave an off-the-cuff interview for a trade publication where he said some outrageous things about "great" literature and generally made himself look pompous. Why then, have there been dozens of follow-up articles and interviews nationally and internationally, as well as hundreds of blog posts, Twitter punchlines, and Facebook rants responding to his comments? Why have people rallied in the streets? Why have men and women across Canada used their voices in whatever avenues they could access to show their dismay or support?

I can think of six reasons why Gilmour's comments immediately gained traction and why so many people seem to care so deeply. These group around 1) the state of the profession, 2) responsibility to students, 3) power in the institution, 4) public accountability, 5) other recent examples of sexism in Canadian academic settings, and 6) an increase in awareness about issues of equity in Canadian literary culture. University of Toronto graduate students Andrea Day and Miriam Novik convincingly argue that Gilmour's "comments have made explicit what is so often implicit. He has gracelessly articulated the biases that too often dictate what sort of literature is considered 'serious' and 'useful,' opinions which too often shape teaching and reading at all levels of education and private life" (n. pag.). In sum, Gilmour's statements tap into (fears of) what lies beneath the surface of contemporary Canadian culture.

First, by exclusively placing work by "serious heterosexual guys" at the centre of his teaching, the message is that, for Gilmour, the major qualification for literary greatness is to be male, white, and straight. The work of women writers, Chinese writers, Canadian writers, and non-heterosexual writers is not serious enough to merit his time or his students' attention. He disdainfully leaves the study of those "other" writers to instructors that he implies are less discriminating than he. It is the generalized nature of Gilmour's claims about what he wouldn't teach (work by those whose gender, sexuality, or racialization marks them as other—as if such singular categories exist), juxtaposed with the specificity of what he would teach (work by a handful of "guy-guys"), that makes this particular case raise hackles. Gilmour's remarks about the books he chooses to teach are like a kick in the gut to those critics, theorists, and teachers who have worked hard at leveling the literary playing field for the past four decades. The English academy, whether studying Canadian or

medieval literature, or really anything in between, has expanded the canon to include work of excellence by writers from a diversity of backgrounds and has extended the classroom to engage a multiplicity of voices and approaches. I am of course referring to the impact of postcolonialism, feminism, queer studies, and critical race studies, but I am also referring to the work of those interested in print culture, ecocriticism, new historicism, cultural materialism, poststructuralism, and experimental writing, among many other approaches that have had an impact on what and how books are taught in higher education. Gilmour's teach-books-closest-to-your-heart version of authorial veneration is completely out of step with literary studies in the twenty-first century. Indeed, following the interview, the University of Toronto English Department quickly distanced itself from Gilmour's classes at Victoria College when Paul Stevens, the acting chair, stated that Gilmour's comments "constitute a travesty of all we stand for" (qtd. in Bradshaw n. pag.). Teachers and students jumped in to point out that English classes are interested in books by many more writers than white heterosexual men. However, if Gilmour limits the writers he teaches this way, we might wonder how many other instructors are flying along with him under the radar?

Second, *Globe and Mail* Books Editor Jared Bland voiced a leading theme in the commentary in his "Memo to David Gilmour," when he wrote that "teaching only books by 'heterosexual guys' does a huge disservice to your students" (n. pag.). Further, Stevens is quoted as saying that "teaching literature should not be self-indulgent, a matter of opining about one's likes and dislikes. It is a serious discipline in which students should be enabled to come to a better understanding of the world in which they live in all its complexity and diversity" (qtd. in Bradshaw). By focusing on Gilmour's students, Bland, Stevens, and many others, focused on pedagogical responsibility and the ethics of teaching.

When given the chance (and national public forum) to defend himself in both the *National Post* and the *Globe and Mail* a few hours after the release of the original interview, Gilmour said "I haven't got a racist or sexist bone in my body" (qtd. in Medley n. pag.). Instead, he argued that he just feels most comfortable teaching what he knows best: "I'm a middle-aged writer and I am interested in middle-aged writers. I'm very keen on people's lives who resemble mine because I understand those lives and I can feel passionately about them" (qtd. in Barton n. pag.). The fact that Gilmour teaches a class filled mainly by students he calls "girls" about the joys and perils of middle-aged male life does not seem to have dampened his passion for the subject. It

also doesn't seem to have occurred to him that the male and female, straight and gay, ethnically diverse undergraduate students in his class might not share his passion for middle-aged male sexuality. Indeed, he boasts that he saves Philip Roth's *The Dying Animal* "til the very end of the year because by that point they've got fairly strong stomachs, and they're far more sophisticated than they are in the beginning. So they can understand the differences between pornography and great literature. There are men eating menstrual pads, and by the time my students get to that they're ready" (qtd. in Keeler n. pag.). As a young student at Victoria College, I can't imagine that I would have ever had a strong enough stomach for such an approach to that novel. I agree with Bland that Gilmour's choices do first-year students a disservice.

The problem, as I see it, is that teaching a reflection in the mirror leaves little room for acknowledging the experiences of the other people in the classroom or being open to the many artistic engagements that go miles and centuries beyond the teacher's scope of experience. And, as Holger Syme so eloquently put it, "Rather notably absent from the interview: literature. Rather notably over-present: authors. Profession of the interviewee: author" (n. pag.) Focusing on the author instead of the literature makes the classroom a space for the expression of personal taste more than critical engagement with texts. One of the most memorable of the myriad anonymous comments posted on social media in response to Gilmour's interview succinctly stated: "teaching is not about self-replication." As my sister, Julia Zarb, who did her doctoral dissertation on issues of authorial intention in the 1990s, responded, perhaps Roland Barthes should have written about "Death of the Teacher" instead of "Death of the Author." Gilmour would have missed both death notices.

Literature is not sociology. It is not ethnology. It is not psychology. But it is not free of social significance either. The choices a teacher makes about which books to teach and what authors to foreground as meritorious, signifies something to the class. The teach-what-you-know approach Gilmour is advocating signifies male privilege, even an authoritarian privilege that is centred in the white male heterosexual image he seems to be so consciously fighting to uphold. It also means that he isn't likely to learn anything new himself from literature or from his students.

In his book *In Bed with the Word*, Daniel Coleman explores the pendulum swing that has occurred in the last century of literary studies. Drawing on the language of Paul Ricoeur, Coleman writes about the shift from a "hermeneutics of affirmation," which venerates literature, to a "hermeneutics

of suspicion," which approaches literature with incredulity. He argues for the need to achieve a midpoint between affirmation and suspicion, a point of critical and respectful engagement with texts and their contexts. Gilmour's interview shows a firm commitment to a hermeneutics of affirmation that reveres writers who fit into his small definition of literature. I concur with Coleman's notion that a midpoint is more productive. The midpoint of respectful engagement is what I personally strive to cultivate in my classroom. I try to teach students to engage generously with what people have thought and imagined in the past and to think critically about literature in its contextual framework. My goal is to expose students to a multiplicity of well-written stories, plays, and poems. Sometimes these are from marginalized writers and sometimes from canonical ones. Sometimes they are the voices of literary theorists; sometimes they are the sounds of the poets themselves. I want us to read critically, creatively, and analytically because I believe that it is intellectually lazy to send students "down the hall" to get other perspectives than mine. Like a lot of my peers, who come in different genders, ages, shapes, and ethnicities, I'm less concerned with bringing my own experience to light and more concerned with my students' ability as they synthesize the elements at hand. It may not be transcendent at every turn but there is always the potential to spark greater knowledge through debate.

Third, Gilmour's use of the classroom as a bully pulpit raises questions about power in an institutional setting. What kind of power does an instructor have? How much autonomy should s/he have? How far does academic freedom extend? Such difficult questions arise out of this controversy and have been productively discussed in the wake of Gilmour's remarks. Perhaps this is the best legacy of the controversy. In his original interview, Gilmour notes that he had received complaints in the past from parents of his students about the inappropriate nature of the books in his course. He also explains how he put those concerned parents in their place by telling them that a book that had been around for sixty years must have merit. I do not want to say that parents should dictate what is taught in a university classroom, but I do think that their concerns should be respectfully acknowledged. Gilmour's repeated assertion of shock that anyone could be upset at his statements suggests that he thought that his status provided a solid footing for any opinion he might wish to voice. And he is partly right. Indeed, he was immediately given the chance to explain himself in national newspapers and on television. The media were scrupulously fair in giving him space to refute the claims made against him.

I somehow doubt that everyone who makes incendiary comments would be given such a quick chance at redemption.

Fourth, in this age of government cuts to education and the slashing of Arts faculty budgets in particular, Gilmour's elitist comments were a gift to anti-intellectuals across Canada. They read like a (damaging) parody of (what non-academics suspect happens in) an English class. See how useless English is? Should tax dollars be spent on teaching novels about men eating menstrual pads? It is all very well for people to love literature but why spend money studying it? What marketable skills could possibly be gained by reading Chekov? Articles like the ones that appeared in Vancouver's *Province* ("Female authors flap aside, university courses like English literature, art history don't deserve tax dollars") and the *Globe and Mail* ("David Gilmour an agent of the patriarchy? Oh please") used the outcry at the Gilmour interview to argue the damaging infiltration of political correctness into university education and/or the resultant irrelevance of such an education. Both the original comments and the vitriolic responses they elicited have been held up as evidence that a Humanities education is superficial and petty. However, significantly, one thing that literature courses do teach students is the difference between opinions and a well-articulated argument. Questions of accountability and public responsibility loom large in this framework and no one on either side of the debate can possibly win. But we can try to improve the standards of evidence and argument brought into the conversation.

Fifth, Gilmour is not alone in articulating a toxic strain of sexism in contemporary culture. His comments came a few weeks after the controversy over "rape chants" sung at first-year orientation (frosh) week festivities at Saint Mary's University (SMU) and at the UBC Sauder School of Business. The chant that came under fire from administrators and citizens is based on the word YOUNG that includes the words: "Y is for Your sister, O is for Oh so tight, U is for Underage, N is for No consent, G is for Go to jail." UBC Commerce Undergraduate Society (CUS) student leaders told frosh groups that if they were to sing the song, it had to be kept within the group, only sung in private gatherings, and kept as a secret. Both SMU and UBC have stepped in with official responses highly critical of the chants and the organizers of the frosh events. Stephen Toope, the President of UBC, acknowledged "the more pernicious, systemic aspects of the casual acceptance of violence and sexualization that we believe manifests itself in incidents such as the C.U.S. FROSH rape chant" and announced a task force to consider optimal means to confront this acceptance on campus (n. pag.). As Toope said, "we are

seizing this opportunity to strike at the sexual violence and intolerance that we know still lurks beneath the surface in pockets of our society" (n. pag.). The UBC Institute for Gender, Race, Sexuality, and Social Justice followed up with a statement demanding concrete action in the university community because "in Canada, as elsewhere, gender based violence is both commonplace and exists in multiple intersectional guises, many of which go unchallenged, and are simply assimilated and normalized in the name of the banal, the familiar, the known" (n. pag.).

As with the Gilmour interview, I approach the "rape chant" by thinking about the power of speech and the vulnerability of those hearing it, about audience, and about cultural positioning. In this case, the audience of the chant was a group of first-year students on a bus being asked to join in by their leaders. I wonder whether there were survivors of sexual assault on that bus? I wonder what will happen if one of the new students is assaulted over the next few years? Will he or she feel safe reporting it, remembering the chant the frosh leaders led? Will they feel supported by their institution now that it has come to light and been censured by the school? Lucia Lorenzi, a doctoral student in the English department at UBC, responded to the rape chants by saying "I am going to make it very clear why this is a problem: using secrecy to legitimize violence and sexism is precisely the tactic used by abusers and assailants themselves. Suggesting that things are 'okay' so long as they are not brought into the public eye is exactly how domestic abuse continues to be perpetrated and excused. Informing people to 'keep a secret' is one of the top tactics used by abusers to silence their victims" (n. pag.). I hold the frosh leaders responsible for their actions but I also believe them when they say that no harm was intended. That is why the rape chants are so terrifying. They reflect the pervasive acceptance of sexism and rape culture in Canada today. In her response to the chants published in the feminist blog *Hook&Eye*, Erin Wunker was exactly right when she said, "Here's the thing: unlearning prejudice takes time. Unspooling the ways in which we all, each of us, are interpellated into pernicious systems of inequity that depend on divide and conquer strategies takes time. It is hard" (n.pag.). The rape chants show that within contemporary culture there is a toxic strain of acceptance of authoritarian abuse, the abuse tends to be sexist and perpetuated by silence. The rape chants and the Gilmour interview are two sides of the same coin. Both perpetuate the normalcy and the banality of power inequities. When brought to light, however, both have also been called to task and used to speak to the pervasiveness of the problems at hand. This in itself is heartening.

Finally, Gilmour's comments make concrete the inequities in Canadian literary culture that Canadian Women in the Literary Arts (CWILA)[1] have proven in the last two years. In response to the Gilmour interview, CWILA posted the following status update on its Facebook page:

> Thank you #1 to David Gilmour for the spontaneous CWILA fundraiser he kick-started today by saying that he doesn't teach female writers or Chinese writers in his English class at the University of Toronto.
>
> Thanks #2 to Emily M. Keeler for editing and publishing the interview with Gilmour who says offensive though not terribly shocking things that indicate how much work there is to do if we are going to have an equitable literary communities and cultures in Canada.
>
> Thank you #3 goes back to David Gilmour for publishing a follow-up interview in which he makes a plea for women to not stop buying his books and in which he calls Keeler "a young woman who kind of wanted to make a little name for herself."
>
> Every time Gilmour opens his mouth, you've got a reason to support CWILA's work for gender and racial equality in Canadian literature. (n. pag.)

Indeed, Gilmour's comments illustrate what CWILA has demonstrated numerically.[2] CWILA was created in the spring of 2012 when poet and UBC lecturer Gillian Jerome decided to go beyond anecdote about the lack of review space and attention given to women's books in Canada and to count the number of book reviews in the media dedicated to work by male and female authors. Jerome questioned the status quo and wanted to prove that women writers in Canada were at a significant disadvantage through the collection of hard data. Within a month, she and a small group of women and men had rallied over 50 volunteers to count almost 2500 reviews in 14 publications and to analyze the numbers. While many had long suspected that there was a gender bias in literary culture in Canada, the first CWILA count proved it. Over the course of its first year and a half in existence, CWILA has grown to 400 members (writers, critics, poets, reviewers, editors, publishers, scholars), become incorporated as a not-for-profit organization, and chosen its first Critic-in-Residence position (poet Sue Sinclair 2013). CWILA now compiles the largest data set in Canada that tracks gender in book reviewing culture. On the CWILA webpage, the organization also publishes interviews with/by Canadian women/genderqueer writers, reviewers, and editors, as well as essays that address issues of racial and gender equity. The core idea behind CWILA is that it is not enough to point to the problems of inequality but that those within the literary community must work together to change the culture itself.

For the 2012 Count, CWILA added a new set of metrics. Alongside gender, the organization also tracked the percentage of authors and publishers of the

books reviewed that were Canadian. As I said in my report on the findings of the 2012 Count, "we set out to extend the C in CWILA." The decision to count the nationality of writers and publishers was not a kind of monitoring of Canadian content or policing of Canadian identity. Instead, it was a way of measuring the support of the Canadian book industry and writers within Canada by local and national newspapers, journals, and magazines. In total, of 3,092 reviews counted in the 25 publications monitored for the 2012 Count, two-thirds were about books by Canadian writers. Further, two-thirds of the publications reviewed books by Canadians at least three-quarters of the time, and the majority of reviews are of works by Canadians in 22 out of 25 publications. The overall 2012 CWILA Count numbers suggest that, as I noted, "Canadian publications are, by and large, committed to evaluating Canadian writers and invested in carrying on critical conversations about Canadian literature" (n. pag.). In this regard, Gilmour seems to be an outlier in his lack of engagement with Canadian writers.

Standing at Victoria College beside a statue of Northrop Frye, adorned for the day with a pink boa and a tiara, Novik and Day opened the "Serious Heterosexual Guys for Serious Literary Scholarship" rally they organized in response to the Gilmour interview by quoting Frye from *The Educated Imagination*: "what is the use of studying a world of imagination where anything is possible and anything can be assumed, where there are no rights or wrongs and all arguments are equally good? One of the most obvious uses, I think, is its encouragement of tolerance." As they said, Frye "encourages us to read widely, the better to build empathy and understand the imaginations of those around us, and he would no doubt encourage Gilmour's students to take that trip down the hall" (n. pag.). This issue of *Canadian Literature* takes that trip as well. The issue did not set out to be a response to David Gilmour's cavalier comments but it serves as a fitting one. Not only does this collection of critical essays show that the idea of "women's writing" is facile and pointless but also that Canadian writing is similarly beyond simple categorization. Further, the acts of literary archaeology in this issue—with forays into the archives of Phyllis Webb, Richard Outram and Barbara Howard, Gauntlet Press, Carol Shields, Margaret Atwood, and Rosanna Mullins Leprohon—prove that writers within the canon and on its margins alike can be productively reconsidered with careful study and new approaches. Cumulatively the essays go well beyond tolerance. Indeed, with the Gilmour controversy, this issue proves the timeliness of returning to the archives.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to Julia Zarb, John Moss, and Margery Fee for their feedback on and input into this editorial.

NOTES

1 Full disclosure: as book review editor at *Canadian Literature*, I volunteered to provide our numbers for the inaugural count. (I am glad to say that we were one of the only publications in the country that reviewed men's and women's books equally in our English book reviews in both the 2011 and 2012 counts.) I was so struck by the results of the national count that I decided to join CWILA and have been involved ever since, serving on the board of directors and, with other scholars at UBC, creating a social justice research network around scholarly issues raised by CWILA.

2 The initial CWILA count found that although women published half the books in the country, in 2011 they only received an average of 38% of the book review space (as low as 23% in some publications like the *Walrus*, 33% in the *National Post*, 40% in the *Globe and Mail*, and as high as 54% in *Quill and Quire*). The 2011 Count also found that men write more reviews than women, men tend to review books by men, and books by male writers receive more review space in top venues than books written by women authors. The 2012 Count, conducted in the spring of 2013, found a slight improvement in the data and a movement toward equity. Most significantly, in interviews with editors and reviewers (see cwila.com) several mentioned how they had worked to try to close the gender gap in their own writing and allocation of review space since the bias proven in the original count came to their attention. The point is that CWILA's research had raised an awareness of the issue and had an impact in changing it. As Jerome noted in her analysis of the gender numbers in the 2012 Count, "in one year we can see many publications with significant changes in the number of published reviews of books written by women, most notably the *Walrus* (23% to 56%), *Canadian Notes and Queries* (25% to 46%), *Fiddlehead* (29% to 56%), *Geist* (38% to 49%), and the *National Post* (33% to 42%)" (n. pag.). Further, as Jerome points out, the 2012 numbers show a 10% rise in the total number of book reviews written by women (from 38% to 48%). Still, a discrepancy remains in that men review books by male writers 70% of the time. See cwila.com for full analysis of the 2011 and 2012 Counts.

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Judy Brown

It is with sadness that we announce the passing of our friend and colleague Judy Brown on September 1, 2013. Since 2005, Judy served as an associate editor at *Canadian Literature*. She was an award-winning teacher in the English Department at UBC and a dynamic editor at the journal. Her passionate commitment to the fields of Canadian Literature, Children's Literature, and Technical/Professional Writing was remarkable.

Judy will be remembered by us at the journal as an exceptionally kind and generous person who worked thoughtfully and compassionately. A few years ago, after she received the 3M Teaching Award in recognition of her outstanding work as a teacher, Judy said, "If you're looking for a life where you're always going to be stretched, challenged, surprised, and inspired by your students, or at least be open to being inspired by your students, then this is a really good life to choose." Judy passed away after a life of inspiring students, colleagues, readers, and friends. She will be missed.

Tammy Armstrong

Ice

On the post-road between St. Petersburgh and Archangel
—Mary Shelley

And then it was at the horizon—the hooded shape
mushing the sled and chain of dogs.

Through my telescope, cracked from a high fall,
I saw the ice gaw open and take it.

This pole—the seat of frost and desolation,
the lapse in our own sun-dogged reasoning.

The figure, rubbed against the milk sky,
was not the only one scalded by solitude.

From these frozen parishes, the North's sulfur light
became the equinox's staddle, that barbed spirit level.

There was pain behind my eyes when I stared too long
against the slouched candle and smalted match.

I still say it was large in form
and the sled dogs led on without whip or voice.
We were in the far north. It never turned to study us.

Lorraine York

"How a Girl from Canada Break the Bigtime"

Esi Edugyan and the Next Generation of Literary Celebrity in Canada

The field of literary celebrity studies has experienced something of a boom in recent years, with exciting studies of British and American modernist writers by the American scholars Jonathan Goldman and Aaron Jaffe and, closer to home, Gillian Roberts' *Prizing Literature: The Celebration and Circulation of National Culture* (2011), a study of the way in which prize culture marks the Canadian nation state as welcoming or inhospitable to immigrant writers in particular. Such critical activity has taken place within a broader context of renewed attention to literary production conceived as operating within and not necessarily against celebrity culture. These recent studies of literary celebrity are revealing a new modernism: not the elite recoil from tawdry popular culture that many of us were trained to expect from the likes of Eliot, Pound, and Woolf, but a modernism that is fully implicated in celebrity culture. As Goldman observes in his perceptive book, *Modernism Is the Literature of Celebrity* (2011), "literary high modernism and early twentieth-century celebrity . . . these two supposedly separate aspects of culture are, in truth, mutually constitutive, two sides of the same cultural coin . . . modernism and celebrity perform similar cultural work on the notion of the exceptional individual" (2). Both modernism and celebrity, that is, work to contemplate and affirm the central role of the individual within mass culture.

Along with dearticulating the old narrative of modernism's antagonistic relationship with popular culture, recent studies of celebrity writers feature an appreciation of the transnational reach of national culture, as well as a renewed awareness that the material aspects of literary culture matter. For

example, in his study of "Margaret Atwood, Inc.," Graham Huggan reminds us that "neither Atwood nor her work can be seen outside their requisite material context, both as aspects of a thriving literary/critical industry in North America, Europe and elsewhere in the world and as part of a global image-making machinery that has helped turn Atwood into national icon and cultural celebrity" (210). Carrying this insight further, Laura Moss explores the relationship between Atwood's roles as "national icon" and global "cultural celebrity," noting that her role abroad as a native informant about all things Canadian makes her a perfect embodiment of the tensions of "transnational-nationalism": the production of narratives about Canada for export abroad.

As these examples suggest, much critical and theoretical work on literary celebrity has tended to employ a backward glance, focusing on earlier generations of writers. Loren Glass' book *Authors Inc.* (2004), for example, seeks the origins of American literary celebrity in Twain, London, Stein, Hemingway, and Mailer; Aaron Jaffe's *Modernism and the Culture of Celebrity* (2005) focuses on mainstream modernists Eliot, Joyce, Pound, and Lewis; and Joe Moran begins his study of American literary celebrity, *Star Authors* (2000), with senior writers Philip Roth and John Updike before moving to the *relatively* more recent authors Don DeLillo (born in 1936) and Kathy Acker (born in 1947). The trio of Canadian celebrity writers in my own *Literary Celebrity in Canada* (2007), Atwood, Michael Ondaatje, and Carol Shields, came to prominence in the late 1960s and early 1970s, with the exception of Shields, who published in the 1970s but attained literary celebrity belatedly, in the 1990s, with the publication of *The Stone Diaries*.[1] Still, born in 1935, she was a near contemporary of Atwood (born in 1939) and Ondaatje (born in 1943), writers who are, of course, still active but unquestionably senior. Recent, illuminating studies[2] of individual Canadian literary celebrities gravitate to the same generations of writers, like Huggan's and Moss' work on Atwood, Joel Deshaye's perceptive article on Layton and Cohen, and Katja Lee's astute essay on Farley Mowat.

There are important reasons why we have glanced backwards to understand literary celebrity, and why that backward glance returns us, more often than not, to the first three quarters of the twentieth century; as celebrity itself was transformed by the industrialization of entertainment culture in the early days of Hollywood, literary culture was anything but immune to its effects. And so, along with the usual suspects Oscar Wilde, James Joyce, and Gertrude Stein, Goldman devotes a chapter of his book

to Charlie Chaplin. Faye Hammill, in her study *Women, Celebrity, and Literary Culture between the Wars* (2007), makes this mutual implication of literary and filmic celebrity explicit in studying L. M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* in relation to early Hollywood, and devoting an enormously entertaining chapter to Mae West—as a celebrity *author*. But what do we learn when we train our glance on the present rather than on the past?

One recent, notable example of Canadian literary celebrity-in-the-making offers a rich field of possibilities for answering this question: Esi Edugyan, whose novel *Half-Blood Blues* won the Giller Prize in 2011 when she was only 33 years old. Edugyan's experience with literary celebrity, prize culture, and publishing companies at home and abroad, has much to tell us about how new generations of literary celebrities are affected by a mixture of challenging publishing conditions in Canada and the effects of celebrity culture. In what follows, I consider her publishing history and its current Canadian industrial context, the media discourses that construct questionable celebrity narratives about that history, and Edugyan's own narratives of success and celebrity in *Half-Blood Blues*.

Unlike Canadian literary celebrities of previous generations—such as Atwood and Ondaatje who began their careers working in alternative, small-scale modes of production (at House of Anansi and Coach House Press, respectively), where the economic stakes are lower—Edugyan's generation are under ever-greater pressure to succeed early in their careers. In conversation with filmmaker Atom Egoyan, Ondaatje reflected that working at Coach House afforded him a perfect apprenticeship, in which he and his fellow artists were free to experiment and "make mistakes, fall flat on our faces, it didn't matter . . . but a spotlight on me at the age of 21 would have killed me" (D6). He and Egoyan worry about the effects of this desire for instant success on the development of young artists.

Such a telescoping of apprenticeship seems surprising in the digital age, with its explosion of alternative platforms for sharing young writers' work. Edugyan's generation, beneficiaries of the new social media, would seem to be ideally positioned to construct for themselves independent venues for the early distribution of their work. The crucial factor, though, is the need for even minimal compensation for that digitally distributed work; as David McKnight notes of the founding of new small presses in the 1970s, they "benefitted directly from two federal government programs designed to provide employment opportunities for young Canadians: the Local Initiative Program and Opportunities for Youth" (315). In contrast, digital media

publishing success stories tend to follow a more capitalistic entrepreneurial pattern. The success of Terry Fallis' comic novel about political backroom shenanigans, *The Best Laid Plans*, is a perfect case in point. Fallis, a public relations man and former Liberal strategist, was unsuccessful in finding a publisher and decided, instead, to release podcasts of sections from the book. He then self-published the manuscript, using an online program called iUniverse. It went on to win the Stephen Leacock Medal for Humour in 2008 and was picked up by McClelland and Stewart, eventually sweeping the CBC Radio Canada Reads competition for best novel of the decade in 2011. As an apprenticeship narrative, this one is distinctly entrepreneurial, as opposed to the more collectivist narrative that Ondaatje fashions about the government supported small presses that, however dogged they were by financial woes, allowed young artists to experiment, fail, and experiment some more.

Edugyan's brief publishing history shows us how far the forces of literary celebrity have combined with specifically Canadian challenges to the publishing industry to prop up this individualistic, entrepreneurial narrative. She published her first novel, *The Second Life of Samuel Tyne*, with Knopf Canada when she was only 25, as part of Random House's "New Face of Fiction" series, which seeks to bring "spectacular first-time Canadian novelists to readers." Its website proclaims the star-making powers of the program; these first-time novelists are promoted as the literary stars of tomorrow. But as members of the writing community know, such promotion brings, along with its decided benefits, the pressure of sustaining such high expectations. And while *The Second Life of Samuel Tyne* received mainly positive reviews, it was, in the words of Adrian Chamberlain, "a modest seller yet critically acclaimed" (n. pag.).

In the publishing business, merely modest sales can undo the salutary effects of critical acclaim, particularly in the case of new writers. As Atwood reflected in *Negotiating with the Dead*, "We've all heard the story about the writer whose first novel hasn't done well, and who then presents the second one. 'If only this were a first novel,' sighs the agent. 'Then I might be able to sell it'" (65). And so it proved with Esi Edugyan. Her second novel, *Half-Blood Blues*, a stylistically edgy story of members of an interracial jazz ensemble who fled from Nazi Berlin to Occupied Paris, was shopped around to various publishers with little success, to the point where Edugyan considered abandoning her writing career. But because she had been awarded writing residencies in France, Hungary, Germany, and Iceland, she thought she would persist and try to see her second novel through to

publication. As she reflected in an interview with Beth Carswell, "You finish a book and you're really excited, and it might not perform the way you (or others) want it to perform, and you wonder why certain books aren't more celebrated, and why others are, and so many great books seem to slip through the cracks. It can seem quite arbitrary" (n. pag.). The much-celebrated *Half-Blood Blues* was very nearly one of those books that slipped through the cracks. Eventually, the small British press Serpent's Tail picked up *Half-Blood Blues*, but Edugyan's agent, Anne McDermid, had trouble placing it in Canada, until Key Porter Books and a particularly astute editor, Jane Warren, saw its promise. Just as the situation was looking brighter, in the winter of 2010-2011 Key Porter Books went under, and Edugyan was without a Canadian publisher once again.

Those historical challenges to Canadian publishing form a crucial backdrop to this narrative of Esi Edugyan's career. Though there are numerically fewer foreign-owned publishers in Canada, they tend to be larger, and they account for 59% of domestic book sales and 23% of Canadian-authored books. So, as Danielle Fuller observes, that means that 77% of works authored by Canadians are being produced by small firms, most of whom make profits of less than $200,000 and have limited means to distribute or advertise those books (12-13). As David Creelman points out, small presses may apply for government subsidies, but that grant money may not be used for marketing purposes (61). Mid-sized presses, on the other hand, may have a marketing budget, but even they, in Creelman's words, "have sometimes struggled to devote the resources and funds needed to create and sustain the media buzz that produces strong sales" (62).

Fortunately for Edugyan, one of those mid-sized firms, Thomas Allen Publishers picked up the already-copyedited manuscript, and when *Half-Blood Blues* won the Giller and was short-listed for the Man Booker, its publisher, Patrick Crean, was hailed as a rescuing hero and paracelebrity (James Monaco's term for one whose celebrity derives from association with another celebrity subject [4]). He appeared on CBC's online book club's conversation, in host Sandra Martin's words, "to tell us how he rescued *Half-Blood Blues*" (n.pag.). Edugyan, in her acceptance speech, singled out Crean as the man "who saved this book when it most needed saving" (qtd. in Barber, "Edugyan Wins Giller" n.pag.). Still, almost no one in Canada was celebrating Serpent's Tail, the small, twenty-five-year-old British publisher which is, in its own words, committed "to publishing voices neglected by the mainstream"—except for Edugyan, who enthused, "It was a great working relationship—

totally smooth and painless and wonderful—and just the antithesis of what I was going through here" (qtd. in Barber, "Two Canadian Novels" n. pag.). The dominant narrative in the Canadian media had become, instead, one of transitioning from obscurity to fame, from small production to the big time with the help of a mid-sized white knight publisher.

Edugyan has identified the advantages of mid-sized publishers, noting, for instance, when her novel, along with Patrick deWitt's *The Sisters Brothers*, was short-listed for the Man Booker prize in September 2011, "The one thing that both of our novels have in common is they were released by mid-sized publishing houses. . . . With publishers like Anansi [deWitt's publisher], you see really interesting stuff being published" (qtd. in Pearson n. pag.). The implication here is that the mid-sized publisher is more likely to take on risks than the large conglomerates. But four days after Edugyan's comments were published, the *Globe and Mail* announced that Picador, a Macmillan imprint, won an auction for the US rights to *Half-Blood Blues* for "an undisclosed amount" ("*Half-Blood Blues* Gets U.S. Deal"). The march from small or mid-size publisher to multinational proceeds apace. Even if an author happens to prefer the aesthetic advantages of smaller-scale production (what David McKnight calls "the consultative relationship that often exists [in small publishers] between publisher and author in determining layout and appearance" [311]), it is difficult for that same author to object either to the book being placed in more readers' hands by a larger publisher—or to the extra income that this wider distribution generates. As Fuller has observed, distribution has historically been "a huge headache" for independent Canadian publishers, since their "lack of financial clout" has afforded them "few options" because both print and digital distribution are "dominated by large foreign-owned companies" ("Citizen Reader" 13). Edugyan, then, may express her preference for a smaller-scale mode of production, but there are manifold forces within the marketplace that militate against that preference.

A further complicating factor is that mid-size publishers in Canada, like Anansi, Thomas Allen, or the recently bankrupted (and revived) Douglas & McIntyre are particularly vulnerable to market pressures. One factor in Douglas & McIntyre's temporary demise, for example, was what Charles Foran called their "expensive failed venture into digital publishing" (n. pag.). Foran pondered whether their attempt to compete with the multinationals on their own (digital) turf wasn't doomed to failure without the economic cushion afforded by blockbuster sales from the likes of Dan Brown or J. R. R. Tolkien.

John Barber put the runaway success of novels like Edugyan's and deWitt's in this broader and more sombre industrial context, pointing out that although *Half-Blood Blues* became Thomas Allen's most popular title ever published (100,000 copies on the market as of the end of 2011), "Head-office retrenchment at the multinationals made itself felt" in that same year "as Canadian branches cut established authors loose and pared their once-ambitious Canadian lists" ("Great Novels" n. pag.). Those cutbacks, ironically, have sent many authors and their manuscripts back to small presses.[3]

Compounding these challenges is the way in which youth is figured in these tales of literary success. On one hand, newer voices are a mainstay of publishing and its marketing strategies; audiences are enjoined to read up-and-coming, next-big-thing authors, through programs such as Random House's New Face of Fiction. But when younger writers graduate from these novitiate forms of publication and promotion and when, ironically, the star-making aims of programs like New Face of Fiction succeed, public response is double-edged. When six finalists, among them Edugyan and deWitt, were named for the 2011 Giller, Barber announced in the *Globe and Mail* that "a new generation of Canadian writers took centre stage" ("Generation Giller" n. pag.), one that he dubbed, with a nod to Douglas Coupland, "Generation Giller." Joining deWitt and Edugyan were David Bezmozgis, Lynn Coady, Zsuzsi Gartner, and the *éminence grise* of the competition, Michael Ondaatje, nominated for *The Cat's Table*. For all of its air of celebration and hospitality, though, Barber's piece hints at the negative reception of Generation Giller. He reports that one of the judges, Annabel Lyon, explained that six books rather than the usual five were nominated because the field was exceptionally strong, but Barber neutralizes that explanation by adding that "[g]iven the distinctly youthful cast of the short list, observers joked that it was extended . . . this year in order to include at least one recognizable name." Ironically, that may have been the case; recognizable names are key to producing pre-award publicity "buzz." But the very fact that Barber includes this joke has the effect of delegitimizing the artistic achievements of younger writers on the short list.

Beyond the 2011 Giller competition, other recent narratives of youthful Canadian literary fame make this unfortunate connection between youth and obscurity. Barber, reporting on the previous Giller season, drew attention to "the short list's strong tilt in favour of new and obscure authors publishing with small presses," as though youth, obscurity, and small-scale production were mutually defining ("Johanna Skibsrud Wins" n. pag.).

Vit Wagner, writing in the *Toronto Star*, underscored Barber's point by describing the book that won the Giller that year, Johanna Skibsrud's *The Sentimentalists*, not as the dark horse in the competition but "the darkest horse." In a curious tautology, young Canadian writers who win expanded national and international audiences through the workings of prize culture are dismissed for not having had celebrity in the first place. This tends to happen because celebrity as a phenomenon drives such a wedge between the celebrity subject and the anonymous "mass" that border-crossing between the two states becomes difficult to conceptualize. One way to bridge the divide that has been prominent in the history of film stardom has been to consider the star as having been, from birth, destined for celebrity.

Once authors are caught in the klieg lights of prize culture, public measurements of their success become predominantly economic, and this disrupts the always precarious balance between the commercial and the artistic. James F. English sees the combination of those two forces in prize culture as producing a

> deeper equivocality of all such prizes, which serve simultaneously as a means of recognizing an ostensibly higher, uniquely aesthetic form of value and as an arena in which such value often appears subject to the most businesslike system of production and exchange. (7)

In the career of Esi Edugyan, I perceive both competing forms of value at work, but after a literary prize consecrated her work, the relative emphasis upon them shifted. On one hand, the media coverage for a "critically acclaimed" "modest seller" like *The Second Life of Samuel Tyne* tended to skirt the subject of sales, highlighting "winning reviews" (White 41), "widespread praise" (Barber, "Edugyan Wins Giller"), and honours such as being named a New York Public Library "Book to Remember" (Bethune n. pag.). The press coverage for *Half-Blood Blues*, on the other hand, luxuriated in multi-figure statistics. From the moment of the prize announcement, generous sales predictions abounded. For instance, the *National Post*'s Mark Medley curiously linked the monetary value of the award with its power to spur sales: "The $50,000 prize virtually guarantees that tens of thousands more copies of the novel . . . will be sold in the coming months." At the moment of the awards ceremony, 23,000 copies of the novel were in print in Canada, but in a matter of "[m]oments after the announcement, Patrick Crean, publisher of Thomas Allen, said: 'We're pushing the button first thing in the morning'" (Medley n. pag.). The first week after the announcement, accordingly, sales "surged 479 per cent," the *Toronto Star*

claimed (Bain n. pag.), and Victoria's *Monday Magazine* reported that "One day after winning the Giller Prize, *Half-Blood Blues* jumped from 3,376th on Amazon's bestsellers list for Kindle e-books to 360th" (Heatherington n. pag.). By January of 2012, there were 115,000 copies of the novel in Canada; in one week alone, 9,000 of those copies were sold, reports the *Victoria Times Colonist* (Chamberlain). Suddenly, numerical details of writers' sales and financial situation are front-and-centre, and while this is in some ways beneficial to the writer (creating more "buzz" for the book and ensuring that the bookstores will stock it), it also shifts the whole discourse of literary production for the newly successful author. Terms like "bestseller" and the heightened attention to the economic capital of a writer of so-called "literary fiction" increase the pressure on that writer to reestablish the balance between economic and aesthetic capital by reasserting his or her commitment to the art. One tangible way of accomplishing this is by publishing a subsequent work that is *critically* acclaimed. This further intensifies the pressure on the young writer.

Newly celebrated writers feel the public demands of the nation just as keenly as they feel the pressure to keep the precarious balance of art and commerce in check. In many profiles of Esi Edugyan and other young Canadian writers, the spectre of Canadian content emerges with predictable regularity. When Barber coined and celebrated "Generation Giller," he inserted near the end of his article a particularly disturbing innuendo:

> All but two of the books—Gartner's *Better Living Through Plastic Explosives* and Coady's *The Antagonist*—were published simultaneously in Canada and abroad. Coincidentally, those are the only two books on the Giller short list that are set in Canada and include recognizable Canadian content. (n.pag.)

Barber says no more, but the implication is plain: certain of these young writers are fashioning their cosmopolitan narratives, it would seem, in order to court international markets. Such accusations echo the long-standing debate over nativism and cosmopolitanism in Canadian literary criticism; indeed, Barber's insinuations echo those of Stephen Henighan in his polemic *When Words Deny the World*. Though Henighan allows that he should be the last to criticize Canadian writers for setting their work outside Canada's borders, since he has done so in several of his books, he nevertheless proceeds to do so, lambasting the "gimmick of setting fiction 'anywhere but here'" as a vehicle "for steamrolling Canadian history" and turning "Canadianness—deep, historically rooted Canadianness . . . into a commercial liability" (170-72). Henighan's distinction between responsible

and irresponsible foreign settings turns upon the criterion of characters being recognizably Canadian in those foreign settings: one must be natively cosmopolitan. Cynthia Sugars, writing of the manifold ironies of positions such as Henighan's, observes that, today, there is an oxymoronic "insistence on the contribution of recent writers to a recognizably Canadian ethos (and by extension to Canada's international reputation) even as they are championed for their 'postnational' perspective; and/or an implicit disparagement of these writers for not being Canadian enough" (80-81). This is exactly the conundrum that Esi Edugyan and other young Canadian writers face, and it marks the policing of a familiar boundary in the world of Canadian literature: one that its youngest stars soon learn to negotiate.

When *Half-Blood Blues* was nominated for the Man Booker, the question of Canadian content predictably surfaced, but in this case at least one journalist, the *Toronto Star*'s Kali Pearson, noted that "neither of this year's [Canadian] nominees' novels is set within our borders," and suggested that readers "stop lamenting the displacement of Frozen Wheat lit." However supportive Pearson's position, the issue is once again brought to the fore; we are clearly not ready, yet, for the displacement that Pearson anticipates. Other reviewers continued to hunt down Canadian content; Donna Bailey Nurse commented, of *Half-Blood Blues*, that "Canada exists far from the landscape of this novel," though she did grasp at the straw of Delilah Brown's Montreal childhood ("Blacks and Blues" n. pag.). In *Maclean's*, Brian Bethune resurrected the question of Canadian content in similarly nervous ways; Bethune notes that both Edugyan's *Half-Blood Blues* and Patrick deWitt's *The Sisters Brothers* "could scarcely be less Canadian in setting and characters . . . not CanLit as it once was and many still think it is" (n. pag.). (In the same review, Bethune marvelled that deWitt has never been to Toronto. Clearly, Frozen Wheat lit is not the only cherished belief about the Canadian publishing world that could use displacement.)

Esi Edugyan has felt the weight of such expectations, even as she has resisted them. Her response to Pearson's question about Canadian content was cautiously diplomatic: "It is interesting that neither of our [deWitt's and Edugyan's] books are set in Canada. . . . There is a great discourse going on about that—about Canadian books all being set elsewhere—and it tends to be a bother to some critics and readers" (n.pag.). Edugyan's carefully coded lack of sympathy with such nationalist acts of cultural policing is clear, despite the diplomatic air, and her positioning as a writer of colour compounds the inappropriateness of this policing of literary nationalism. Even so, in another

interview Edugyan answers the perennial question, "Can you tell us a bit about your next project?," by assuring her interlocutor that the requirements of Can Con will be met: "to give you a general idea, I will say it's a novel with a Canadian setting" (Carswell). The pressures of producing the next book after a runaway success are palpable here, and they have a nationalist cast.

If one were to summarize the various narratives that have formed around the literary celebrity of Esi Edugyan, they would read as follows: (1) It is a matter of personal initiative, not collective action; (2) The exercising of this initiative causes one to move programmatically from obscurity to renown; (3) Youth, though desired by the market, is suspect and aligned with obscurity; (4) Profits are evidence of artistic success; (5) Cultural celebrity is an expression of national values. Of course, a writer can do little to control the sorts of narratives that media outlets formulate about her, but in the case of Esi Edugyan, the very novel that spawned her success counters many of the narratives about celebrity that I have listed above.

Half-Blood Blues reveals a writer who has been preoccupied with celebrity, giftedness, and obscurity. When the narrator, the elderly bass player Sid Griffiths, returns to Germany to attend a tribute to his former band member and gifted trumpeter, Hieronymus Falk, the lid is lifted on the story of how Falk, a German of African ancestry, fell into the hands of the Nazis and was sent to Mauthausen: a story that has everything to do with the possession or lack of celebrity. As Griffiths recalls early in the novel, "It's no exaggeration to say that of all the gents who played in our band, I become the least famous. I ain't never made it" (29). Sid's sense of inferiority is confirmed by no less than the biggest jazz celebrity of the twentieth century; Louis Armstrong asks Sid to sit out their recording of the jazzed version of the Nazi anthem "Horst Wessel," "Half-Blood Blues," because his playing is not up to standard:

> "Sid," he said quiet like, "You going sit this one out. . . ." I give a funny little shrug, like it ain't no trouble. "Aw, it alright Louis," I said. "It alright. Sure. It alright." It wasn't alright. (242)

It certainly wasn't, and Sid holds Hiero's safety ransom for a measure of celebrity—for the "fame, fortune and all that damned et cetera" (31) that he affects to disdain in his later life.

The story of Sid's fruitless pursuit of success flatly denies the individualist, entrepreneurial narrative of celebrity. *Half-Blood Blues* explores, on the contrary, the serendipitous nature of genius: the way it cannot be commanded, either by those who possess it or by those who lack it. As Sid reflects on Hiero's playing, "He had that massive sound, wild and unexpected, like a

thicket of flowers in a bone-dry field" (32). Edugyan uses the same metaphor—the unexpected bloom—once again when Delilah interrogates Sid about Hiero's past: "Lou was like him. When he was young. Would you say Lou's *talented*? Would you still call it talent, if it blooms without any kind of nurturing?" (106). And as Sid's grudge against Hiero grows to include a suspected romance between him and Delilah, he grows ever more resentful of the serendipity of genius, the way it crops up anywhere:

> Cause I admit it. He got genius, he got genius in spades. Cut him in half, he still worth three of me. It ain't fair. It ain't fair that I struggle and struggle to sound just second-rate, and the damn kid just wake up, spit through his horn, and it sing like nightingales. . . . Gifts is divided so damn unevenly. (245)

Ironically, it is that uber-celebrity, Louis Armstrong, who attempts to scale back Sid's obsession with genius as the measure of individual worth: "A man ain't just his one talent. . . . You got the talent of making others your kin, your blood. But music, well it's different. . . . . But it ain't a man's whole life" (248). But although Armstrong's words calm Sid's bitterness for the moment, they do not quell it.

Even for artists who have seemingly moved from obscurity to success, Edugyan shows that celebrity is a relative, and therefore fickle, value. For example, although Armstrong's agent Delilah Brown inhabits Satchmo's aura of celebrity, her own position is, like Sid's, insecure. At first, when she appears in Berlin to try to spirit the band members out of Germany and to Paris to work with Armstrong, she expects to be recognized instantly, as a celebrity:

> There was a flash of impatience in her eyes. "I'm Delilah *Brown*."
> "Oh," I said. "Of course."
> "The singer," she said after a moment. (74)

But Sid and the other band members only recognize her when she is identified as Armstrong's representative: "Hell. Now *that* we understood" (74). Try as she might to carve out her independent career, she remains a paracelebrity. Later in the novel, when she has become Sid's lover, she allows him to see the vulnerability of her second-tier fame; she runs into Josephine Baker, the celebrated dancer and singer, and is clearly jealous of the attention that the African-American star has garnered in France. She calls upon Sid to join her in her criticism of Baker's talents, and slowly he realizes that she feels the kind of pain that he does:

> Then slow like, she lift up her green eyes and look at me with real hurt. Hell. This was my cue. I was meant to say, *You know you ten times the* woman she is, Lilah girl. You know fame's comin you way any day now, it *ain't lost you address*. (223)

But, of course, he doesn't, because to recognize Delilah's pain and jealousy would be to acknowledge his own.

The major celebrity presence—that of Armstrong—is not felt until two-thirds of the way through the novel, though he is spoken of, anticipated, and even feared long before he enters the stage. "I been dreading this hour," thinks Sid when the band, now in Paris, work up their courage to contact Armstrong. And when they finally make a date to play with him, Sid comes onstage "with dread. . . . Louis Armstrong, brother. That gate cast a shadow even lying down" (230-31). This deferral of the celebrity who has, more than any other, cast that long shadow through the history of jazz, in a novel that is so obsessed with celebrity, is telling. For the celebrity that Sid and Delilah Brown so desire demands to be both acknowledged and yet displaced, all the better to recognize the celebrity of everyday life. Hieronymus Falk, whose legendary narrative as a celebrity ends with what the talent scout John Hammond calls "a glamorous death" (33), is, instead, living a heroically obscure life in Poland, far away from the klieg lights.

Looking over this much-celebrated novel's meditations on celebrity, they appear to be the opposite of the narrative that has been told about their author. In particular, celebrity may attach itself, arbitrarily, to one person or another—to Louis Armstrong but not Delilah Smith, to Hieronymous Falk but not Sid Griffiths—but it seems that it cannot be entrepreneurially programmed in the individualistic way that many media narratives of celebrity suggest that it can. The move from obscurity to fame that is the result of such individual agency is never assured, nor is it a linear march. There are side-doors, history's deviations, lost threads, betrayals. The operations of nation and nationalism may generate fame for some and strip it cruelly from others. But in the world of *Half-Blood Blues*, creativity survives in spite of the most repressive actions of the state because ultimately it cannot be entrepreneurially programmed by the state either.

When Esi Edugyan stepped in front of those lights on November 8, 2011, the Giller jury that chose her book urged readers to place it "next to Louis Armstrong's 'West End Blues'" ("2011 Scotiabank Giller"). In so doing, they proclaimed Esi Edugyan to be Canadian literature's Hieronymus Falk: a prodigy propelled from obscurity to fame in a seemingly spontaneous fashion. But attention must be paid to the struggles as well as the consecrations, the economic, material conditions out of which Edugyan's celebrity has arisen, and the publishing and prize cultures which she and other young

Canadian writers must navigate, if we are interested in understanding literary celebrity today. As Sid Griffiths urges Delilah Brown,

> "Go on. Tell me your secret."
> "You're really interested?"
> "In how a girl from Canada break the bigtime? Who ain't interested?" (110)

NOTES

1 I also discuss Stephen Leacock, L. M. Montgomery, Mazo de la Roche, and Pauline Johnson in a chapter devoted to a history of literary celebrity in Canada, and I affirm that literary celebrity in this country is not exclusively a contemporary phenomenon; however, the three central case studies are more recent ones.

2 There are studies that focus on literary consecration in the present, though they tend to be analyses of phenomena rather than individual writers. Examples would include studies of mass reading events like Canada Reads and the Oprah Book Club by Danielle Fuller and DeNel Rehberg Sedo, as well as studies of prize culture like Roberts' and English's.

3 I am grateful to an anonymous reader of this article for pointing this out to me.

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Dawn-Amber Kennedy

Weytk

Hey Cuz,
come over and have a bowl of rice with me.
white rice, rinsed twice …….made in a pot on the stove, not a rice-cooker.

I got *Heinz* ketchup or *China Lily* soya sauce if you want it.
We could open a can of *Libby's* brown beans too,
and maybe there's some bannock left,
probably not.

We could sit on the floor while we eat,
share a carton of Apple juice and watch tv.
You'll say, "Hey did you hear that new Lil Wayne song?"
I'll say, "Yeah that shit was off the hook."
You'll say, "For shizall, my nizzall!"
and then we'll cackle like crows,
chucking made-up gang signs at each other.

Later we'll walk down to Bunny's to bum a smoke.
She'll get mad at us, but share anyways.
Next time she might need one.

Our bellies full and a fresh cigarette to share,
we'll walk down to the river and watch the moon swim by.
Talking about dip-netting, you'll tell me some lies.
I'll believe you.
It's only polite.

Then tomorrow we'll ride brother's dirt-bike, together
along the highway
looking for bottles
to buy some more rice
so days like yesterday don't have to end.

Hannah McGregor

Reading Closely
Discursive Frames and Technological Mediations in Carol Shields' *Unless*

The Framing of Violence in *Unless*

At the conclusion of Carol Shields' final novel *Unless* (2000), the mysterious trauma that has been haunting the narrator Reta's teenaged daughter, Norah, is climactically revealed. A piece of security footage has been retrieved, disclosing Norah's intervention in the self-immolation of "a young Muslim woman (or so it would appear from her dress)" (314). The description of this intervention is graphic and visceral: "Without thinking, and before the news team arrived, Norah had rushed forward to stifle the flames. . . . Stop, she screamed, or something to that effect, and then her fingers sank into the woman's melting flesh—the woman was never identified—her arms, her lungs, and abdomen. These pieces gave way. The smoke, the smell, was terrible" (315). The horror of this scene is framed within the medium of the security footage, a mediation that saturates the passage with uncertainty—the dialogue is guessed at, the woman's identity unknown, and the sensations and smells, readers must assume, only imagined. As a representation of violence, this passage is suffused with the unrepresentability of violence itself.

This scene, and its impact on both Norah and Reta, has given rise to a variety of often highly divergent readings. According to Elleke Boehmer, *Unless* is a novel concerned with the powerlessness of women and "the pain of misunderstanding and exclusion" they experience "on a day-to-day basis—a pain which, the novel tries to claim, connects women in the west with women worldwide" (119). Other critics, including Wendy Roy, Nora Foster Stovel, and Bethany Guenther, have noted the potential for transnational feminist community generated by the links the novel forges

between Reta's suffering over her daughter's trauma, Norah's commitment to live on the streets as a response to the experience, and the unknown, possibly-Muslim woman's tragic death.[1] Boehmer, however, is skeptical of these kinds of claims, and expresses her scepticism through a close reading of "the implications of Norah's intervention [in the self-immolation] as both a cross-cultural and as a gender-marked gesture" (121). The act of throwing herself upon a stranger's body in an attempt to extinguish the flames fails as a moment of "spontaneous, cross-cultural empathy" (120) because of how it is textually framed within the novel. The unnamed but racialized woman is constructed as a trope of "Third World female victimhood" through signs such as "sati" and "the veil"; the effect of this framing is to elide any notion of the woman's protest as political or resistant (121). For Boehmer, the narrative's focus on Norah's actions, and Reta's response to them, "replicates the appropriative moves characteristic of historical colonialism, as well as of certain forms of western feminism" in which white women pride themselves on saving brown women from "native patriarchy" (121).[2] While she concedes that Norah's actions could have functioned as a sign of transnational feminist solidarity, the narrative's denial of textual agency to either Norah or the unknown woman (Reta speaks for them both) contributes to "the sheer unreadability" of Norah's actions, leading Boehmer to conclude that "the scope does *not* exist for a cross-cultural or transnational solidarity between women to be successfully realised" within the novel (121-22).

Boehmer's argument situates precisely what is at stake in *Unless*: the capacity, or lack thereof, to represent, recognize, and respond to the suffering of others. While Boehmer concludes that the novel fails to allot the unknown woman adequate agency, I propose to complicate her analysis by introducing new ways of productively reading this difficult scene and, in turn, new possibilities for reading representations of violence and suffering. My intervention draws upon Judith Butler's recent work on the power of discursive frames to shape whether "we apprehend or, indeed, fail to apprehend the lives of others as lost or injured (lose-able or injurable)" (1). Working with the concept of frames, I read the scene of self-immolation not as a failure to move beyond stereotypes of "Third World female victimhood" (Boehmer 121) but as an evocation of the impact that mediation has upon how moments of violence are perceived. Focusing on the interaction between discursive framings and technological mediations of the self-immolation, I contend that the novel constitutes not a representational failure but an exploration of unmediated representation's impossibility. This exploration operates through a textual

engagement with the problem of reading: how does Reta read the self-immolation, and how do her readings shape our own readings? If every event, image, and text is framed by a context that shapes, without determining, its meaning (Butler 10), then scenes of violence like the self-immolation must be read in terms of how each framing and mediation constitutes its own palimpsestic iteration of the same moment. Only in the peculiar conjunction of, and discrepancy between, these various framings does the significance of the scene itself begin to emerge.

In *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* Butler offers an analysis of how frames regulate our "affective responses" (39) and our "moral responses" (41) to the suffering of others. While her focus on war photography emphasizes media-specific representation, her argument implies an expansion of this concept to encompass the very parameters of "the interpretive scene in which we operate" and through which the differential recognizability and grievability of lives is constructed and rendered normative (71). By recognizability Butler refers not simply to perception or apprehension, but to the production of a life within particular "schemas of intelligibility" that render it "intelligible *as a life*" (7). Grievability refers to the production of a life not only as recognizable but also as a life that matters. As "a condition of a life's emergence and sustenance" (15), then, differential grievability reveals that not all lives matter equally within certain epistemological frames, such as those that render the enemy less grievable than one's own nation's soldiers. The regulation of affect "disposes us to perceive the world in a certain way, to let certain dimensions of the world in and to resist others" (50), thus shaping our sense of those to whose suffering we respond. Butler emphasizes the importance of critical consciousness of frames alongside consideration of how they govern our affective responses to the suffering of others, not attempting to move beyond representation but calling for a new way of reading with attention to the discursive production of recognizability and grievability.

Unless is the first-person narrative of Reta Winters, a successful author, mother of three teenaged daughters, and doctor's wife living in a lovingly-described brick house in Orangetown, a fictional town north of Toronto. At the beginning of the novel, it is revealed that her oldest daughter Norah has, for reasons unknown to her family, taken up silent vigil on the corner of Bathurst and Bloor in Toronto holding a sign inscribed with the single word "goodness." It is only at the end of the novel that the cause of Norah's "dereliction" (120), as the novel describes it, is revealed to be her intervention in the unknown woman's self-immolation on that very corner. The moment

is described in detail only once, though it is mentioned in passing at several other points in the narrative. Each of these references and descriptions is framed and mediated through newspaper (41, 117-18) or videotape (309). They are also framed discursively in ways that shape potential readings of the event in terms of either "Third World female victimhood," as Boehmer argues (121), or the privileging of Norah's suffering at the expense of the unknown woman's subjectivity through the description of the event as something that happened to Norah.

Surveying critical responses to *Unless*, Alex Ramon has described the diverse readings produced by these discursive frames; while some critics read the moment as "a destructive encounter with an anonymous ethnic 'Other' who remains entirely objectified by the text," others maintain that "the Muslim woman's 'exclusion' from the text" can be read "as a reflection of a wider cultural exclusion, an attempt to highlight the nature of silence imposed upon ethnic voices, rather than as a mere participation in that silencing" (172). The question of how to read the unknown woman's silence—as objectification or as a representational argument about cultural exclusion—is clarified by connecting the two types of framing. Attention to how the self-immolation is mediated sheds light on how it is discursively framed, as both reinforce how "genre and form" shape "the communicability of affect" (Butler 67). The narrative focuses on how characters' readings of the self-immolation are constrained by the media through which the event is framed, encouraging attention to the influence of similar constraints on how, or even whether, interpretation takes place. Thus, when Reta reflects retroactively that the event "was reported in the newspapers, though we didn't read closely about it for some reason" (309), the emphasis on close reading, as well as the ambivalence of her "for some reason," encourages a self-reflexive reading practice attentive to how the self-immolation is or is not read or rendered readable. In turn, this attention to the framing and mediation of scenes of violence calls for a critical approach that moves beyond accusations of representational guilt or innocence to understand how texts themselves inscribe and interrogate the act of interpretation.

The self-immolation is mentioned three times in the novel, each reference providing both additional detail and ambiguity such that the closer the narrative gets to understanding this event, the more mediated and uncertain it becomes. The first, passing reference mentions "a Muslim woman [who] had set herself on fire in Toronto. I read something about it in the paper" (41). The significance of this event is recognizable by neither narrator nor

reader—nothing connects it to Norah—while the identity of the unknown woman is framed as entirely recognizable. She is simply "Muslim." The second reference occurs during a conversation about responsibility that Reta has with girlfriends at a coffee shop, in which the self-immolation becomes one of several examples of female suffering deployed as a generalized trope. This conversation offers enough detail to begin making the pivotal connection while also introducing greater uncertainty; the identity of the woman is still described as "Muslim" but only because of her "traditional dress": "They never found out who she was" (117). Later, in a climactic revelation, the self-immolation is framed clearly as something that happened *to Norah* rather than to the unknown woman, whose unidentifiability is marked parenthetically in her description as "a young Muslim woman (or so it would appear from her dress)" (314). The ambivalence of the woman's identity increases as the significance of her self-immolation becomes more overtly constrained by the narrative centrality of Norah. Such representational tension foregrounds the framing of the event as well as *Unless*' concern with the impact of language on how subjects experience and interpret the world.

I am certainly not the first to note that Reta's narrative is decidedly writerly and that an adequate reading must be mindful of her "tendency to view the world in narrative terms" and the resulting representational instability (Ramon 167). This instability is perhaps most readily exemplified by the telling gaps in Reta's imaginative construction of her world. A revealing example is her fondness for imagining the previous tenant of her house, Mrs. McGinn. When Reta thinks of Mrs. McGinn—"I've never discovered her first name . . . but I speculate it might be Lillian or Dorothy or Ruth, something like that" (55)—she imagines her as "a woman of about my size and age. . . . Some essence has deserted her. A bodily evaporation has left her with nothing but hard, direct questions aimed in the region of her chest" (56). When Reta's mother-in-law Lois (in a passage still narrated, of course, by Reta) reveals the "real" *Crystal* McGinn (297) it becomes apparent that the woman Reta had imagined functioned as a means through which she worked out her own anxieties about the oppression of women. This example might encourage readers to carefully consider other narrative fissures.

Similarly, the novel draws attention to the "structuring constraints of genre" (Butler 67) through its focus on Reta's own writing practice, particularly her composition of a light comedic novel. *Unless* engages with its own fictional status primarily through the voice of Danielle Westerman, the well-known feminist scholar and poet whose memoirs Reta translates and whose "suspicion

of fiction" (105) increasingly infects the narrative, until Reta finds herself wondering "what really is the point of novel writing when the unjust world howls and writhes?" (224). Danielle's belief in "the consolation of the right word perfectly used" (102) influences Reta's attention to the capacity of language to shape meaning, and her explicitly feminist interpretation of Norah's crisis becomes another key discursive frame (218). The extent of Danielle's influence is evident when, mere pages from the end of *Unless*, Reta reflects on the completion of her own novel: "Everything is wrapped up at the end, since tidy conclusions are a convention of comic fiction, as we all know. . . . but what does such fastidiousness mean? It doesn't mean that all will be well forever and ever, amen; it means that for five minutes a balance has been achieved at the margin of the novel's thin textual plane" (317-18). Reta's meditation on the untrustworthy constraints of genre casts a suspicious light on the tidiness of Shields' own ending, in which the Winters family is reunited in the safety of their home. Reta's writerly narrative thus invites a reading that pays as much attention to what is said as to what proves unsayable, what remains at the edge of "the novel's thin textual plane."

Of equal interest is the iterativeness of Reta's narration, its tendency to re-narrate the same events with slight variations. Norah's presence on the corner of Bathurst and Bloor, for example, is repeated multiple times, often in the form of imagined letters that Reta composes in her mind (136, 165, 220, 248, 273, 309). In these passages she experiments with how to frame the traumatic event—sometimes as an illness, other times as a direct response to Norah's experience of gender inequity, or simply as an inexplicable tragedy. Reta's struggle to frame her loss in a way that renders it meaningful recalls Butler's insistence that there is no representation without framing. While these "categories, conventions, and norms" (5) are "iterable" and must "break from themselves in order to install themselves" (12), such breaking does not eliminate the framing altogether or offer some sort of unmediated access to a "material reality" (29). What the iterability of the frame suggests is simply that, through these iterative breakages and reinstallations, "other possibilities for apprehension emerge" (12). Thus Reta's framing and reframing of Norah's experience reveals her struggle to manage or comprehend an incomprehensible event. A similar framing operation is at work, I argue, in the novel's handling of the self-immolation.

At the heart of the narrative of *Unless* is the loss of a life that is ultimately framed as ungrievable, but in a way that foregrounds its very framing as such. Instead, the question of what happened to Norah is the almost-obsessive

narrative centre of the novel. Both Wendy Roy and Nora Foster Stovel have pointed out how the novel shapes Reta's quest to recover her missing daughter as a mystery with no readily apparent answer, although "[t]heories abound" (Stovel 53). Reta's overt critique of the desire for closure and teleology implied in the conventional ending of comic fiction, in which "[e]verything is neatly wrapped up" (317), extends to her doctor husband's desire to diagnose Norah. She describes diagnosis as "a rhythmic arc of cause and effect that has its own built-in satisfactions" (264) but that, compared to the "slow, steady accumulation of incremental knowledge" (269) (revealed through the novel's iterative narrative patterns), is simply too easy. If the novel's happy ending, in which Norah is safely returned to the family home, is presented as a narrative trope to be looked upon with suspicion, to be "read closely" as it were, so too is the "diagnosis" of Norah's trauma that the self-immolation seems to offer. Consistently framed and mediated, this solution to the mystery of Norah is rendered unstable and unsatisfying, demanding a reconsideration of what we, as readers, can actually know about this or any moment of unspeakable violence.

Goodness, Feminism, and Memorialization

The first detailed account of the self-immolation occurs in a scene in which Reta and her close friends Sally, Lynn, and Annette are discussing the problem of goodness. Sparked by the word Norah has emblazoned upon her sign—the word that has become her sole, opaque utterance—this conversation considers the gendered dimensions of goodness in terms of moral responsiveness to the suffering of others. Contradicting Sally's claim that women are excluded from the realm of "moral authority" because of their gender, Annette argues that such exclusion may be deserved insofar as they have failed as ethical subjects by not responding to the suffering of others:

> Remember that woman who had a baby in a tree? In Africa, Mozambique, I think. There was a flood. Last year, wasn't it? And there she was, in labour, think of it! . . . [W]hat did we do about that? Such a terrible thing, and did we send money to help the flood victims of Mozambique? Did we transform our shock into goodness, did we do anything that represented the goodness of our feelings? I didn't. (116-17)

The examples that follow Annette's argument suggest that the women are thinking through their ethical failure in terms of very particular forms of suffering. They discuss "that woman who set herself on fire last spring . . . right here in our own country, right in the middle of Toronto," debating

where she was from—"Was she a Saudi? Was that established?"—and how she was dressed, in a "chador" or "veil" or "burka" (117-18). The other example is a "young woman in Nigeria who got pregnant and was publicly flogged" (118). These unnamed women are obliquely racialized, through references to "Africa" or a generalized "Muslim" identity, and the focus on their gendered bodies evokes the neo-colonial feminism alluded to by Boehmer, in which "[t]he western feminist's typical reading of the Third World woman as the victim of native patriarchy . . . is generally followed by an attempt benevolently to intervene on her behalf" (121). These unnamed women are implicitly victimized by a patriarchal culture metonymically signified by a veil or a public flogging. And the conversation does, as Boehmer suggests, circle around the possibilities and limitations of benevolent intervention.

The friends disagree about the extent to which they are responsible for, or ought to respond to, these kinds of crises. Speaking of the woman who was publicly flogged, one friend emphasizes the impotence of the kinds of interventions they feel are within their power, such as letter-writing: "A lot of people did write, they got quite excited about it—for Canadians, I mean—but she was flogged anyway" (118). While Sally insists that "we can't extend acts of goodness to every case" (117), another replies with an example of someone who did extend such an act toward the unnamed veiled woman: "someone did try to help her. I read about that. Someone tried to beat out the flames. A woman" (118). In the midst of a conversation about the impossibility of meaningful benevolence in the face of suffering, this single act of compassion emerges as a beacon of hope, suggesting the possibility of real and transformative goodness. The "someone" in question is, of course, Norah, as we later learn, but the framing of her intervention as exceptional sets the tone of the conversation, which centres on the familiar outcry: "but what can we do" (Ahmed, "Declarations" par. 56). Sara Ahmed discusses the politics of this question, which she calls "a white response" to "hearing about racism and colonialism." For her the question "is not necessarily misguided, although it does re-center on white agency." Ahmed writes that the pervasive question "can be both a defense against the 'shock' of hearing about racism (and the shock of the complicity revealed by the very 'shock' that 'this' was a 'shock')" and "it can be about making public one's judgment ('what happened was wrong')." Further, Ahmed argues, "the question, in all of these modes of utterance, can work to *block* hearing" and it can "move away from the object of critique, or place the white subject 'outside' that critique" ("Declarations" par. 56). Ahmed's nuanced analysis links the question "but what can we do"

to a position of privilege and political outrage, complicity and compassion, while implying that these seemingly opposed positions are in fact part of the same complex of neoliberal white guilt that seeks to overcome its hegemonic position through an acknowledgement of this very hegemony. Many of these dimensions are evident in the conversation between Reta and her friends. They certainly express their shock at the suffering experienced by these unnamed women, while acknowledging some level of complicity in the failure to translate this shock into action; they attempt to align themselves with the women through the shared experience of oppression under patriarchy, but they also move themselves out of a position of responsibility by associating these atrocities with a generalized condition of injustice: "God, this is a brutal world" (118). The conversation about responsibility and intervention reframes the lives of those racialized women as ungrievable insofar as their loss cannot be translated into political action and insofar as they are deployed as tropes or examples rather than recognized as subjects. For Reta and her friends, the real problem is their own gendered oppression and how it restricts their capacity to respond to these subaltern women (119). The friends thus garner the moral authority to speak about the possibilities or impossibilities of ethical action through their "alleged distance from power" (Henderson 15).

Jennifer Henderson, writing about the life narratives of Canadian settler women, argues that the moral authority of white women is not antithetical to their perceived distance from official power but is rather constituted by it. These women, she argues, "occupied the site of the *norm*," a position central to the operations of a normalizing state (4). She points out the tendency of literary criticism to narrativize women's writing as "irreducibl[y] exterior[] to the machinations of power" (8) and links this tendency to "a liberal politics of reading" that praises the individual narrative as a sign of agency without locating it within the social histories that determine its possibilities (4). While disenfranchised and property-less women may historically have been excluded from politics proper, they extended their authority via the social, particularly through a moralistic imperative to "improve" the lives of racialized others (a process that inevitably constructs the "racial distinctions" it purports to overcome) (10). There is thus racial work being done in the image of the white woman attempting to improve the lives of others. The voicing of moralistic concern alongside a claim to powerlessness, in my reading of this scene, seems to frame Reta and her friends as *more* moral because of their lack of agency (a framing that will be complicated, or even

critiqued, in later scenes). The only form of agency that seems available to these women is that of selective memorialization.

The passage echoes with the language of memory. After Annette asks her friends to "Remember that woman who had a baby in a tree," Lynn responds with her own memory of "waking up in the morning and hearing on the radio that a woman had given birth in a tree" (116-17). The other characters begin to offer their own memories, filtered through the media (radio or newspaper) from which they first learned these stories. Their language calls for an act of group memorialization, with the memories more often phrased as questions than statements, as a call-and-response through which they piece together what they know of these lost lives. While this act of memorialization suggests the kind of grievability with which Butler is concerned, critics have complicated the relationship between memory and the ethical responsiveness that Butler associates with the framing of a life as grievable. "Perhaps," Susan Sontag suggests, "too much value is assigned to memory, not enough to thinking" (115). Judith Halberstam echoes this concern: "memorialization has a tendency to tidy up disorderly histories. . . . Memory is itself a disciplinary mechanism that Foucault calls 'a ritual of power'" (15). Whereas thinking invokes a mode of critical awareness that might help us "[t]o learn to see the frame that blinds us to what we see" (Butler 100), memory places atrocity in the past and beyond the reach of action. It also, to repeat Ahmed's argument, risks "plac[ing] the white subject 'outside' that critique in the present of the hearing" ("Declarations" par. 56). The moment in which Reta and her friends remember the suffering of these subaltern women is fundamentally divorced from a moment in which they could have been moved to respond.

Significantly, Reta and her friends discuss not the moments of violence themselves but their mediations, framed within discourses that shape the possibilities of responsiveness. The women's affective reactions to these stories of suffering are mediated and thus, as Butler argues is the case with all affective responses, "they call upon and enact certain interpretive frames" (34). The mediating power of the various literal and discursive frames through which Reta and her friends recall the self-immolation (e.g., newspaper or radio, "goodness" or gender oppression) becomes particularly clear when the same incident is re-described via different frames and in a decidedly different affective register. The shift of the same incident between different frames, and the clear impact of these frames upon Reta's affective response to the self-immolation, constitutes a moment of productive breakage. As

Butler notes, "[w]hen those frames that govern the relative and differential recognizability of lives come apart—as part of the very mechanism of their circulation—it becomes possible to apprehend something about what or who is living but has not been generally 'recognized' as a life" (12). As the self-immolation circulates through different media, Reta's interpretation of the self-immolation shifts from a generalized example of women's oppression to the cause of her daughter's trauma. In the process, the operations of the frames that render Norah's life more recognizable and grievable than the life of the unknown woman come into view.

Mediation, Spectrality, and Abjection

The final, and most detailed, account of the self-immolation is also framed in multiple and complex ways. The passage offers a self-reflexive representation of the unrepresentability of the suffering of the other, emphasized by its bookending between two discussions of the eponymous conjunction "unless" and its mediation through video footage serendipitously acquired. The stylization of this scene productively clashes with the affective resonance of a mother's desire to spare her daughter pain, rendering the passage a fraught interrogation of representation despite its narrative framing as the solution to the mystery of what happened to Norah.

By the end of the narrative, Norah has been hospitalized for pneumonia, her self-imposed exile has ended, and her secret has been revealed. The chapter that discloses this secret begins with a reflection upon the writerly craft involved in the discursive framing of events: "A life is full of isolated events, but these events, if they are to form a coherent narrative, require odd pieces of language to cement them together" (313). While "unless" is introduced as one of these "little chips of grammar" that cement a narrative, the conjunction's actual function in the chapter that follows is to disrupt and splinter the narrative by introducing the spectral presence of an alternative, untold history. "The conjunction *unless*," Reta writes, "with its elegiac undertones, is a term used in logic, a word breathed by the hopeful or by writers of fiction wanting to prise open the crusted world and reveal another plane of being, which is similar in its geographical particulars and peopled by those who resemble ourselves" (313-14). "Unless" introduces alternate possibilities, the otherwise that undermines the illusion of inevitability.

Contingency, coincidence, and alternate possibilities are powerful structuring forces in the description of the self-immolation, when it finally appears:

> Unless. Novelists are always being accused of indulging in the artifice of coincidence, and so I must ask myself whether it was a coincidence that Norah was standing on the corner where Honest Ed's is situated when a young Muslim woman (or so it would appear from her dress) . . . stepped forward on the pavement, poured gasoline over her veil and gown, and set herself alight. (314)

Reta did not witness this scene, nor has Norah narrated it to her. She has received this information by chance and through media:

> If the firemen hadn't pulled her away in time, if Honest Ed's exterior security video hadn't captured and then saved the image of Norah, her back anyway, her thrashing arms, instantly recognizable to members of her family, beating at the flames; if they hadn't turned the video over to the police, unless, unless, all this would have been lost. (315)

The hesitancy of the first description betrays its reliance on conjecture, while the deliberate foregrounding of literary "artifice" is a reminder of the shaping force of Reta's authorial voice (and of Shields' voice behind hers).[3] Once it is clear that Reta has accessed this information through security footage, the specification that Norah's actions took place "before the news team arrived" (315) both emphasizes the event's mediation and opens up a space that precedes and even exceeds that mediation, a space of immediacy that is gestured toward but that cannot be described. This scene is thus riven by a tension between the visceral immediacy of Norah's encounter on the one hand and the impact of various mediating and framing forces on the other.

Immediacy is evoked not only by the insistence that Norah acted outside the realm of representation but also by the image of her hands penetrating the flesh of the other woman, suggesting the possibility of an unmediated encounter. But in the very moment that Norah's fingers penetrate the nameless woman's body, that namelessness erupts again, as though refusing the appropriativeness of knowledge: "her fingers sank into the woman's melting flesh—the woman was never identified" (315). Norah can touch the other but cannot know her, and for Reta—as well as for readers—even that touch cannot be encountered directly but is narrated at several removes. The woman escapes the literal grasp of Norah and the representational grasp of Reta by becoming an abject body that challenges the norms of intelligibility. Through its evocation of the untouchable body of the stranger, this scene recalls Ahmed's argument that there is no such thing as a pure touch in the present: the skin is materialized through a history of touches that determines what we already know about others (*Strange* 155). This mediating history is not unlike Butler's frames; both insist that other lives can be accessed only through filters that shape the possibility of recognition,

grievability, or touch. Ahmed wonders, then, how one is to "get[] closer to this other's skin" without fetishizing her as a stranger (158). Her answer is that the other is encountered through her abjectness:

> This other presents itself as vomit, as violence spat out into the world. This other leaks as pus, as infection spreading outwards from a wound. This other fails to be contained in her skin. The fluids which seep across my hands are not simply from inside you; they are the trace of the encounters that have already violated you before the skin-to-skin of this reading could take place. (160)

This insistence that the other is encountered as the abject is a logical extension of Ahmed's refusal of an ontology of the stranger that would grant her a being outside the history of encounters that have constructed her as stranger (3). The abject other is beyond the signifying system that constitutes her as a knowable hence assimilable entity, and thus cannot be reduced to a trope or an example, as the unnamed subaltern women were in Reta's conversation with her friends. In the moment of encounter this other dissolves into sheer unidentifiability.

The abjectness of the unknown woman is linked to her unrecognizability and her ungrievability. Whereas "the woman was never identified," Norah herself is "instantly recognizable to members of her family," even from behind, and the framing of the self-immolation makes Norah's trauma seem both more recognizable and more grievable. It is described as a tragedy that has "usurped the life of a young woman" (309)—of Norah, that is—and it is on Norah's grief that Reta's narration focuses: "But it's all right, Norah. We know now, Norah. You can put this behind you. You are allowed to forget. We'll remember it for you, a memory of a memory, we'll do this gladly" (315). Reta's assurance frames the self-immolation as something that happened to Norah, and tries to displace the visceral immediacy of the incident even further by offering to take on the memory such that it becomes "a memory of a memory." If Norah needs to forget this incident it is because the unknown woman constitutes a threat to Norah's well-being that must be expelled. Yet this unrecognized subject cannot be so easily purged; she continues to threaten the boundaries of recognizability, to render visible the frames that govern differential grievability. She resembles what Butler describes as the "specter that gnaws at the norms of recognition" and that, in so doing, "figures the collapsibility of the norm" (12). Unrecognizable, unnamed, and both physically and representationally ungraspable, this woman is a spectral presence in the novel that reveals the limits of recognizability by being pushed beyond them.

Like the unknown woman, "unless" is frequently associated with the spectral presence of alternatives. In her first extended meditation on the word, Reta emphasizes the force of contingency:

> Unless you're lucky, unless you're healthy, fertile, unless you're loved and fed, unless you're clear about your sexual direction, unless you're offered what others are offered, you go down in the darkness, down to despair. *Unless* provides you with a trapdoor, a tunnel into the light, the reverse side of not enough. *Unless* keeps you from drowning in the presiding arrangements. (224)

The "presiding arrangements" refers to contingencies like wealth, opportunity, and luck, the latter emphasizing the arbitrariness of privilege. Despair, on the other hand, is associated with "not enough." In the midst of this passage, "unless" turns back on itself. In the first sentence it points toward those outside the circle of privilege: the conditions of luck and happiness are so over-determined and exclusive that "unless" seems to lead directly "down in the darkness." In the next sentence it has become its own opposite, "a tunnel into the light." This reversal suggests the interconnection of darkness and light, luck and despair, introducing into the image of the "lucky ones" the spectral presence of the unlucky. This is the spectre of the unknown woman bursting into the narrative again, insisting that the privilege of the "presiding arrangement" demands its supplement, those others who reside in despair.

If Reta seems to suggest that Norah should forget the self-immolation, that it should be re-framed as "a memory of a memory," "unless" points toward the impossibility of such a tidy solution. Her promise to "do this for you gladly" is followed immediately by the introduction of uncertainty: "Unless we ask questions" (316). The implicit object of questioning is Norah and the self-immolation, suggesting that the event cannot be forgotten or displaced. The absence of a clear grammatical object, however, implies a more general state of questioning that, in its contrast with Reta's promise to memorialize the event, recalls again Sontag's distinction between thinking and remembering. Memory, as in the coffee shop scene, is a form of framing that determines the possibility of affective response. Attempting to reduce her daughter's ongoing involvement with the self-immolation, Reta reframes the event as manageable. Such a framing, and the suggestion of its impossibility introduced by the word "unless," recalls Slavoj Žižek's differentiation between "*symbolic history*" and "the unacknowledgeable '*spectral*,' *fantasmatic history*" that "tells the story of a traumatic event that 'continues not to take place,' that cannot be inscribed into the very symbolic

space it brought about by its intervention . . . (and, of course, precisely as such, as nonexistent, it continues to persist; that is, its spectral presence continues to haunt the living)" (64). Reta's offer of memorialization suggests the attempted circumscription of a spectral history that continues to inscribe itself even as it is foreclosed—in this case, by a happy ending. In the novel's generically comedic conclusion, both Reta's suspicion of how genre curtails meaning and the spectral memory of the self-immolation haunt the enclosed space of the household, reminding readers that happiness is only "the reverse side of not enough" (Shields 224).

Conclusion: The (Im)possibilities of Representation

Unless is a novel of interpretation, demanding readerly attention to the ways in which discursive framing curtails affective, and thus moral and political, response on the part of both characters and readers. The unknown, possibly-Muslim woman is a spectral figure who exposes the work of the frames through which differential grievability is produced. Her unidentifiability is underscored by the heightened mediation of her and Norah's encounter, both through newspapers and video footage, and through discourses such as "Third World female victimhood" (Boehmer 121). This emphasis on mediation and illegibility invokes the ethics of the encounter with the other. As Ahmed argues, the other cannot "appear in the present as such" because she is always mediated by "that which allows the face to appear" in the moment of the encounter (*Strange* 145-46). Drawing on Spivak, Ahmed refers to this mediation in terms of untranslatability, "the impossibility that pure presenting, pure communication can take place" (148). The trope of translation thus suggests both the impossibility and the possibility of ethics; the encounter leads not to complete knowledge or perfect empathy "but to a sense of the limits of what can be got across, to a sense of that which cannot be grasped in the present" (148). It is in terms of untranslatability that Boehmer reads Norah's sign, inscribed with the multiply-signifying word "goodness," which she interprets "less as a claim of goodness for herself, than as . . . a confession to the impossibility of translating the other body-in-pain" (120-21). Untranslatability, like illegibility, points to an otherness that foregrounds the frames that generate differential recognizability.

The novel, however, explores translation as a fraught yet necessary "creative act" (3). When Reta expresses to Danielle her concern about claiming her translation work as original writing, Danielle objects: "Writing and translation are convivial, she said, not oppositional, and not at all

hierarchical" (3). *Unless* does not treat the creativity of translation as a betrayal to the text or event being translated, but neither does it attempt to elide their difference. Translation instead becomes a new kind of creative act, one capable of opening up a gap between event and memorialization. As Halberstam argues, the refusal of memorialization "unleashes new forms of memory that relate more to spectrality than to hard evidence" (15). The continued mediation and translation of the self-immolation renders the unknown woman more spectral than real, but also invites a reading attentive to the productive possibilities and ethical challenges of spectrality.

The self-immolation that troubles *Unless*, and that has troubled critics' readings of the novel, is difficult to read in part because it participates in an objectification of racialized bodies that arguably perpetuates the violence inflicted upon the unnamed woman. Rather than celebrating the novel as an ode to transnational feminist solidarity or repudiating it as an example of white liberal feminist constructions of "Third World female victimhood" (Boehmer 121), I read its deployment of various discursive and mediating frames as a means of emphasizing what Ahmed calls the "ungraspability of the pain of others" (*Cultural* 30-31). Refusing the idea that we can fully understand the body in pain as a sign of racialized violence, she asks how we can "bear witness to injustice and trauma without presuming that such witnessing is the presenting or ownership of 'the truth'" (*Strange* 158). *Unless* denies readers access to "the truth" of who the unknown woman was or how her act of self-immolation signified. Filtered through Reta's narrative voice and the unreliability of news media, this event becomes unspeakable and ungraspable at an ontological level (we cannot know what happened) that powerfully reproduces the ethical imperative to relate to the other without indulging in fantasies of perfect comprehension. The ontological ungraspability of the event, and the woman at the centre of it, in turn emphasizes the epistemological frames that shape what can and cannot be recognized or grieved.

Unless thus calls for a different set of reading practices attentive to the materiality of technological mediations and the entangled genealogies of discursive framings. In *Writing at the Limit: The Novel in the New Media Ecology*, Daniel Punday interprets the inscription of other media within novels as a means of exploring the constraints and possibilities of contemporary literature within an increasingly complex media ecology (37-38). Read alongside Butler's articulation of the impact frames exert on whether lives are recognizable or grievable, Punday's argument emphasizes a

critical shift toward understanding how novels engage with and are enfolded within other signifying regimes. The image of the video camera outside Honest Ed's, for example, raises the question of how the contemporary urban novel participates in or resists the production of knowledge as a means of securing capital; Lynn's reference to hearing on the radio about a woman who gave birth in a tree invokes the historical conjunction of Canadian nationalism and new media. A reading attuned to frames and mediations, and to what they reveal about the limits of representability, opens an interpretive space in which to ask what we, as readers and critics, have failed to read closely.

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NOTES

1 See Roy 131-132, Guenther 161, Stovel 69 n.19.
2 Boehmer is alluding here to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's famous equation of colonialism with "[w]hite men saving brown women from brown men" (50). For more on the critique of western feminism and its link to colonialism see Mohanty; and Razack, Smith, and Thobani.
3 While a discussion of the relation between Reta's narrating voice and Shields' authorial voice is beyond the purview of this paper, various critics have pointed out how difficult it is to distinguish between them (see Guenther 148, Roy 130, and Stovel 51). For the purposes of my argument I read Reta's voice as distinct from that of the implied author, while acknowledging how tenuous this distinction often appears.

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Lakshmi Gill

Crow Redressed Against the Manciple

No, Cock's bones! I think not! No gossip, this.
Did you not hang my cage in Phoebus' house?
Did he not teach me mimicry? Be honest,
was it not but to spy on that wife he so jealously
guarded? *By sadde tokenes and by wordes bold*
by sworn testimony of sober observation
I gave witness to that great villainy.
I did my job. I did it well. Why still my voice?
Why fling me to the devil?
Why blacken my reputation?

Let's hear his confession. It was his rage that killed her.
Would a Lord have deigned to hear her explanation?
Murder is his tag.
You've got your tales and maxims all mixed up.
Confuse the issue. Distract us with dissembling.
Wickedness lies not in my tongue but in your telling.

Sara Jamieson

"Surprising Developments"
Midlife in Alice Munro's *Who Do You Think You Are?*

Both *Lives of Girls and Women* (1971) and *Who Do You Think You Are?* (1978) have been described as Alice Munro's texts of "growing up" (Warwick 204). Whereas the earlier book traces the maturation of Del Jordan into a young woman, the linked stories of *Who Do You Think You Are?* follow its heroine, Rose, into middle age. Having briefly attended university, gotten married and divorced, and established a career as a television interviewer and actress, Rose is around forty when, in the last two stories, she returns to her hometown of Hanratty to assist her stepmother Flo in moving to an old age home. As a text about aging into midlife, *Who Do You Think You Are?* does more than simply range beyond the "season of youth" that is the traditional preserve of the *Bildungsroman* (Buckley vii); it draws attention to age itself as something of an unremarked category in a form ostensibly concerned with getting older. In *Lives of Girls and Women*, the characters' ages go mostly unmentioned; by contrast, *Who Do You Think You Are?* persistently foregrounds the ages of its characters in a way that both registers and resists the process whereby the number of a person's years has become a defining aspect of identity in twentieth-century culture. The interrogation of age norms in *Who Do You Think You Are?* can be read as a critique of how this preoccupation with chronological age contributed to a cultural devaluation of midlife by enabling the figuration of the entry into middle age as a traumatic and turbulent period of rupture from a more desirable youthful identity.

Gordon Collier has recognized *Who Do You Think You Are?* as a text that grapples with the disquieting alterity that aging can involve, particularly in

the penultimate story, "Spelling," which depicts Rose's encounters with the dementia-afflicted and "inaccessib[le]" Flo (52). For Amelia DeFalco, Rose's struggle to achieve even a momentary connection with Flo testifies to the "difficulty of responding ethically to [the] radically altered subjectivity" of "those suffering the severe debilitations of old age and illness" (84). DeFalco's reading of "Spelling" positions the story as an early precursor to Munro's later interest, in stories like "The Bear Came Over the Mountain" (2001), with "the changes of aging into old age" (75), and with the ethical dimensions of caregiving in the midst of current concern over the "crisis" of population aging. As a midlife text, however, *Who Do You Think You Are?* can be more productively read in the context of concerns specific to its own time. The 1960s and 1970s were the years when the so-called "midlife crisis" rose to cultural prominence, and a plethora of psychological and self-help texts worked to define it as a difficult period of transition affecting both men and women, during which the middle-aged subject, newly aware of the increasing proximity of death, either learns to accept, or persists in denying, the new reality of the aging self. By emphasizing the anxiety, stress, and upheaval that could accompany this process, these therapeutic texts figured midlife as a problem, and implicitly promoted themselves as the solution.

The popular literature of the midlife crisis is marked by a preoccupation with identifying the precise age range during which midlife anxiety might be expected to begin, and is grounded in the assumption that chronological age functions as a natural and universal measure of human development. Munro's text challenges this assumption by drawing attention to age consciousness as a recent phenomenon produced and sustained in particular social and institutional contexts, and by exposing the midlife crisis as a narrative that is historically and socially situated. In a direct critique of the way in which therapeutic literature of midlife prioritizes age as the defining aspect of identity, Munro's text insists on how awareness of age is mediated by other factors including gender, and, more importantly, class: by focalizing the narrative through the eyes of a protagonist from a poor family who moves up the social ladder through marriage and career, Munro characterizes the midlife crisis as a construct that advances a particularly middle-class narrative of development as the human norm, and generates a false impression of the middle-aged as a homogenous generational constituency. Making visible the differences that age elides, Munro's text questions a cultural tendency to attribute unhappiness in midlife primarily to age, rather than inequities of class and gender. By working to demystify

the concept of middle age as a timeless essence, *Who Do You Think You Are?* exposes the midlife crisis as but one among many possible narratives of middle age, not all of which are characterized by a debilitating anxiety about getting older. In contrast to the popular conception of midlife as triggering a frightening sense of disjunction from a younger self, Munro figures Rose's middle age in a way that emphasizes the continuity of subjectivity that is as much a part of aging as is physical change. The text advances a view of midlife as a habitable mixture of continuity and change that not only emphasizes the possibility of happiness for individuals in middle age, but facilitates the recognition of connections among different age groups at a time when divisions between the young and the middle-aged were often figured as profound and unbridgeable.

Interrogating the role of chronological age in the production of identity adds a new dimension to the discussion of midlife in Munro's work, which has so far focused on the body as the primary site of resistance to the cultural devaluation of the aging self. Reading a selection of stories published between 1982 and 1994, Peggy Martin argues that they privilege the "materiality of the aging female body" in a way that enables characters to "claim a new space in which older women do not have to become garish, invisible, or pathetic" (83, 84). Embodiment remains a key issue in scholarly debates about fictional representations of middle age: the productive sense of bodily awareness that Martin ascribes to Munro's characters stands in stark contrast to Helen Paloge's more recent contention that the body constitutes the "missing element" in contemporary fictions that repress the reality of the aging body even as they claim to address it (5). With its emphasis on chronological age, *Who Do You Think You Are?* reminds us that it is not the body alone that tells us we are growing older, but an age-conscious culture in which identity is measured in yearly increments, and birthdays, some more than others, are interpreted as occasions of disjunction rather than continuity. Maintaining a critical stance toward chronological age as a means by which awareness of middle age is socially produced, Munro creates a context in which the middle-aged heroine's acceptance of her aging body becomes possible.

Historian Howard Chudacoff has attributed the increasing age consciousness of twentieth-century culture to developments in science, industry, and communications that "stressed numerical measurement as a means of imposing order and predictability on human life and the environment" (5). He argues that it was precisely the intensification of age consciousness that helped to bring middle age into being as a distinct stage of life:

the stratification of society into peer groups based on age combined with increased life expectancy in the post World War I period to focus attention on what had previously been regarded as a "fleeting, vacant transitional period between adulthood and old age" (107). The emergence of developmental psychology, in particular the work of Erik Erikson, was especially influential in providing a vocabulary that enabled discussion of middle age in the second half of the twentieth century. Departing from Freudian models that limited the formation of subjectivity to early childhood, Erikson conceptualized adulthood as a dynamic period of continuing development, and divided the entire life span into eight stages, each with its own particular "identity crisis" to be resolved (247). For Erikson, the crisis corresponding to the years between forty and sixty-five is one of several that must be grappled with over the course of a life; by the 1970s, however, the years around forty had come to be seen as a particularly crucial period of transition, and "the mid-life crisis" had passed into the popular lexicon.

The term originated in a 1965 essay by psychoanalyst Elliott Jaques, who theorized that arrival at the mid-point of life brings men and women into a newly pressing awareness of death. For Jaques, the main task of this period is a process of accommodation to this awareness: fantasies of omnipotence must be surrendered, depressive anxieties overcome, until the subject, ideally, reaches a point where the "enjoyment of mature adult life" becomes possible (512). While Jaques locates the onset of this process "around the age of 35" (502), later texts that popularized the midlife crisis are marked by a preoccupation with trying to define its chronological parameters in increasingly precise terms. Roger Gould's *Transformations* (1978) locates the onset of midlife anxiety in the decade between ages thirty-five and forty-five. In *The Seasons of a Man's Life* (1978), Daniel Levinson doubts "that a true Mid-life Transition can begin before age 38 or after 43"; it "ordinarily has its onset at age 40 or 41 and lasts about five years" (191). This increasing preoccupation with chronological age in therapeutic literature of midlife often seems calculated not only to identify, but also to exacerbate feelings of anxiety associated with the attainment of specific ages. Nowhere is this more visible than in Gail Sheehy's *Passages* (1976), the midlife text that Munro's readers at the time were perhaps most likely to have been familiar with.[1] Sheehy introduces her text by giving an account of the crisis, amounting to a complete breakdown that she herself suffered at thirty-five, when she was "confronted for the first time with the arithmetic of life," an experience

she describes as, "quite simply, terrifying" (5). While Jaques acknowledges the "inner chaos and despair" (511) that can accompany the awareness that one's life is likely half over, Sheehy writes of this awareness with a language approaching that of gothic horror: the "deadline decade" between ages thirty-five and forty-five brings one face to face with "the specter of death," a "private, unmentionable gargoyle" (351); the passage to midlife is a confrontation with "the dark side" that releases a "cast of demons. Every loose end not resolved in previous passages will resurface to haunt us" and "buried parts of ourselves will demand incorporation" (358).

In contrast to the way in which such popular midlife texts isolate particular ages in the middle years in order to generate anxiety about them, Munro's stories of Rose's midlife never mention her age at all. In fact, Rose's precise age is mentioned only once in the entire book: in the story "Mischief," she is twenty-three when she has an affair with her friend Jocelyn's husband, Clifford (122). In the later story "Simon's Luck," her daughter Anna's age is given as seventeen; since Rose married after one year at university and gave birth to Anna early in the marriage, we can infer that she is in her mid-to-late thirties in that story, and in her late thirties and early forties in the two stories that follow it. It is by drawing attention to the ages of other characters that Munro situates Rose's midlife within a wider context that destabilizes the authority of chronological age as a measure of identity. Age in this text is fundamental to how the characters view themselves and each other; at the same time, however, it is oddly unstable, and characters' attempts to determine people's ages are often marked by a speculative quality that exceeds precise description. This is especially visible in the first story, "Royal Beatings": during "the years when Rose was nine, ten, eleven, twelve," and her half-brother Brian was "five or six," her stepmother Flo might tell a story about encountering a flasher on the bridge home from town, a boy "eighteen, nineteen years old" (13). In "Wild Swans," the teenaged Rose travels to Toronto on the train, and the first thing she notices about the "minister" who sits next to her is that he appears to be "between fifty and sixty years old" (64).

These are just two examples of how Munro's text repeatedly stages the conflict between the impulse to fix someone's age to a precise number and the inability to do so, and registers tensions arising from the intensification of age consciousness in North American culture. Moreover, the text draws attention to how certain assumptions regarding age and identity that were increasingly taken for granted over the course of the twentieth century did not in fact always exist. In the title story, for example, Rose's high school

English teacher Miss Hattie Milton refuses to see "any difference between teen-agers (she did not use the word) and students in Grade Four" (207-08). While schools were primary sites for the production of age consciousness, Miss Hattie's refusal to use the word "teen-agers" signifies her rejection of the age-based peer groupings that became a defining characteristic of twentieth-century culture, and this is central to the story's figuration of her waning influence in Hanratty. Munro's insistence on age categories as historically situated departs from contemporary writings on midlife grounded in a conception of age norms as timeless essences. Jaques, for example, argues for the universality of the midlife crisis by illustrating his theory with examples drawn not only from among his own patients, but from the biographies of an array of composers, painters, and authors (ranging from Michelangelo to J. S. Bach to Goethe) whose creativity can be argued to have undergone a "decisive change" in their late thirties (503). In place of this notion that the experience of midlife was the same in 1665 as it was in 1965, Munro's text substitutes an awareness of age norms as changeable entities whose meanings shift over time.

The text's destabilization of chronological age as a universal measure of human development continues when Rose leaves Hanratty for university, and gains insight into the economic basis of apparently natural age norms. Living with Dr. Henshawe, a retired English professor who opens her home to "poor . . . bright girls" (77), Rose is initiated into the equation of growing up with moving up that is a central ideological component of the *Bildungsroman*, a form that, as Patricia Alden writes, "link[s] the individual's moral, spiritual, and psychological maturation with his economic and social advancement" (2). Munro's text unsettles this generic association of maturity with the attainment of middle-class status through the figure of Dr. Henshawe, a woman "in her seventies" who almost never appears without her *leitmotif* of girlishness (71). Rose feels able to borrow a raincoat from the much older woman because the garment attests to the latter's "classically youthful tastes" (88). Compare this with Flo who, while still in her early thirties, wears the same "print housedresses" that "a woman of fifty, or sixty, or seventy might wear" (11). The lack of any distinction between widely disparate ages characterizes working-class West Hanratty as a world where people are seen to become old much earlier than in Dr. Henshawe's milieu; the so-called "old men" who sit outside Flo's store, dying slowly of "the foundry disease," may well be younger than Dr. Henshawe, an old woman who embodies a middle-class ideal of aging well by appearing not to age (5).

Far from being a reliable measure of identity, chronological age is shown to have very different meanings in different social contexts.

While the text emphasizes age identity as contingent on class positioning, its affluent characters are not reliably aligned with any uncomplicated concept of maturity or adulthood. When Rose's wealthy fiancé Patrick quarrels with his sisters, their voices strike her as "astonishingly childish. . . . They had never had to defer and polish themselves and win favour in the world . . . and that was because they were rich" (81). A similar developmental instability characterizes Rose's fellow scholarship students at university: the girls are "stooped and matronly," the boys "babyish-looking. . . . It seemed to be the rule that girl scholarship winners looked about forty and boys about twelve" (76). In reality, the scholarship winners are young adults close in age to Patrick and his sisters, yet despite the fact that they have clearly spent considerable effort in polishing themselves and winning favour, this has not resulted in the attainment of an identity more reliably "mature" than those born to a life of privilege. Indeed, their over-eager compliance with the narrative of maturation that identifies growing up with moving up results in a maturity that signifies as "docility," and whose apparent privilege brings no authority, but only dependence on the charity of others (76). Foregrounding the way in which class difference complicates perceptions of chronological age, the text makes visible the economic disparities among people of the same generational cohort.

In its emphasis on the social and economic differences that mediate perceptions of age and individual development, Munro's text participates in an emerging psychological critique of the class-bound nature of the Eriksonian theory of identity formation that underpins the midlife crisis narrative. The late 1970s and early 1980s witnessed a shift among some psychologists from treating Erikson's concept of developmental "crisis" as a "deep-seated psychological universal" to recognizing that its successful resolution required a degree of choice and personal autonomy that rendered it "inappropriate for marginal and economically underprivileged groups" (Slugoski and Ginsburg 38). In Munro's text, the universalist view is represented by Rose's friend Jocelyn, who, in the story "Mischief," voices the opinion that "going to a psychiatrist was something that everybody should do at developing or adjusting stages of life" (119). The text presents Jocelyn's devotion to psychotherapy and its vocabulary of "developing stages" (or crises) as an ineluctable marker of her middle-class background, and her assumption that its tenets are applicable to "everybody" indicates her uncritical belief in the universal nature of her own experience. That the

working-class Rose has "difficulty" in "catching the tone" of Jocelyn's use of the discourse of developmental psychology registers her own sense of exclusion from it, and undermines its claims to universality (136).

It is in the story "Simon's Luck" that Munro specifically interrogates the midlife crisis as a developmental narrative that claims its applicability to all people in middle age. The story is focused on a party that Rose attends during a stint as a contract instructor undertaken to supplement her uncertain income as an actress. The host is a professor whose radical reshaping of his life suggests a desire to prolong his youth, and conforms to the kind of "familiar pattern" that often comes to mind at the mention of the midlife crisis (Jaques 511): "Only three years younger than Rose, but look at him. He had shed a wife, a family, a house, a discouraging future, set himself up with new clothes and new furniture and a succession of student mistresses" (167). The story's attention to details like the man's "velvet jumpsuit" and the décor of his apartment, its "jukebox, barbershop mirrors [and] old silk lampshades," posits the midlife crisis as nothing so much as an exercise in consumption that purports to be a natural characteristic of middle age, but whose potentially liberating aspects are in fact available only to the middle-class men who can afford it (165). The resentful narratorial aside "Men can do it" aligns Rose with the man's abandoned wife and family in a way that exposes the midlife crisis narrative of age-based anxiety as a convenient means to naturalize masculine self-indulgence and irresponsibility (167). If this man makes Rose aware of her lack of access to a similar means of escape from a "discouraging future" of her own, this is attributable at least as much to the class/gender nexus that has limited her educational opportunities and consigned her to a lower economic status as it is to her position in middle age alone.

The possibility that the cultural preoccupation with age anxiety functioned to provide affluent men with a convenient justification to act on marital dissatisfaction is reinforced when Rose refers to the "middle-age crisis" as a possible reason why her ex-lover Clifford wants to leave his wife; Clifford's response, however, decouples his restlessness from his position in middle age: "I've been going through this ever since I was twenty-five. I've wanted out ever since I got in" (135). In contrast to the way in which an age-conscious culture invokes chronological age in order to divide identity over time into discrete segments, Clifford's insistence on continuities between himself at twenty-five and in middle age issues a particular challenge to how the theory of the midlife crisis isolates specific ages in the middle years as

triggering a radical and frightening break with young adulthood. The text similarly repudiates this narrative of disjunction by representing Rose's own midlife as a time when the recognition of continuities within the self enables the acceptance of change.

Martin argues that it is precisely through their "insistent focus on change" that Munro's stories figure the acceptance of the aging self (83); in *Who Do You Think You Are?*, however, this is accompanied by an equally insistent focus on continuity. Gerald Lynch's definition of the short story cycle as a genre particularly suited to registering tensions between "contrary pressures" suggests the extent to which the form of Munro's text enables its representation of aging into midlife as a process of negotiating the competing forces of continuity and disjunction (18). Individual stories often emphasize the way in which temporal existence produces baffling discrepancies between present and past selves: in "Royal Beatings," the young Rose struggles to see a resemblance between the "malicious" Becky Tyde, "a big-headed loud-voiced dwarf" who makes regular visits to Flo's store, and the portrayal of Becky in local gossip as the "mute" victim of her father's alleged abuse of her in childhood (8, 10). The dislocations of aging are stressed again at the end of the story, which leaps ahead in time to show the middle-aged Rose listening to a radio interview with a venerated old man whom she eventually recognizes as a local thug remembered from her Hanratty childhood. His transformation from "horsewhipper into centenarian" signifies the incongruity of identity as it changes over time, yet this discontinuity is countered by the middle-aged Rose's persistent ability to marvel at it, just as she did as a child observing the incongruities of Becky Tyde (25). This continuity between Rose's childhood and midlife selves is reinforced by the structure of the book as a whole, whose chronological ordering makes visible those aspects of her character that remain consistent well into adulthood.

The consistency of Rose's subjectivity as she ages is an important aspect of the book's interrogation of contemporary age ideology, since it is located in particular qualities that work to articulate an alternative narrative to that of the midlife crisis. For example, a susceptibility to surprise is an aspect of Rose's character that remains consistent throughout the book, and provides a critique of the language of predictability characteristic of the midlife crisis narrative. For example, Sheehy's text, subtitled *Predictable Crises of Adult Life*, is indicative of how the popular literature of midlife invokes chronological age as a source of both anxiety and reassurance, as something that enables people to prepare themselves for the onset of midlife

trauma by predicting the age at which it will most likely occur. Sheehy's emphasis on predictability as a panacea for midlife anxiety could not be more different from Munro's habitual "fascination with the unpredictability of everyday life" that manifests itself in what Ajay Heble terms a "poetics of surprise" discernible throughout her fiction (122). The recurrence of surprise in *Who Do You Think You Are?* functions specifically to challenge popular conceptions of midlife as either utterly predictable or debilitatingly traumatic. Rose's childhood intuition that "life [is] altogether a series of surprising developments" forecasts her later ability to regard the changes that attend her aging as an ongoing and unpredictable source of interest that can be both gratifying and unsettling (40).

Christopher Miller has theorized the dual nature of surprise as a phenomenon that "encompasses both discomfort *and* pleasure" ("Jane" 253, emphasis in original). The emphasis on surprise in Munro's text thus provides a welcome alternative to the affective climate of fear and anxiety with which the midlife crisis narrative invests awareness of middle age. When the middle-aged Rose inspects the County Home for the Aged prior to placing Flo there, Munro's text substitutes surprise for the "narcissism" and "aggression" that, according to Kathleen Woodward, have traditionally characterized encounters between the middle-aged and the old in Western literature (77). Rose's tour of the facility starts on the ground floor among the alert and able-bodied and proceeds to the top floor where "you might get some surprises" (195). One such surprise comes when Rose is introduced to a blind old woman who communicates only by spelling out words spoken by the people around her, including the one that Rose offers, the optimistic "celebrate" (196). By grouping this woman among the "surprises" that Rose finds in the County Home, Munro's text conveys Rose's initial consternation at what she sees, but in a way that also encompasses the sense of wonderment, celebration, and possibility that the encounter elicits from her. For DeFalco, this scene is significant for its insistence on the "incomprehensible, yet undeniable, personhood" of a woman in deep old age (84), but it also has important implications for the representation of Rose's middle age: her ability to move beyond her initial feelings of revulsion and despair and recognize the old woman's personhood indicates her departure from a prevailing midlife narrative that reduces the aged body to a trauma-inducing harbinger of the middle-aged subject's own future.

Rose's life is punctuated by other moments of surprise whose repetition provides reassurance of the continuity of her identity as she moves into

middle age. For example, as a newly separated woman living as a single mother, she discovers a "surprising amount of comfort" in the domestic chores she has to do in addition to her job at a radio station (148). Later on, when the sight of some dishes in a diner signals to Rose the return of her ability to appreciate the ordinary world after being unhappily in love, she is "surprise[d]" to discover that she "so much wanted, required, everything to be there for her, thick and plain as ice-cream dishes" (182). As midlife discoveries that conform to Miller's definition of surprise as "the sudden admixture of the mundane with the pleasurable," these moments run counter to the figuration of middle age as precipitating a frightening awareness of rupture from a former, more youthful self ("Jane" 242). Rose's receptivity to surprise, and her propensity to surprising others, is by no means figured as unambiguously positive: after breaking up with her fiancé, it is her inability to resist the desire to "surprise him with his happiness" by reinitiating their relationship that leads directly to their disastrous marriage (103). It is simply the recurrence of surprises in Rose's life, whether gratifying or unpleasant, that facilitates for readers a productive conception of how her identity in some part remains consistent despite the changes of aging. In contrast to models of midlife that rely on chronological age to tell us what to expect and when to expect it as they measure our increasing distance from youth, Munro foregrounds Rose's susceptibility to surprise in a way that locates the continuity of her identity in the recurrent, unanticipated apprehension of a familiar response to the world.

It is the social, dialogic aspect of surprise as something that both "com[es] from within and seiz[es] the self from without" (Miller, "Wordsworth's" 413) that enables Munro to represent the continuity of subjectivity in a way quite different from models of selfhood, pervasive in aging studies, that locate that continuity in an interior, unchanging, essentially youthful identity that is concealed behind the "mask" of the aging body (Featherstone and Hepworth 371). As DeFalco observes, "this insistence on 'core' youthful selves betrays the dread of change that provokes aging subjects to reject an altered self rather than admit to transformative identity" in which both change and continuity can be accommodated (6). Munro's text indeed draws attention to how the pervasive alignment of youth with the notion of a "true" self at times threatens to inhibit Rose's acceptance of her altered self in midlife. For example, as Rose freshens up in front of a mirror before the party in "Simon's Luck," she is discomfited by the presence in the room of the hostess, a young graduate student named Shelley. In contrast to Rose, whose "reddish

brown hair was dyed at home," Shelley is described as a "true blond" (164). This choice of words would seem to confirm the characterization of aging as a descent into artificiality, the loss of a more authentic, youthful identity. Other details, however, disrupt this apparent privileging of the authenticity of youth: Shelley's hair is further described as "thick and straight as if cut from a block of wood" (164); the image yokes together two organic yet disparately textured substances whose combination is strikingly artificial. Shelley's "waif-style" vintage outfit elicits the narrator's appraisal that "such clothes took looking for," indicating that the young woman's appearance is as carefully contrived as Rose's own (164). Rose worries that her own dress is "wrongly youthful," but this is qualified by the supposition that "perhaps she was not slim enough to wear that style" (164). The comparison introduces a note of conjecture into the well-worn satiric narrative of the aging woman desperately trying to look young; also, by reminding us that Rose was never slim, even as a young girl, it complicates the way in which the narrative initially appears to privilege age as the primary difference between the two women. Subtly destabilizing the presumed superiority of youth, Munro challenges the inevitability of age anxiety, and creates an atmosphere in which acceptance of the aging body becomes possible. Looking into the mirror, Rose sees "lines [running] both ways under her eyes, trapping little diamonds of darkened skin" (164), and the description encourages readers to see value, rather than deterioration, in the marks of aging by connecting them with materials suggestive of great worth.

By the end of the story Rose no longer seems troubled by her aging. She is helped in this by landing steady work on a television series that requires her to play a character older than she is. As he applies special aging techniques to her face, the make-up man "joke[s] that if the series [is] a success and [runs] for a few years, these techniques [will no longer] be necessary" (183). The idea that the marks of aging on Rose's face, which for the time being have to be approximated with cosmetics, will eventually become real, overturns the "mask of ageing" trope which identifies authenticity with a youthful interior self concealed within a deteriorating bodily facade (Featherstone and Hepworth 371). Instead, this moment in Munro's text would seem to evoke Barbara Frey Waxman's figuration of aging as a process of "ripening," in which the subject journeys toward "personal authenticity" (59) and the assumption in middle age of a "new, truer self" (19). Yet a closer look suggests the way in which this scene invests midlife with value without reproducing the prejudice implicit in the notion that certain stages in life

are more "true" or authentic than others. To her colleagues on the show, Rose remarks that she is "getting the distinct feeling of being made of old horsehide," and "slap[s] her creased brown neck" for emphasis (183). This articulation of midlife resilience, far from signalling the emergence of a "truer self" in middle age, actually shows Rose "beginning to adopt some of the turns of phrase, the mannerisms, of the character she was to play" (183). In contrast to the idea of "ripening" that assigns value to midlife only by framing it as more authentic than youth, Rose's appreciation of her middle-aged self is grounded in the persistence of her life-long attraction to assuming multiple, simultaneous identities through acting. The text thus provides readers with a model of midlife that rejects notions of an essential, interior self that either stays the same or improves, and instead figures midlife subjectivity as both continuous and open to multiplicity and change.

Munro's text privileges an understanding of selfhood in middle age as a combination of stability and transformation, and represents Rose's midlife in more constructive terms than previous critics have claimed. Susan J. Warwick is critical of the multiplicity that defines Rose's subjectivity, arguing that her "assumption of roles and poses implies the failure of knowing 'who she is'," and signifies her "lack of a fully developed sense of self" (220). Ildikó de Papp Carrington's similar perception of Rose as an "arrested adolescent" (137) is perhaps attributable to Rose's midlife capacity for surprise, given the extent to which "the fading of surprise from life" is assumed to be an expected feature of aging (Miller, "Jane" 247). This critical condemnation of Rose's "failure to 'grow up'" (Warwick 219) suggests the pervasiveness of what Margaret Morganroth Gullette identifies as Western literature's "master narrative" of midlife that identifies maturity with disillusionment, and is an indication of how far Rose's story departs from such a narrative (148). Gullette's important work on midlife fiction supplies a context for reading *Who Do You Think You Are?* as part of a larger canon of texts that answered a growing demand for optimistic midlife narratives as baby boomers began to enter adulthood in increasing numbers in the 1970s. While Gullette goes so far as to claim the emergence of the "progress novel" as a new genre that "overthrow[s] the traditional view that the middle years are a time of devolution," we have already seen how Munro's text exposes the limitations of concepts like "progress" which, like "ripening," imagines aging into midlife as a process of inexorable improvement (xiii). The figuration of aging as progress may well enable a life narrative that "dares to prize the middle years more than earlier stages," but its failure to encompass the losses

and challenges that can accompany the transition into old age threatens to displace the anxieties about change and finitude that characterize the midlife crisis onto a later stage of life (Gullette 5). Munro's text suggests that the key to entering midlife with equanimity does not lie in any conviction that the middle-aged self is an improvement over a younger self, but in the recognition of these selves as both different and the same. Importantly, this view is characterized as one that can potentially be sustained into later life: when Rose visits Flo in the County Home, readers are invited to see in Flo's "obstinate and demanding" behaviour an exaggerated yet recognizable version of the "willful [and] stubborn" younger woman they have already come to know (DeFalco 83). If this scene, as others have pointed out, shows the importance of recognizing the continuing humanity of those radically altered by old age, my focus on how aging is represented across the text as a whole suggests the extent to which this ethical response to the old is linked to Rose's ability to recognize and appreciate continuities within herself as she ages into midlife.

Given that Rose achieves a hard-won if momentary sense of connection with her stepmother, an old woman altered almost to the point of being unrecognizable, it is significant that the text does not include any such connection between the middle-aged Rose and her own daughter, Anna. Perhaps this testifies to how the differences between the young and the middle-aged were conceptualized at the time in particularly crude and adversarial terms. Written in the wake of the famous dictum "Don't trust anyone over thirty"[2] that worked to legitimize prejudice against the middle-aged and suppressed the differences within what was actually a diverse group of people, Munro's challenge to the dominance of chronological age as an index of identity protests the reductiveness of defining people by the number of their years. The teenaged Anna's icy remoteness toward her mother reminds Rose of her ex-mother-in-law, Anna's grandmother; while mother and daughter apparently remain estranged for the rest of the book, this chain of associations nonetheless crosses generational boundaries in a way that invites readers to recognize age identity as shifting and unstable, and to question an atmosphere in which the divisions between youth and middle age are seen as natural and absolute. Insisting on the continuities between age groups, as well as the differences within age groups, that a narrative like the midlife crisis elides, Munro's text invites us to reconsider the centrality of chronological age to our perception of who we think we are.

NOTES

1 Listed by a Library of Congress survey as "one of the 10 most influential books of our time," *Passages* spent over three years on the *New York Times* bestseller list and was translated into twenty-eight languages ("Gail Sheehy Bio").

2 Commenting on the "prejudice against adults" that created a "big problem about how to be an adult in this period," Munro attributes this dictum to Abbie Hoffman (Sheila Munro 209). The phrase was apparently coined by UC Berkeley student activist Jack Weinberg.

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rob mclennan

from Hark, a journal: 1635–1863

for Christine,

Today I am not writing, I am seeing to the house of writing, and you are there, in the garden light.
—Edith Dahan, *Crosscut Universe: Writing on Writing from France* (2000)

Prague, 1660

What she felt so deeply, equestrian plunge. I have learned what to suppress. Death is always imagined. For mud bleeds through cobblestone. I skip horse-pucks, a river of paper. I tell you, I frightened. The question of loss of a colour. Is a man, any one, not a country? A big chair, a stone. Withdraw, she withdraws herself. The story was never mine. It has no longer appropriate space.

Madrid, 1640

Leap year, a Sunday, a Wednesday. Velazquez. Sweeping sentences, sentences, bells. Genres that clear such a high fence, and gored. Intervene, a good verse, bullfight, a wellspring of sometimes. Reflections, we play at it. Ambiguous fictions. Aesop and desire, a discursive slice. More suffocating, breathsong, a space. We love, live at it. Echoes, they lessen. A lesson.

Ramsgate, 1775

Harbour construction, grandfather remembers. Mentions. St. Augustine, sinks. Port unknown, whatsis. Silent, lists should consider. Silts, a veritable sting. Port town of another language. Liquid. If I repeat this articulated. Bridge crossing river. A sailor-man, merchant. He will register forever, pictured in ecstasy. Another Page, turns. Hardscrabble, nothing.

Shipwreck, 1710

A stone in soft water, fragment. This truncating silence. The story of dissolute, image-based. What we put in our mouths. I accepted the rules of the game. Vessels sunk, floundered, or otherwise lost. Like me, we are beautiful. A terror lament, and the loss of good liquor. What these tales told at sea, was an ocean. Three little words. Heavy surf, forcing hands. We are desert and tiny.

Beijing, 1644

Astonishments: death, as in life. Heart a gulp of fine wine. A commitment to title, first words. This crossroad of lines. Immortal shores, distant. Marking out dynasties. The Forbidden City. Asphyxia, solitude. Launched a thousand ships, broken blood vessels. Harmony, harkened. Supremacy. A radical slowness of sentences, cut. Sleep is a country, a treaty. Relinquish.

Laura Cameron

"The Great Dreams Pass On"
Phyllis Webb's "Struggles of Silence"

"**M**y poems are born out of great struggles of silence," wrote Phyllis Webb in the Foreword to her 1980 volume, *Wilson's Bowl*; "This book has been long in coming. Wayward, natural and unnatural silences, my desire for privacy, my critical hesitations, my critical wounds, my dissatisfactions with myself and the work have all contributed to a strange gestation" (9).[1] In this frequently cited passage, Webb is referring to the fifteen-year publication gap that divides her forty-year career as a poet. She put out two full volumes before *Naked Poems* in 1965 and two full volumes after *Wilson's Bowl* in 1980, but in the interim she produced only a handful of poems that she judged publishable.[2] And yet, although it might have appeared from the outside in this period as though Webb had renounced poetry for good, archival evidence—numerous poem drafts in various states of completion, grant applications outlining the projects that she intended to pursue, and radio scripts elaborating on her creative efforts and ideas—reveals that this was not simply a period of absence or withdrawal. On the contrary, the middle years of Webb's career, her "struggles of silence," were fertile, eventually fruitful, and integral to her poetic development. The interval was characterized by "dissatisfactions" and "hesitations," as Webb says, but also—and just as importantly—by ambition and an intense desire to grow and progress as a poet, to expand her vision and to write poetry, as she described it, of "cosmic proportions."[3]

The creation of *Wilson's Bowl* was "a strange gestation" because Webb's "progeny" did not mature as expected: *Wilson's Bowl* was not the volume that she had initially set out to write. In the late 1960s, she had grand plans

to write a long series called "The Kropotkin Poems," about the nineteenth-century Russian anarchist prince, revolutionary, philosopher, and writer, Peter Kropotkin. Webb says that she has always been a political idealist, and Kropotkin captured her imagination because of his theories of communist anarchism, "the most idealist of all political philosophies" and "his particular dream" ("The Art of Ideas").[4] As she sought to convey *her* poetic vision, what she conceived as a politically meaningful vision of "cosmic proportions," to a wide and receptive audience, Webb was interested in how Kropotkin, the visionary, had sent *his* utopic dreams out into the world. His politics were appealing to her, but she also hoped that he would provide her with a model for the creative development that she desired. "Kropotkin" was a big idea, though, and Webb struggled to capture him in her verse. Her obsession with the "Kropotkin Poems" project grew throughout the 1970s, burdening Kropotkin with an iconic status that, rather than freeing and opening her vision, obstructed it instead. "The Kropotkin Poems" were never realized as Webb had intended, although she threaded some of their remnants into *Wilson's Bowl*. The organization of that volume records Kropotkin's disappearance as the poet let go of the blockage that had held her back for over a decade. Webb's later poetry is revitalized by the accumulation of frustrated creative potential and its powerful release: in other words, by the rhythms of her "struggles of silence" (*WB* 9).

The idea of "silence" has been engrained in the critical discourse surrounding Phyllis Webb ever since her 1970s audience assumed, after five or six years had passed without a new book (aside from a *Selected Poems* volume that seemed retrospective in tone), that her creativity must have dried up. The clues—a certain set of clues, read a certain way, at least—all seemed to indicate the finality of her retreat. Sylvia Plath's suicide in 1963 had, however unfairly, brought the trope of the confessional, suicidal "poetess" to the foreground of the popular imagination. As evidence that Webb might be doomed for a similar fate, a reader mistakenly conflating poetry and biography needed only cite the title of her poem "To Friends Who Have Also Considered Suicide," published just a year earlier in *The Sea Is Also a Garden* (1962). The minimalist *Naked Poems* (1965), too, represented to some a "voluntary impoverishment of poetry" and a "reductive verse-making" that amounted, as George Woodcock put it, "to a kind of suicide" ("Question" 540). When Webb relocated from Toronto to the much more remote Salt Spring Island in 1969, critics such as Woodcock imagined a "growing withdrawal" that was "only in keeping with the solipsistic character of much of her verse" ("Webb"

1642). Moreover, her supposed "failure" to carry off "The Kropotkin Poems" as planned was a very public one: "a small literary legend," she calls it (*WB* 9). Between 1970 and 1972 she talked publicly about the project a great deal; she published some of the poems that she had managed to complete in journals and anthologies and recorded a selection from the series for CBC Radio's *Anthology*.[5] When "The Kropotkin Poems" did not appear in book form, it seemed even to many of Webb's greatest supporters that she had finally given up writing for good.

Meanwhile, postmodernist critics such as Frank Davey were clearing space for a new style of poetry, and so they actually *wanted* to see poets of the older, modernist generation defeated or "silenced." Webb's apparent retreat made her an easy target. In *From There to Here*, an introductory guidebook to Canadian literature that emphasizes "the demise of the modernist period," Davey argues that in Webb's poetry, "the modernist's rejection of the secular and material and his campaign to purify the language have reached their ultimate end. Beyond lie only suicide and silence" (19, 264).[6] The "culmination of her work," Davey says, "has been the brief, understated and ironic *Naked Poems* (1965) and the seven years of silence that have followed" (262). Of course, such a view was clearly no longer tenable after the publication of *Wilson's Bowl*, and critics have been working ever since to heal Webb's reputation from attacks such as Davey's (as well as an earlier, longer, and much more vicious one by John Bentley Mays):[7] what she called her "critical wounds" (*WB* 9). Feminist critics in particular have sought to emphasize Webb's productive emergence from a "silence" brought on by "the inherited logos of a patriarchal culture" (Butling 200). Most recently, Stephen Collis has offered a compelling revision of Webb's career by arguing that it is not reclusiveness but responsiveness—to influences, conventions, and to the real world—that characterizes her oeuvre. Such work has certainly begun to complicate the idea of "silence" so easily associated with this poet. It is important, though, even when bringing her back from "silence," not to downplay the crucial role of that middle period in Webb's creative process. It was the *silence*, or her very sense of failure and frustration, that energized the new voice Webb was to develop.

Perhaps counterintuitively, the beginning of Webb's prolonged period of silence is characterized not by retreat or renunciation but by energy and hope. Webb announced the new directions she would like her poetry to take as early as 1962, in "Poetics against the Angel of Death," a playful mini-manifesto that turns ironically on the speaker's self-criticism to describe

with increasing confidence her efforts to "elude" the suffocating shadow of male, Western literary tradition. Many critics have remarked that this poem looks ahead to the formal changes that Webb would pursue over the following two decades. The speaker declares that she would like "to die / writing Haiku," which was notably a form that Webb approached in the short, pared-down *Naked Poems*, "or," she continues, "better, / long lines, clean and syllabic as knotted bamboo." However, this was an objective that would prove much harder to carry out. Webb also outlines a conceptual concern in "Poetics Against the Angel of Death": her growing distaste for the hierarchical, patriarchal "attitude / of private Man speaking to public men" (*Sea Is Also* 39). In both the *Naked Poems* and "The Kropotkin Poems," Webb endeavoured to develop poetic forms that could decentre the authority of that "private Man." In Kropotkin's model of theoretical anarchism, she hoped to find a way in which a private, individual poet could engage with a wide public from a non-authoritarian perspective. She set out in 1962 with a sense of excitement—the poem concludes with an emphatic "Yes!"—but these were projects that would direct and consume all of her creative efforts for many years to come.

Webb concretized the ambitions described in her "manifesto" poem in an application to the Canada Council in the winter of 1963, when she sought funding to work on "two new books."[8] The first became *Naked Poems*—"a small volume of small poems." The second was to be titled "Scorpion and Bull," and it would, she wrote, be a "book of big poems" that would "show evidence of new verse techniques." In this "big" book lie the origins of "The Kropotkin Poems" project. Webb's ideas for "Scorpion and Bull" were very substantial indeed—certainly not the plans of a poet in retreat. It was to be a book of "social satire" and "serious poetry of somewhat cosmic proportions." Although the enthusiastic and assured tone is probably due in part to the fact that this is a grant application, the scope of the project expresses Webb's passionate desire to progress, "to move onto new territory," to expand her world view and to write poetry of wide, even universal significance: poetry of "cosmic proportions."

Webb was awarded the grant and set to work immediately on the *Naked Poems*. She wrote "almost eighty" of the "very small" poems in the summer of 1963, and then departed on an extended research trip to begin work on the "Scorpion and Bull" volume. Yet as the excitement and momentum of the summer faded and the reality of the "big" project set in, Webb faltered. She began to wonder if she had not become, as she put it, "the victim of a

self-delusion" and if she had not simply fooled herself into believing that she could realize such a large-scale project. Her final report on the tenure of the 1963-1964 award comments poignantly on her difficulties:

> On the whole this has been a period of great doubt, which is possibly the necessary preliminary to that revolution in my work which I feel must come. I speak both of technique and vision. I have become temporarily dumb because there is so much to be said and the issues are too big.[9]

Webb's ambition was, it seemed, getting the better of her. Her muteness came not because there was too little to say, but because there was too much.

"Scorpion and Bull" would never come together as Webb had proposed it in 1963. But four years later, in the summer of 1967 on a much-needed leave of absence from her hectic work as executive producer of the CBC program *Ideas*, the figure of Kropotkin came to her "through books and dreams"[10] and Webb began work on "The Kropotkin Poems." She wrote feverishly at first, and within a few months she had completed the "Poems of Failure," which were meant as a preface to the series (and which were eventually published as the "Preface" section of *Wilson's Bowl*).[11] In September of 1968, Webb applied for a grant to write "a book titled *The Kropotkin Poems*," explaining that "the undertaking [is] very complex indeed" and "the subject matter . . . requires immense research."[12] Having left behind one ambitious poetic project, Webb was suddenly absorbed in another. In 1970, a second succession of poems related to the Kropotkin theme "erupted,"[13] some of which were later published in *Wilson's Bowl* and some of which remain unpublished. But Webb's productivity waned over the following year. There are several drafts and fragments in the Phyllis Webb *fonds* at Library and Archives Canada that were clearly meant to be part of the series but were never finished. One last poem, left untitled and published in *Wilson's Bowl* as simply "from *The Kropotkin Poems*," was written in 1971.[14] Any momentum that Webb had enjoyed after the initial inception of the project had dissipated by that point, and she was left feeling discouraged and overwhelmed.

While the mental and artistic blockage caused by the unfinished "Kropotkin Poems" was probably what prevented Webb from taking on any major new poetic projects for most of the 1970s, she still remained deeply preoccupied with the creative process. In order to probe the nature of her struggles, Webb studied as many models of creativity as she could: in her radio talks, in her prose, and in the poem drafts that she did manage to write in the period. These poems articulate, often quite frankly, the agonizing feeling of creative impasse: "My mind rustles the pages of books / for

sentences I would like to write. / . . . Everything has been said. / Everything has been done. / The grammar of it chokes me."[15] Such poems might have begun as exercises, in the hope that the act of writing itself would unfreeze her and pull her into new material, but they do not tend to express any consistent progress (which is probably why they were left unpublished). Webb was imprisoned by her own sense of failure, confined by the unrealized potential of her incomplete projects, and "choke[d]" by her very efforts to grow and move forward.

As much as the highly innovative *Naked Poems* had been intended to liberate the poet's voice—Webb said that she wanted to "see what my basic rhythms were; how I *really* speak" (*Talking* 47)—they too threaten limitation and captivity." The word "room," which is central to the structure of the sequence, implies a simultaneous withdrawal and release. The vast white spaces dominating the pages suggest that the poetry has "room" to move; but they also isolate the little poems, as though each is alone in a "room." Webb ultimately wanted to confront much bigger topics than the intimate subjects and small spaces of *Naked Poems* would allow. One of the speakers is "listening for / the turn of the tide" (Webb, *Vision Tree* 88)[16]—waiting and listening for some great, global sea-change that would occur outside of her little "room." Webb wanted poetry—*her* poetry—to have such far-reaching effects. Even while she worked on the *Naked Poems* Webb remained obsessed with the bigger project she saw on the horizon: the "long poems" and "more complicated" subject matter that she was going to "go on to" next, as she told Dorothy Livesay in 1964 (*Talking* 47-48). She was clearly concerned that the private voice of the *Naked Poems* could not communicate a message large enough for anyone to hear; as one speaker remarks, "I have given up / complaining // but nobody notices" (*Vision Tree* 92). She feared self-absorption (the opposite of poetry of "cosmic proportions"). The *Naked Poems* stripped away convention and all decoration, but they left the poet feeling trapped inside her own, personal "solipsistic" vision.

"[I]t has been a rather fervent desire of mine for some time," Webb wrote in 1968, "to move from what has been called a 'solipsist' position to a more open one."[17] Choosing to write about Kropotkin, one of the most influential political revolutionaries of nineteenth-century Russia, certainly gestured towards the possibility of such an outward turn. She admired Kropotkin for "the reaches / of his mind so vast and intimate" and strove to emulate his "mind sent out to the people" (*WB* 16), but she also dwelled on his enforced imprisonment. "The Kropotkin Poems" urge a comparison

between Kropotkin, locked up for his beliefs and his revolutionary activities in a cell in the St. Peter and St. Paul fortress, and the poet on Salt Spring Island struggling to realize her creative intentions. An unpublished poem from the series expresses, in an epigraph quoting Shakespeare's *Richard II*, Webb's aim as she struggled to move out from the intimate, lyrical position of the *Naked Poems* towards a broader, worldlier perspective: "I have been studying how I may compare / This prison where I live unto the world."[18] She desired a link, a point of transition, a way of moving from her feeling of individual seclusion to meaningful communion with others, and she hoped that Kropotkin would be her guide.

Webb was legitimately interested in Kropotkin's anarchism as a political and poetic alternative to solipsism, because it promised the unconventionality and the egalitarian sense of engagement that she sought. But by turning Kropotkin into a "guiding spirit," Webb inadvertently silenced his inspirational power and essentially negated the very principles of his politics. Anarchism, Webb noted in a later interview, "is totally unauthoritarian except I had my authority in Kropotkin as a godlike or a Christlike figure. So I wanted to get rid of that" (Webb 34). In one of the unpublished "Kropotkin Poems," the speaker must command Kropotkin to "stand still"[19] as though he is "in a museum" so that she can find something to say about him: "I'll walk around you / and surreptitiously / touch the most / complaining places." She came to think of him as such a "saintly" (*WB* 15) authority that she could not engage with him. Kropotkin became so prominent in her imagination, so "holy" and "embellished," as she writes in the unpublished poem, that she even struggles to "worship" him. Indeed, he "requires / immense study, a / Russian peasant's / lifetime." The enormity of the task was overwhelming. Webb's obsession with capturing Kropotkin in her poetry, instead of guiding her out of herself, only left her trapped behind the feeling that her project had failed. .

The seven prefatory "Poems of Failure" chart the progress of a poet's growing sense of frustrated self-absorption. Kropotkin's presence slips away throughout the series: the first three poems focus on Kropotkin himself—his political theories, his biography, his imprisonment—but the later four are much more concerned with the speaker's efforts to write her own "masterpiece." The seventh and final poem in the series concludes in isolation and defeat:

> The simple profundity of a deadman works
> at my style. I am impoverished. He the White Christ.
> Not a case of identification. Easier to see myself
> in the white cat asleep on the bed. Exile. I live

> alone. I have a phone. I shall go to Russia. One
> more day run round and the 'good masterpiece of work'
> does not come. I scribble. I approach some distant dream.
> I wait for moonlight reflecting on the night sea. I can
> wait. We shall see. (*WB* 23)

The feeling that she is a solipsistic poet lingers. The speaker's sense of exile cannot be overcome; she has a "phone," but even that symbol of connection only leads to the conclusion that she will have to move physically out of her space—"go to Russia"—in order to find Kropotkin. She is more comfortable likening herself to the "white cat asleep on the bed"—a static (sleeping) domestic image. Webb had wanted to leave the domestic style and intimate subject matter behind after the *Naked Poems*, and yet here it attracts her speaker yet again. This style feels "impoverished" before Kropotkin's magnificent, Christlike presence. The near-prose lines might be "long," but they are certainly not "clean and syllabic as knotted bamboo," as she had desired in "Poetics against the Angel of Death" (*Sea Is Also* 39). They are halting and composed of short, subject-object sentences. Eight of the fifteen sentences in this excerpt begin with "I," an obsessive repetition that disrupts the flow. The "I" impedes vision: the speaker wants to reach Kropotkin's "distant dream"—*his* vision—but she cannot see past her own "I." Similarly, the experience of trying to render Kropotkin poetically left Webb even more conscious of the limitations of her own "I"—the so-called "'solipsist' position"—and perhaps even more frustrated with her sense of creative failure.

In order to resume writing and to regain confidence in her work, Webb had to find a way to reconcile her art and her political world view. "The cessation of poetry," Stephen Collis observes, was for Webb "a deeply philosophical issue, and a direct extension of [her] anarchism" (98). As Roger Farr proposes, developing an "anarchist poetics" might mean allowing a creative project to "fail," in a certain sense. "If artistic success, like the teleological model of historical 'progress,' involves the 'completion' and 'arrival' of a finalizing state(ment), . . . then 'The Kropotkin Poems' are quite self-consciously resigned to their failure," Farr explains (70). One way for a poet to divest herself of the obligations imposed by authority is for her poetry to "fail," or, according to Farr's model, to remain incomplete. *Wilson's Bowl* provides a forum in which the fragments of the "The Kropotkin Poems" can remain incomplete forever, even as they are legitimated by a book publication. "Failure" is thus validated as an essential part of the poetic process. Webb learned to value this process over closure and finality. In an interview with Leila Sujir she explains, "If you fail,

you presuppose that something can be achieved or perfected. And if you don't set up any proposition about success, perfection, completion, then you're not going to wind up with an idea of failure. You're going to end up with process" (Webb 41). Releasing the contained and obstructed energy of obsession, of frustrated ambition, is the "process" recorded in *Wilson's Bowl*: the *productive* process of Phyllis Webb's "struggles of silence" (9).

The organization of *Wilson's Bowl* enacts a release of Kropotkin and of the project that had consumed the poet over so many years. Just as Kropotkin's presence fades throughout the seven "Poems of Failure," his influence disappears in a broader sense over the book's five sections. The first section, the "Preface," contains simply the "Poems of Failure" as they were written in 1967. The second section, "Portraits," and the third, "Crimes," are composed of eight poems each, and in both cases, the first four are drawn from the original "Kropotkin Poems." The fourth section, titled "Artifacts," comprises only the "Wilson's Bowl" sequence, written between 1977 and 1980, and the final section, "Dreams and the Common Good," is almost entirely made up of new material written in 1978 or later.[20] Webb thus quite deliberately illustrates the process of writing herself out of "The Kropotkin Poems" and into *Wilson's Bowl*. The energy of letting Kropotkin go was the same energy that opened up her vision and allowed her to move on to new projects.

The "Question of Questions" series, placed right in the middle of the "Crimes" section of *Wilson's Bowl*,[21] consists of five poems that investigate the politics and power dynamics of the "question" to express just this shift away from a desire for programmatic knowledge and power—"completion"—towards a state of openness that allows such "letting go" or release to occur. Part V of "A Question of Questions" (*WB* 52-53) is dedicated to R. D. Laing, whose book on psychology, *The Self and Others*, Webb quotes in her "Notes to the Poems" at the end of the volume. Laing describes the shared task of the therapist and the "Zen Master": both recognize that people suffer because of "the state of desire they are in, whereby they posit the existence of 'an answer' and are frustrated because they do not seem to be getting it" (qtd. in *WB* 87). The speaker in Webb's poem knows in theory that "[t]he error lies in / the state of desire / in wanting the answer," but she seems, at first, unable to help herself. She is constantly "wanting" things: "wanting the red-crested / woodpecker to pose / among red berries / of the ash tree / wanting its names / its habitations / the instinct of its ways." She desires knowledge (the woodpecker's "names" and "habitations"), control (to dictate how it should "pose"), and the ability ("instinct") to reach answers.

The "red-crested / woodpecker" is the speaker's therapist-Zen Master who frees her from these desires. Webb notes, in her 1972 radio talk, "Calamities and Crystals: Poetry, Fate and the Unconscious," that this poem "hints at a deliverance from self, the pileated woodpecker replacing my head with an instinctive wisdom I have long sought and long evaded."[22] The speaker is struck by the bird's wisdom at the end of the first stanza: "whiteflash of underwings / dazzling all questions / out of me, amazement / and outbreathing / become a form / of my knowing." The gerunds evoke the suspended motion of instinctual "knowing" in the single "dazzling" moment. In the next stanza, the bird follows the speaker as she "keep[s] walking. / Trying to think." Finally it "flies off / with [her] head," and she is, as Webb's comments suggest, delivered from herself. "Knowing," in this new state, does not require "[t]rying to think"; it can be as simple as "amazement." The woodpecker itself is a source of comfort to the speaker because it exemplifies that intuitive way of knowing, available only after she has given up "thinking" and stopped "wanting the answer." Webb surrenders the authority of the "answer" just as she surrenders the authority of the successful, completed poetic project, and in so doing, she transforms the "silence" that follows in the wake of failing to respond to a question (or failing to bring a creative work to fruition) into a transitional moment preceding new knowledge—or new work.

The first substantial "new work" that came to Webb following her struggles with Kropotkin in the late 1960s and very early 1970s was "Wilson's Bowl." The sequence of short poems concerns the (real) tragic suicides, less than a year apart (in 1976 and 1977), of Webb's friend Lilo Berliner, and a correspondent of Lilo's, the anthropologist Wilson Duff.[23] Webb wrote the first poems of the series in 1977, just one week after Lilo's death; they were, as she says in her "Notes to the Poems," her "attempt to deal with Lilo's obsessions and death" (*WB* 88). Between 1977 and 1980, she wrote as much "publishable" poetry as she had produced over the entire previous decade. Taking up the personal tragedy as a subject reanimated her sense of struggle, and also forced her to move beyond a very real "failure"—Lilo's suicide—and even to seek creative inspiration in it.[24]

The speaker in "Wilson's Bowl" develops a more open and engaged relationship with guiding figures than Webb had felt with Kropotkin.[25] In a four-line prelude to the sequence, Lilo's voice, enclosed in single quotation marks, intones, "You may read my signs / but I cross my path / and show you nothing / on your way" (*WB* 61). Lilo presents herself as a guide who has left "signs"—presumably signs for understanding her death—but she will

"show" her interlocutor "nothing": reading the signs is making "your way," not hers. Accepting this mysterious challenge requires the receptiveness to unanswered questions epitomized by the woodpecker in "A Question of Questions." "What was the path she took? / As winding as her gut / with the pain in it? / Along the beach? / To the caves in the hill?" (*WB* 68). There are no answers; the questions themselves lead the poem forward.

Following "guides" in "Wilson's Bowl" can actually be dangerous. In Webb's poem "In this Place" (66), the evil, "mean spirits" of Salt Spring Island are misleading. They "chitter" and "scrabble radio waves," complicating the delivery of messages through the air: "At full moon / they come down on the rocks / of the sea's shore / deliver such messages: / are not gone. / We quake. We draw curtains / against the word's blaze." Fearful and overwhelmed by the "messages" of the "voices" in this poem, the speaker and her companion ("we") "quake" and withdraw, even falling silent for a time, "draw[ing] curtains / against the word's blaze." But when the "we" emerges from the curtained retreat, it is divided into "I" and "she": "She goes out on the water / hearing. / Is taken or given / by tides. / I go as far as I can / collaborating in the fame." Both "go" out decisively, but the "I," the speaker, bids farewell to the "she" as though to another part of herself: the part, represented by Lilo, that follows the guiding voices "out on the water" and is enfolded in the pattern of the "tides."

While the Lilo figure is passively "taken or given," "hearing" and following the "messages" of the spirits, the speaker "collaborates." "Collaboration" is a pivotal term for Webb, because it marks a departure from her previous efforts to follow, study, or capture faithfully. In collaborating, this speaker listens to the scrambled messages of the guides to a certain point, but she does not feel compelled to lose herself (by drowning in the ocean) in order to complete the journey. The speaker here, unlike in the seventh "Poem of Failure," does not dwell on the fact that she "can" only go so "far"; she recognizes that her restraint saves her from Lilo's ultimate fate. She "collaborates" to a point in the "fame" or dramatic nature of Lilo's death, just as she participated in the "fame" or "small literary legend" (*WB* 9) of "The Kropotkin Poems," but in the end she has to let both stories rest, both "failures" fade, and both guiding figures go on.

One of the titles that Webb considered for *Wilson's Bowl* when she was preparing the manuscript was "The Great Dreams Pass On." She liked "Wilson's Bowl" "for its utter prosaicness,"[26] but "The Great Dreams Pass On" would certainly have been an appropriate alternative. In the volume's

final poem, "The Days of the Unicorns," a detached speaker watches as a herd of unicorns "mov[es] on . . . beyond the story"—away from her "private property"—just as the "the great dreams pass on / to the common good." The unicorns represent Webb's past idols (such as Kropotkin); the "great dreams," her poetic ambitions from twenty years earlier. The speaker is fond of these "delicate beast[s]" and dazzled by their "jewelled / horns," and she thinks of them nostalgically. But their presence, as she remembers it, could also be stifling, demanding: "It seemed they were always near / ready to show their eyes and stare / us down, standing in their creamy / skins, pink tongues out / for our benevolence" (*WB* 84-85). As Ann Mandel notes in her review of the volume, when the unicorns and the great dreams "pass on," they leave us "to our own stories" (89).

This sense of resolution should not suggest conclusion. In fact, to say that would be to erase the essential emphasis on "process" that came out of the long period of struggle. After *Wilson's Bowl*, Webb wrote first a chapbook and then a full volume of *ghazals*, a form that is motivated by "contrasts, dreams, astonishing leaps" (Thompson 5). These "leaps" in logic mean that "silence" must be a tool in the *ghazal*—the principle of progression. Webb builds energy and then releases it, jumping from one couplet to the next. The form, described this way, sounds ideal; and yet even the *ghazals* were not an "answer" or an ending. In fact, Webb told Eleanor Wachtel in 1983 that they were "a transitional thing" for her. "A little bit superficial perhaps. Before I go into the cave again for the big spiritual stuff" (Webb qtd. in Wachtel 14). She recognizes—indeed, not long after coming *out* of the cave for the first time—the ongoing *process* of her poetic development.

Periods in "the cave," or "struggles of silence," were absolutely necessary to Webb's continued creativity. Her prolonged "silence" in the 1970s was defined by an extended and obstructive suspension of her ambitions and "great dreams" of the previous decade. The impetus to assemble *Wilson's Bowl* was provoked by her release of those very projects and ideas. Webb feared that her poetry was narrow in scope and insignificant in import, and as a result she became obsessed with expanding her vision, confronting big topics, and finding appropriate ways to connect her personal, private dreams to much larger global concerns. "Obsessions," Webb has written, "are vital to the creative process, a stalling often, a signalling, a belligerent mental tic" (*Talking* 58). It was, finally, in overcoming the stagnation of "stalled" obsessions that Webb revitalized her creative energies. *Wilson's Bowl* proposes that new beginnings grow out of endings: a new way of seeing grows out of the departure of the old "great

dreams." In "Eschatology of Spring," flowers blossom from the barrel of a gun and "insects divulge occult excrement / in the service of [a] hyacinth" (*WB* 82): a new season emerges from a final summing up, and beauty can be found amid destruction. In Phyllis Webb's poetic career, a new voice grows, old obsessions are laid to rest, and "poems are born out of great struggles of silence" (*WB* 9).

NOTES

1 *Wilson's Bowl* will hereafter be cited parenthetically as *WB*.
2 The early volumes are *Even Your Right Eye* (1956), *The Sea Is Also a Garden* (1962); along with Gael Turnbull and Eli Mandel, Webb also contributed to *Trio: First Poems* (1954). The later volumes are *Water and Light: Ghazals and Anti Ghazals* (1984), and *Hanging Fire* (1990); she also published a chapbook, *Sunday Water*, in 1982. There are also two selected poems volumes, one from 1971 (containing just two new poems) and one from 1982.
3 Phyllis Webb *fonds*, Box 17, Unit 7, folder 2. Report to the Canada Council, 28 August 1963. All archival material quoted in this essay is from the Phyllis Webb *fonds* at Library and Archives Canada, 1983 accession. I will hereafter cite simply the box number, followed by the unit number (and letter, where relevant) and the folder number in parentheses, e.g., "Box 17 (7.2)."
4 Box 15 (5.G.4).
5 The journals and anthologies include *The Canadian Forum* (April-May 1970), *The Tamarack Review* (Summer 1971), *The Capilano Review* (Spring 1972), *Contemporary Poetry of British Columbia* (1970), and *Mountain Moving Day: Poems by Women* (1973). The *Anthology* program was broadcast on 25 June 1970 (Box 15 [5.G.4]).
6 Davey is alluding to Eliot's "Little Gidding," the fourth of the *Four Quartets*, when he writes of "the modernist's campaign to purify language." Eliot is in turn alluding to Mallarmé's "Le tombeau d'Edgar Poe." "Donner un sens plus pur aux mots de la tribu," or "To purify the dialect of the tribe," was what Mallarmé and Eliot believed to be the task of the poet. When Davey mentions "suicide," he is surely thinking of female poets such as Sylvia Plath.
7 See John Bentley Mays, "Phyllis Webb (for Bob Wallace)." *Open Letter* 2.6 (1973): 8-33.
8 Box 17 (7.2). All quotations in this paragraph and the next are from this folder—Webb's application and reports to the Canada Council of 26 February 1963, 28 August 1963, and 8 April 1964.
9 Box 17 (7.2). Report to the Canada Council of 8 April 1964.
10 Box 15 (5.G.4). Roger Farr notes that Webb had probably learned about Kropotkin in the early 1960s when she taught in the English Department of the University of British Columbia along with George Woodcock, who wrote a biography of Kropotkin, *The Anarchist Prince*, published in 1950.
11 Notably, and perhaps surprisingly to readers who have only encountered these poems as they are printed in *Wilson's Bowl*, the series was titled "Poems of Failure" from the beginning (in 1967), and it was always intended as a preface to "The Kropotkin Poems." "Failure" refers to a major theme of the series, and not to Webb's "failure" to finish the volume.
12 Box 17 (7.3).
13 Box 15 (5.G.4).

14 All of the drafts mentioned in this paragraph are in Box 3. See for example 1.A.214, 220, 229, 243, 247, 262, 267; see also Webb's script for her 1970 *Anthology* reading (Box 15 [5.G.4]).
15 Box 3 (1.A.238).
16 I will cite the version of the *Naked Poems* printed in *The Vision Tree: Selected Poems*.
17 Box 17 (7.3).
18 Box 3 (1.A.229). The reference is *Richard II*, V.v.1-2.
19 Box 3 (1.A.269). All following quotations in this paragraph, unless cited otherwise parenthetically, are from that folder, which contains a typescript of an untitled poem beginning "your body's ablaze."
20 All except for "Lines from Gwen. Lines for Ben," which is dated 7 November 1975 in Webb's drafts (Box 3 [1.A.233]). I have been able to locate dated drafts of nearly all of the poems in *Wilson's Bowl*.
21 "A Question of Questions" is literally at the centre of *Wilson's Bowl*: thirty-three pages of poetry precede it and thirty-one pages of poetry follow it. Although some parts of the series were in fact written in July 1970 (see Box 3 [1.A.244]), and therefore they fit chronologically with "The Kropotkin Poems." The placement of the sequence indicates Webb's understanding of its significance in the progression of *Wilson's Bowl* as separate from the earlier project.
22 Box 15 (5.F.17).
23 "Wilson's bowl" is a small basin carved in rock on the beach near Webb's Salt Spring Island home. Berliner discovered it and dedicated it to Duff. The two had formed a strangely intimate bond through an extensive correspondence that Berliner left on Webb's doorstep immediately before walking into the sea in January 1977. Webb included excerpts from their letters in "A Correspondence," an essay published in *Talking*.
24 For more on Webb's productive response to "suicide," see Janice Williamson.
25 Critics such as Pauline Butling and Stephen Scobie have suggested that this growing openness and engagement in Webb's poetry and perspective was also related to a turn towards postmodernism in her writing.
26 Box 10 (4.C.11). Letter to Helen Sonthoff, 22 January 1980.

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Puneet Dutt

Salon

The radio plays
It's too late to apologize
while the old man in orthopedic
shoes sweeps up hair clippings
and curls, and shaming white strands,
with the stick of his red broom,
swishing.
The yesterdays and split-endings
no longer needed, whisper
to him their secrets.
And as the undertaker, he taps
and clears what were once
crowns on the heads of proud winter wheat,
cocoa plant, and ash.

He knows:
mirrors can shatter a face to pieces,
as tearing the flesh of a pod
scatters peas to the wind.
And the shadows stretch
longer here,
but they can't fit into dustpans. They come with us
with the weight of memory.

Patrick Warner

Richard Outram and Barbara Howard's Gauntlet Press

Expanding into the World

Richard Outram was born in Oshawa, Ontario in 1930. A prolific poet, between 1959 and his death in 2005 he published over twenty books of poetry. His output also included pamphlets, broadsides, and occasional pieces. Two of his early books were published by large mainstream publishers: *Exsultate, Jubilate* came out with Macmillan in 1966 and *Turns and Other Poems* was published by Chatto&Windus with the Hogarth Press/ Anson-Cartwright Editions in 1976. At a glance, Outram appears to have had an auspicious start to his career as a poet; neither book, however, attracted much attention. The majority of Outram's books and pamphlets were published either by the Gauntlet Press—the private imprint established by Outram and his wife Barbara Howard—or in trade editions by a variety of small Canadian presses, including Tortoise Press, Aliquando Press, Anson-Cartwright Editions, Exile Editions, The Porcupine's Quill, Food for Thought Books, and The St. Thomas Poetry Series.[1] Poor reception was to dog Outram's poetry for most of his career. It was not until the final years of his life that his work began to draw substantive critical attention. I argue that it was the recipients of the Gauntlet Press publications—the informal network of friends and acquaintances with whom Outram and Howard shared this work—who ultimately proved the most influential in setting the stage for Outram's late-flowering reputation as one of Canada's finest poets.[2]

Richard Outram and Barbara Howard established the Gauntlet Press in Toronto in 1960 when they acquired a small Adana HQ flatbed handpress from England (Sanger 55). There are two phases in the history of the press. The first lasted from 1960 to 1988 and produced fifty-four letterpress items under the Gauntlet Press imprint (Sanger 251). Notable among these were

the book-length collections *Creatures* (1972), *Thresholds* (1973), *Locus* (1974), and *Arbor* (1976), all printed in limited editions of sixty to eighty copies. The second phase in the history of the press began in 1993, after a hiatus of four years, and is generally referred to as the electronic phase. Peter Sanger counts one hundred broadsheets and eight books or pamphlets inkjet-printed between 1993 and 2001, some of which were published under the Gauntlet Press imprint and some not (253).[3] Also produced during the electronic phase was *Ms Cassie*, a work consisting of seventy-seven broadsides that were produced piecemeal, and later assembled into "perhaps eight copies of the entire sequence," all of which were unbound (Howley n. pag.). Subsequent to Outram's death, ninety-two Gauntlet Press works were reproduced in digital form by Memorial University Libraries' Digital Archive Initiative (DAI).

The primary impetus behind the Gauntlet Press was artistic. It allowed Outram and Howard to produce printed works that may not have been economically viable as trade publications. Works produced by the press were, for the most part, designed by Howard and contain the poetry or prose of Outram. Many of the books and broadsides also contain wood engravings by Howard. Outram occasionally turned his hand towards design: Howard notes his contribution to several publications, particularly the "Japanese-style bindings of *Syzygy*, *Tradecraft*, *Peripatetics* and *Eros Descending*" (17). The Press gave both the poet and the artist free rein to pursue what Outram described to Peter Sanger as "the exploration of some of the potencies of the conjunction, the marriage, of word and image" (Sanger 71). It was a philosophy that guided the press during both its letterpress and electronic phases.

Letterpress Gauntlet Press publications were influenced stylistically by the works of other small/fine presses, including the UK's Golden Cockerel Press and the Hogarth Press (Sanger 10). Sanger reports that the Nonesuch edition of John Glanvill's translation of Bernard de Fontenelle's *A Plurality of Worlds*, designed by Francis Meynell in 1929, was "key to the direction they were seeking in terms of design" (71). Gauntlet Press works produced during the press' electronic phase used typographic ornaments from a variety of fonts, with all design works completed in *WriteNow*, a basic word processing application (Howley). Howley notes that Outram and Howard "did briefly flirt with sophisticated page layout programs but found them far too complicated. Instead he and Barbara treated the computer like their old Adana letterpress, the final results only being achieved by multiple passes through the printer!" (n.pag.)

For most of his career, Richard Outram's poetry received little attention from critics and readers: one only needs to consult Amanda Jernigan's

bibliography on Memorial's University's Gauntlet Press website to see how little. Between 1960 and 1970, Outram's work was the subject of a single review: Samuel Moon's 1968 review of *Exsultate, Jubilate* in the American magazine *Poetry*. In the next decade, 1970 to 1980, a period which saw major works from the Gauntlet Press as well as several trade editions of Outram's work, the situation improved only marginally with two published reviews. Outram's work is notably absent from the major anthologies of the time; it is neither in *15 Canadian Poets* edited by Gary Geddes nor in Ralph Gustafson's *The Penguin Book of Canadian Verse*. Nor is it included in subsequent editions of these or other anthologies. Reception improved somewhat in the 1980s and 1990s (two more decades of sustained artistic output for Outram) with thirteen and twelve articles, interviews, or reviews published respectively in each decade. It was not until 1999, however, and the publication of a special issue of *DA: A Journal of the Printing Arts* (44), edited by Alan Horne, that Outram's work and particularly Outram and Howard's work with the Gauntlet Press began to receive substantive critical attention. Further interest in Outram's work increased significantly in the first decade of the new millennium, beginning with the publication of Peter Sanger's "*Her Kindled Shadow . . .*" in 2001, the first book-length scholarly investigation of Outram's oeuvre.

In 2003, poet and critic Carmine Starnino argued that "Outram is not unknown. He's ignored" (25). If this is a correct summation of the lack of critical response to Outram's work—and the literary record supports it—the question becomes why was his work ignored? Starnino, Michael Darling, David Solway, Sanger, and others (all strong readers of Outram's work) point to the difficulties Outram's poems can present to any but the most erudite reader. As Darling puts it, "For those of us lacking the literary omniscience of, shall we say, Northrop Frye, Outram's wide-ranging allusiveness presents serious obstacles to the understanding of his poetry" (14). In the same article, Darling quotes Sanger who, speaking of the semantic complexities in Outram's work, says: "the best companion a reader can have when trying to understand an Outram poem is an etymological dictionary" (14). Sanger also argues that Outram's poetry was "underappreciated because the shapers of public opinion had lost touch with poetry's theatrical origins" (69). Zachariah Wells comments that Outram's poems "are often philosophical and densely allusive to the point of near opacity" (67). Solway finds that Outram's poetry sometimes "grows just a little too florid and rhetorically intemperate for comfort" (10). Clearly, there are challenges in reading

Outram, but as Starnino, Darling, and others point out, opacity is only half the story; Outram also produced formal and linguistically exuberant work that was easily accessible to readers. Starnino offers the Outram poems "Yackety Sax" and "Barbed Wire" as examples (28). Similarly, in his essay, "A Chance Encounter with Richard Outram," Darling offers a close reading of the poem "Chance Encounter," finding it "not particularly difficult or allusive" and demonstrating "the poet's technical virtuosity" (14).

If the difficulties—both real and perceived—in Outram's poetry proved daunting to potential readers, then a second level of obstruction was furnished by Canadian literary tastes of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. Outram engaged with the whole tradition of English Language poetry. His poems were formal and sometimes linguistically baroque. These elements set him in conflict with Canadian literary nationalism of the day which tended to look at formal elements in poetry—metre and rhyme, for example—as a foreign infestation; the literary scene at the time favoured the home-grown and plainly colloquial in packages of loosely-packed free verse. As Roy MacSkimming points out in *The Perilous Trade*, his history of Canadian publishing from 1946 to 2006, "Men of letters . . . were out of style in the cultural politics of 1970. The zeitgeist celebrated the new and the radical" (168). "Printed in Canada by mindless acid freaks" was the motto of Toronto's Coach House Press (MacSkimming 168). It was an unwelcoming time for Outram to begin publishing his work. His 1976 collection, *Turns and Other Poems*, could not find a publisher in Canada until it first found one in England. Sanger tells the story of the collection's manuscript: "it was rejected by MacMillan and by various other Canadian commercial publishing houses. Louise Dennys . . . was 'outraged at the rejection.' She sent the manuscript to Chatto and Windus in England. . . . It was eventually issued in the United Kingdom in 1976 under Chatto & Windus/Hogarth Press imprint, and in Canada in conjunction with Anson Cartwright editions" (68). And the literary environment continued to be unwelcoming: two decades later—decades in which Outram had written most of his major works—Sanger was unable to find a publisher for "*Her Kindled Shadow . . .*" his foundational study of Outram's work. Sanger self-published both the first edition (2001) and the revised and expanded second edition of the work (2002) under the imprint of the Antigonish Review Press, where he was Poetry Editor (Sanger 21).

Given the poor critical and public reception that greeted trade editions of Outram's work, the poet was faced with finding other ways to reach an audience. Personal correspondence became his main means of establishing that readership. By all accounts he was both a voluble communicator and

frequent letter writer, with a significant part of his correspondence taking the form of Gauntlet Press books, broadsides, printed holiday greetings, and occasional pieces that he sent to many people over a period of almost thirty years. In a phone interview with Amanda Jernigan, the Outram scholar characterizes Outram and Howard's practice of sending Gauntlet Press works to friends and acquaintances as "another way of keeping the conversation going." Asked to expand on this point, Jernigan stated her belief that Outram and Howard's artistic life was their real life, that their artistic work was more intense and personal than any letter could be, and that sharing it allowed friends into the most intimate sphere of their lives.

In preparing this paper I was able to acquire from the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library at the University of Toronto scanned copies of Gauntlet Press "recipient lists," the lists of people to whom Outram and Howard sent Gauntlet Press titles and keepsakes. The lists came to me as five separate .pdf files. These unpaginated and handwritten lists add up to approximately five hundred pages. Lists 1 and 2 give the names of the recipients under each poem or book title, while List 3 gives poem or book titles under the name of the recipient. Lists 1 and 2 record approximately twenty-five hundred copies of one hundred and seventy-four separate titles sent to one hundred and eighty different people. Most of these were mailed in the 1990s, though a small number were sent as early as 1984 and as late as 2001. List 3 records approximately twenty-six hundred copies of various titles sent to eighty-four people. Again, these were sent mostly during the 1990s, with a small number of titles mailed in the late 1970s/early 1980s and a few mailed as late as 2001. It should be clear from the above description that List 1 and List 2 taken together do not make a comprehensive title index, nor does List 3 make a comprehensive recipient index. Lists 1 and 2 contain recipient names that are not recorded on List 3; List 3 records poems that do not have a corresponding entry in either List 1 or List 2. The same can be said of Lists 4 and 5. The first part of List 4 records approximately three hundred and fifty-four copies of *Ms Cassie* poems sent to a total of twenty different people, a small number of whom are also entered in List 3. List 4 also contains recipient lists for Gauntlet Press books *Creatures*, *Thresholds*, *Arbor*, and *Locus*, as well as recipient lists for many of Outram's trade publications. Finally, List 5 consists of recipient lists for a number of the Gauntlet Press Christmas and Valentine's Day keepsakes produced by Outram and Howard.

Considerable cross-checking of these lists would have to be done to establish a comprehensive index of recipients and a listing of which publication

each received and when. Suffice to say that Outram mailed thousands of copies of more than a hundred and seventy titles to at least one hundred and eighty people over a period of thirty years. This is clearly a significant and sustained effort, and one that serious scholarly investigations of Outram's correspondence should profitably take into account. Some recipients were on the Gauntlet Press mailing list for decades while others make a single appearance. Some recipients received almost all the Gauntlet Press titles, some only one or two. In a few cases—notably that of Peter Sanger, a relatively late addition to the recipient lists—Outram made a concentrated effort to provide him with as many of the Gauntlet Press titles as were still available. Most of the entries on the recipient lists are dated, so one can see how recipients for a particular title were added over time. The question of who got which titles is a fascinating one. It may be that some insight into Outram's selectivity—in the sense of whom he selected to receive Gauntlet Press titles and which titles he sent them—may be found in that correspondence.

Of the almost two hundred names contained on the recipient lists, a number stand out by virtue of their literary reputations: Northrop Frye, John Metcalf, George Johnston, Robert Denham, and Guy Davenport.[4] Of this group, some were the recipients of many mailings over many years (Manguel and Anson-Cartwright, for instance) and others received mailings only occasionally (such as Metcalf and Ormsby). It should be noted, however, that the majority of those on the recipient lists were not writers, poets, critics, scholars or book sellers, but fall into the category of friends and acquaintances. Some of this latter group were among the most frequent recipients of Gauntlet Press works throughout the lifetime of the Press: the Chapmans and Jay Jelinek to name a few. Whether all of those on the recipient lists were acquainted with each other is doubtful; probably the only thing that united them was that they were part of a small group who, from time to time, over a period of years, received an envelope containing a beautifully designed Gauntlet Press book, chapbook, broadside, Christmas or Valentine's Day keepsake.

As Jernigan notes, "Outram's publishing life is difficult to separate from his private correspondence" ("Wholes and Parts" 16). The recipient lists allow us to glimpse a private world, one that constituted an ideal readership for Outram. As mentioned, Outram did engage in correspondence with recipients. The correspondence coupled with gifts of Gauntlet Press publications may be seen as an intimate and controlled approach to developing a readership, at least when compared with the scattershot approach of trade publication where the majority of responses will come from reviewers who may be

reading the poet's work for the first time. The former approach gives the poet ample opportunity to slowly educate his audience, a state of affairs devoutly to be wished in a poet of Outram's complexity. As a strategy—if it can be called that—it was in Outram's hands more passive than active. There is little evidence to suggest that Outram attempted to coach his readers in any way; nor is there substantive evidence that he tried to impose on his readers a particular reading of any one poem. A look at some of the correspondence between Richard Outram and two of his most avid readers, Peter Sanger and Amanda Jernigan, is instructive in this regard.

In the first chapter of *Through Darkling Air*, Sanger comments on the relationship between writer and critic: "There are obvious dangers and temptations involved in privileged access of critic to writer. I do not wish to be considered Outram's voice or final authority on his work. Therefore, in only two or three cases, where absolutely at a loss and suspecting there was something I must know, I asked him that direct, deadening question: 'What does this mean?'" (27). A review of over five hundred pages of correspondence between Sanger and Outram demonstrates that this caution was as well developed in the poet as it was in the critic. In a letter to Sanger dated 29 March 1999 Outram begins, "A few afterthoughts to my last letter. I am concerned not to seem to be in any way attempting to shape what you write; but of course, want to help in any way that I can." Overall, the correspondence corroborates the position taken by both Sanger and Outram. In a letter dated 8 March 1999 regarding Northrop Frye, Sanger asks, "Could you tell me anything about his effect, as a teacher, upon you? (the other stuff, your later readings of him, is something that's really my job to work out and probably make a fool of myself doing . . .)." Later, in the same letter, Sanger poses eight questions related to particular allusions in Outram's work, most of them in regard to the identity of speakers in "Benedict." Sanger makes clear that his asking is a last resort: "here is the residue of questions I don't think I'm ever going to be able to answer myself, can you please help me . . ." (emphasis original). In only one instance did Outram offer Sanger detailed comments on one of his (Outram's) poems. In a letter to Sanger from 4 November 1999, Outram expiates one passage of his poem "Tradecraft." On November 18 of the same year, Sanger responded with the following, "Thank you for the 'Tradecraft' notes. They persuade me that the poem needs the equivalent of an annotated separate edition. It is your Finnegan's" (sic).

Elsewhere in the correspondence it becomes clear that Outram agreed to read various drafts of *Her Kindled Shadow*. On 18 October 1999 Sanger

wrote, "Richard, thank you for going through the typescript. What you said was what I needed to try to make it better. I'll make the changes you suggested. Tomorrow, Tuesday, I'll start work again with the intention of having a full version ready for you to look at by the middle of November." It is also clear from a later exchange that Outram agreed to disseminate a more finished version of the manuscript. A letter from Sanger dated 24 July 2000 has the following information "The promised copy of "Her Kindled Shadow . . ." I'm putting in another package. In the one-side of the page version, it is so bulky. When I get a chance, I'll also send you a copy of the master disk. Yes, please do circulate copies: the book was written for <u>your</u> work, and if it can help secure more readers for your work by private circulation then that is part of its proper job" (emphasis his). In a letter to Sanger dated 30 December 2001, Outram says, "I hope in the next couple of days to get down to a proofing of the photocopy of '*Her Kindled Shadow . . .*'"

Such exchanges form only a fraction of Sanger and Outram's correspondence written between the early 1990s and 2001. The letters cover many subjects: poetry, book collecting, music, travel, nature, and sometimes personal matters. An undated letter from Sanger to Outram (possibly written the mid-nineties) indicates when Sanger began to read Outram, "I've read your work for many years. When I first found it, during the 1970's, it became part of my magnetic north." In a personal e-mail to me from Peter Sanger, dated 13 December 2012, he writes, "*Her Kindled* was about half finished before I ever met Richard personally" (emphasis Sanger). Sanger's letters reveal him to be a scholar who was deeply committed to the task of appreciating the work of Richard Outram. Outram, in turn, both encouraged and appreciated Sanger's efforts. A letter from Outram to Sanger from 10 September 1996 details the poet's efforts to get Gauntlet Press works and other related works into Sanger's hands. In a letter sent three years later on 9 August 1999, Outram writes of his pleasure in reading a draft of "*Her Kindled Shado*w . . .", noting that Sanger "understood and attempted to articulate the complementary relationship, not just of the two of us as persons, but the two of us as artists," and also tackled the "spiritual dimension" of the work. The "us" in the quotation refers to Outram and Barbara Howard, and yet it is clear that by the late 1990s the relationship between Sanger and Outram had also become complementary, blending both the personal and the artistic.

If Peter Sanger developed a critical interest in the work of Richard Outram long before meeting the poet, Amanda Jernigan was first a friend to Outram

and later a critic of his work. In her article "Graceful Errors and Happy Intellections: Encounters with Richard Outram," which appears in issue 89 of the *New Quarterly*, Jernigan says, "At some point over the course of our first meeting at the fundraiser, we exchanged addresses. Richard mentioned that he might put something in the mail. I didn't really expect anything to come . . . but a package did arrive by mail, from Richard and Barbara, about a week later" (31-32). Jernigan and Outram's relationship, as revealed in their correspondence, demonstrates the same underpinnings and development over time as Outram and Sanger's relationship. It was complementary and blended both the personal and the artistic. Jernigan shied away from asking Outram direct questions about his work or about specific poems. In a 12 December 2012 e-mail to me, Jernigan states, "I don't recall corresponding with Outram about specific poems of his, in a critical-minded way. But certainly our correspondence was everywhere about poetry, and had a huge influence on me, not only as a critic (of his work and of the work of others) but as a poet" (Jernigan). Elsewhere, Jernigan has the following to say about Outram's answers to questions she raised when they discussed poetry, "these *answers*, though patient, thoughtful, and well-wrought, did not constitute the *meat* of Richard's correspondence with me. The meat was in the poems, the quotations, the groups of linked references that he sent along with the letters, many in broadsheet form" (emphasis hers, "Graceful Errors" 33). She records feeling deeply honoured to be a recipient, and asking herself, on receiving one such mailing, "Am I worthy?" (telephone interview).

Many other recipients of Outram's mailings were similarly charmed. Sanger puts it this way: "Few people who received a copy of one of Outram's broadsheet poems in the morning mail could have read it without feeling the day alter into a wider and brighter range of possibilities" (255). Louise Dennys, in a letter dated "Wednesday, 18th February" (no year) and written on Hugh Anson-Cartwright stationery, wrote: "Thank you too—more than I can say in this short note—for 'Covenant.' It arrived this morning when I was at a dismally low ebb (trying to be a punch advertiser and with the ad copy escaping me) and brought a light into my day and my being." Aesthetically beautiful objects, prized by collectors, and often containing brilliant poetry, Gauntlet Press publications bring the reader closest to the literary and artistic endeavours of Outram and Howard. They offer the reader an intimate lens not available to those familiar only with Outram's trade publications. The effect of being included in this bright circle was a powerful one for many people. Jeffery Donaldson describes it as follows:

> Over the span of four decades, the artist and poet have published and mailed out to fortunate recipients their fine hand-sewn books, prints and broadsheets, original poems, telling arrangements of prose and lyric, all joined with accompanying woodcut, drawings, blazons, pictorial devices and icons, in a kind of chiaroscuro of image and word. No one who was ever treated to Howard's [sic] and Outram's company together could have failed to notice that their marriage was an expression of mutual encounter and recollection.

He continues,

> By recollection, I mean a constant remembering or assembling of their endeavours into the life they shared with friends and artists, a life they inhabited, or gathered together, quite literally, by sending it out regularly into our midst in book-filled care packages and envelopes. Such recollections expand into the world as they are shared by us, brought out to see, moved about from home to home, saved up and dreamed over. (18)

While the paths to literary recognition are often subterranean, not to mention tangential and convoluted, it should perhaps come as no surprise that a number of people included in the charmed circle of recipients would prove to be highly influential in bringing Outram's work to attention, both in the years immediately prior to his death and in the years since. In 1999, Donald McLeod provided a checklist of Gauntlet Press publications in number 44 of *DA: A Journal of the Printing Arts*, a special issue on the Gauntlet Press. In 2001, Sanger finally published the first major work of scholarship about Outram in "*Her Kindled Shadow . . .*", followed by a revised and expanded edition in 2002. In 2010, Sanger published another revised and expanded edition under the title *Through Darkling Air*. In 2003, John Metcalf and Michael Carbert put out an issue of the periodical *Canadian Notes & Queries* entirely devoted to the work of Richard Outram, and containing essays by William Blissett, Terry Griggs, Amanda Jernigan, Guy Davenport, W. J. Keith, Eric Ormsby and Jeffery Donaldson, all of whom appear on Gauntlet Press recipient lists. In 2007, Jernigan completed a thesis for her Master's degree at Memorial University of Newfoundland on Outram's poetry entitled "Wholes and Parts (All Puns Intended): The Mereological Vision of Richard Outram's Poetic Sequences." Jernigan has also contributed articles about Outram and his work to several periodicals and was instrumental in arranging with the trustees of Outram and Howard's estate, Peter Newman and Susan Warner-Keene, for a collection of Gauntlet Press publications to be housed at Memorial University's Queen Elizabeth II Library.

Critical interest in Outram's work has also increased in recent years with a new generation of poets/critics taking up his cause, including Carmine Starnino,

Zachariah Wells, Evan Jones, George Murray, Brian Bartlett and Steven Heighton. A collection of essays on Outram's poetry from Toronto's Guernica Editions, edited by Ingrid Ruthig, was published in fall 2011, and contains essays by Robert Denham and Eric Ormsby, to name a few. Also in 2011, Porcupine's Quill issued *The Essential Richard Outram*, edited by Jernigan who is currently at work on a PhD thesis at McMaster University that will see her produce Outram's collected poems. In 2012, England's Carcanet Press included a selection of Outram's poems in *Modern Canadian Poets: An Anthology of Poems in English,* edited by Canadian poets Evan Jones and Todd Swift. Finally, the project spearheaded by Memorial University Humanities librarian Martin Howley to digitize Gauntlet Press works has brought Outram and Howard's work to a worldwide audience. In the year 2010, Gauntlet Press pages on the DAI received 44,977 page views from 5000 visitors. Approximately 80% of these originated from computers within Canada, about 10% from the US and a further 10% from the UK, France, the Republic of Korea, and other countries.

Richard Outram's reputation as a poet is rising, a state of affairs that is directly attributable to the circle of friends and acquaintances who were recipients of Gauntlet Press publications. Whether the level of critical attention his work currently enjoys will be sustained and where exactly Outram's reputation will come to rest is difficult to predict. There is not as yet a consensus around Alberto Manguel's opinion—published in 1988—that Outram was "one of the finest poets writing in English" (58). What can be said at this time is that the poetry of Richard Outram is being ignored by fewer and fewer people, both in Canada and around the world.

NOTES

1 Works authored by Outram and published in trade editions include, in addition to those mentioned above, *Seer* (1973); *The Promise of Light* (1979); *Selected Poems, 1960-1980* (1984); *Man in Love* (1985); *Hiram and Jenny* (1988); *Mogul Recollected* (1993); *Benedict Abroad* (1998); and *Dove Legend* (2001).

2 In "The Other Outram," Carmine Starnino refers to Richard Outram as "Canadian poetry's cleverest artificer" (23). In "A Freak of Senius," Hubert de Santana calls Outram a "major poet" (19). Alberto Manguel refers to him as "one of the finest poets writing in English" (58). In *"Her Kindled Shadow . . ."* and *Through Darkling Air*, Richard Sanger repeatedly makes the case that Outram's poetry is of the highest quality.

3 Notable works from this period include *Around & About the Toronto Islands* (1993), *Peripatetics* (1994), *And Growes to Something of Great Constancie* (1994), *Tradecraft and Other Uncollected Poems* (1994), *Eros Descending* (1995), *Notes on William Blake's The Tyger* (1997) and *Lightfall* (2001), all printed in editions of forty to forty-five copies.

4 Other recipients include Caroline Adderson, Jeffery Donaldson, Tim and Elke Inkster, Hugh Anson-Cartwright, Anne Corkett, Alice Munro, Alberto Manguel, Michael Carbert,

Peter Sanger, W. J. Keith, Steven Heighton, Ross Leckie, Don McLeod, Amanda Jernigan, Susan Warner-Keene, Eric Ormsby, William Blissett, George Murray, and Terry Griggs.

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Signa A. Daum Shanks

Volvo Stationwagon

Let me make it perfectly clear your spirituality means a great deal to me—I mean it! Feel free to discuss it at any time. Actually, I bet it would reveal much about how its intersubjectivity affects your scholarly approach. It's pivotal that such interpolations are given greater exposure within the larger meta-narrative expressed by the academy. You are welcome here to discuss anything, you know. . . .

> Oh, it's great. Well, mileage could be better. But to be in, it's great. I mean—what? Oh, yes—your work.

There's a tendency—I thought I was the only one to believe this but my cosmology obviously patterns itself after the French reactions to postmodernism, or maybe they pattern themselves after me?—for observers to contend that the inner psyche self-postulates first and then proceeds to interweave itself within socialized communication regarding mandatory communal activities. It then follows you can hypothesize, even correctly predict, how what you consider "cultures" (and I consider accidentalized groups who happen to interact but are ultimately defined by some form of liberal paradigmatic formulation) will evolve. Of course, I am better placed than you to iterate such conclusions. As—well, how I can I put this gently?—your thought process is in its infancy.

> When I'm going fast it's a dream. Off-roading at Muskoka, it takes turns like nothing I can describe! Of course, I'd only do that on pavement since its wheels aren't big.

As Derrida found—or was it Foucault—certain typologies ascribe delineated versions of recurrent subtexts. Within those subtexts lie inverted and sometimes converted silhouettes of a subterfuge regularly mistaken for cultural identity. I'm afraid a few of the topics you argued as vital are not—to be frank—terribly pivotal. You must remember expressivism of those you have chosen to explain to me is seemingly sometimes interesting but often irrelevant. Keep in mind

that it's the internal standards of the system to which you're placed which dictate normative values. They are extremely influential and ultimately superior as they better combine the best exactitudes of individual placement and socializing actions argued as necessary for complete success.

> You know the best thing about it? It holds so much! All through university I drove sports cars and had to jam my stereo and televisions and computers and clothes into cars. And when I was traveling and I'd rent cars and I never felt secure about security as there were never any car alarms. And what with the sound system I'd need, that was an issue.

Oh yes. . . .There's a fundamental flaw in your premise. While it might appear your view supplants current manifestations which undermine your "nation's"—I put that in quotation marks because you really do not have enough evidence of nationhood—evolution, wouldn't you say the tide of positivism overtakes your standpoint? After all, it's not self-determination you really need. It's a form of autonomy. I mean, in the end you're not any more special than anyone else.

> It's not a coffin. It's called a "thule." It's to put things in, like my skis. The net is for the dog so the car stays clean.

When you said "presence", I thought that must have come out of our conversations. It could not have simply appeared on your intellectual horizon. Write all of it down—you'll never remember on your own. And do you know what it means when you don't look me in the eyes? That you don't trust me.

> Well it's no BMW. That's next—when the little, messy, screaming one is older. I wish I really that—why are you getting us off topic? This meeting is supposed to be about what you're doing.

There's a constant paradigmatic tension between the memory affiliation with historicism and the desire, no—the passion—to use post-modernistic tendencies for current recognition. Don't you realize that's why you've long hair? Anyway, concerning your methodology—when you talk to your peoples you must get their permission in the way we devised. For their own protection. You don't know how their intellectualism might be misappropriated. Our standards are superior.

> You look tense. Ever tried swimming?
>
> When I'm in it, and the air conditioning's on so it's like I have the top down without the bugs—so it's *better* than a convertible—it's like I'm driving and I rule the world. And then—right then—I remember there's some people you just need to say "Fuck you" to.
>
> Don't ever forget that.

Now where were we? You and your tribes keep getting me off topic. . . do you do that on purpose or something?

Julia P. W. Cooper, Norah Franklin,
and Nathan W. Murray

"Underskin Journals of Susanna Moodie"

Atwood Editing Atwood

"Husband, in Retrospect" is one of a handful of unpublished poems that can be found among Margaret Atwood's drafts and revisions of *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* (1970) at the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library at the University of Toronto.[1] The poem was included in an early version of the manuscript before being excised from the final collection, and it exists in four drafts in the archives: a handwritten version in a notebook and three typed drafts, two of which are marked up in Atwood's handwriting. The fourth version is clearly her final attempt. "Husband, in Retrospect" provides insight into Atwood's creative process during her work on the *Journals*, a poetic reimagining of early Canadian pioneer Susanna Moodie's memoirs, *Roughing It in the Bush* (1852) and *Life in the Clearings Versus the Bush* (1853). Atwood has been vocal about the rationale behind her adaptation of her source texts. Finding Moodie's tone to be opaque and overly genteel, Atwood wrote her cycle of poems in an attempt to express what Moodie left unsaid in her works. In her exploration of the pioneer's psychological experience, Atwood focuses on what she perceives to be the earlier writer's ambivalence about her new country. In constructing this unspoken narrative, Atwood's project does not aim to resolve but to expand on existing fissures and moments of doubleness in Moodie's texts.

In "Husband, in Retrospect," Atwood's Susanna Moodie dwells on the changes that her husband, John Dunbar Moodie, has undergone since the family moved from the bush to a comparatively civilized life in Belleville, Ontario. Susanna[2] characterizes her husband as distant and circumscribed

by civilized life in the clearings, but she reflects that his complex relationship with his new country had made him a multi-faceted and dynamic man in the bush. In their home in the wilderness, the characters' individual ambivalent experiences provided the basis for their intimacy. Reading the four drafts of the poem in succession reveals that with each new draft, Atwood worked to make the husband more emotionally and physically distant from the speaker by removing concrete images and using increasingly abstract language. Finally, Atwood cut the poem from the collection. A consideration of this double movement of development and effacement demonstrates that, while "Husband, in Retrospect" presents a thorough portrait of John Dunbar and resolves the Moodies' individual experiences of pioneer life, Atwood's editing and her final exclusion of the poem point to her decision to avoid this moment of narrative resolution. Instead, the published collection puts forth an ambiguous representation of Susanna's husband, and the Moodies remain detached from one another. The pair experience "doubleness," as they remain unable to resolve their conflicted relationship with the land and with each other. In this way, Atwood's editorial process in the drafts of "Husband, in Retrospect" is representative of her creative project in the *Journals* as a whole, shedding light on the poet's effort to enhance rather than reconcile moments of contradiction and ambiguity in Moodie's memoirs.

These drafts provide a glimpse into what appears to be Atwood editing Atwood without the apparent interference of any third parties. They offer a portrait of a poet whose work begins with simple and expository drafts and who then edits her work to increase its complexity. In order to share Atwood's composition process and to elucidate its significance for research on the *Journals* specifically, and for Atwood scholarship more broadly, we have included all four drafts of "Husband, in Retrospect" from the archives as well as a compiled genetic edition of the poem that incorporates all four drafts as appendices to this article.[3]

Like much of the scholarship on the *Journals*, this article begins with a consideration of Atwood's "Afterword" to the collection. In her short essay that comprises the final pages of the first edition of the collection, Atwood outlines her interpretation of the historical Moodie, based on her experience of reading *Roughing It in the Bush* and *Life in the Clearings*. She claims that

> Mrs. Moodie is divided down the middle: she praises the Canadian landscape but accuses it of destroying her; she dislikes the people already in Canada but finds in people her only refuge from the land itself; she preaches progress and the march of civilization while brooding elegiacally upon the destruction of the wilderness. (62)

Atwood also observes that Moodie's response to her new country is representative of Canada's national identity, that "the national mental illness . . . of Canada is paranoid schizophrenia" (62). Atwood's observations have provided the springboard for criticism of the collection that explores the character of Susanna and her transformation in Canada. Early scholars of the *Journals* used Atwood's reading of Moodie in the "Afterword" to argue that the Susanna of the poems initially denies her divided identity but eventually comes to accept what Atwood calls "the inescapable doubleness of her own vision" (63).[4] Yet recent studies are more critical of this straightforward application of the "Afterword" to the poems and of Atwood's conclusions about Moodie.[5] Susan Johnston, for example, argues that the "Afterword" has not only distorted criticism of Atwood's poems but has also strongly influenced analyses of *Roughing It in the Bush* and *Life in the Clearings* (28). In order to counter the authority of the "Afterword," Johnston examines Atwood's reading of Moodie, discussing the moments of rupture in Moodie's texts that inspired Atwood's own poetic project.

Indeed, several critics have shown that the "Afterword" offers a glimpse into Atwood's creative process and functions as an interpretive model for the poems as a responsive form—Atwood is as much a reader of Moodie in this collection as she is a creator of a new work.[6] Atwood recalls that she felt compelled to read Moodie's *Roughing It in the Bush* and *Life in the Clearings* only after dreaming that she had composed an opera based on the life of Susanna Moodie. She was disappointed with what she found in the two memoirs, reflecting that "the prose was discursive and ornamental and the books had little shape: they were collections of disconnected anecdotes" (62). She was, however, immediately attracted to the contradictions that she perceived in the texts. Of these instances of conflicted expression, Atwood has since noted:

> What kept bringing me back to the subject—and to Susanna Moodie's own work—were the hints, the gaps between what was said and what hovered, just unsaid, between the lines, and the conflict between what Mrs. Moodie felt she ought to think and feel and what she actually did think and feel. (Staines xi)

This narrative that Atwood crafts about her composition process provides an entry point for understanding Atwood's project as she adapted Moodie's work. Atwood suggests that the uncomfortable relationship between Moodie's sense of decorum and her fraught experience of her new country resulted in writing that is filled with inconsistencies. Yet Atwood's project does not involve simply trying to tell Moodie's story as if Moodie had not

been limited by the decorum of her upbringing; instead, she aims to expand on the schizophrenic ambiguities in the source texts, and to emphasize the clash between Moodie's sense of propriety and her sense of despair.

In the box that contains the manuscript of the *Journals*, there is a title page that offers two tentative titles for the collection: "The Underskin Journals of Susanna Moodie," which is typed, and the "Unspoken Poems of Susanna Moodie," which is written underneath the first title in Atwood's hand. While Atwood chose neither as the final title for her collection, they are nonetheless significant, as they signal the poet's interest in the silences in her source texts.[7] One such "gap" in *Roughing It in the Bush* and *Life in the Clearings* is Moodie's curious omission of a thorough portrait of John Dunbar Moodie.[8] In the *Journals*, Atwood draws attention to this absence in her development of a narrative about Moodie's husband. In "The Planters" and "The Wereman," he appears to be caught, like his wife, between the customs of his old life and the challenges of his new life. In "The Planters," Susanna watches her husband and several other men as they tend to their meagre rows of crops on a barren stretch of cleared land. As she observes the men attempting to cultivate the earth, she reflects, "I know / none of them believe they are here. / They deny the ground they stand on, / pretend this dirt is the future" (10-13). The men do not see that the wilderness is affecting them as long as they continue to believe in their power over the land. In contrast, Susanna has "[opened her] eyes . . . to these trees, to this particular sun" and is aware that the land is acting upon her (16-17).

In "The Wereman," John Dunbar appears to have let go, in part, of the illusion that he has control over the land. Like "The Planters," this poem is about Susanna's growing perception of the ways in which the land is changing her and her husband.[9] She recognizes that her husband is beginning to transform, to merge with the land, as she wonders, "Unheld by my sight / what does he change into / what other shape / blends with the under- / growth" (6-10). Yet Susanna allows for the possibility that John Dunbar's perception is beginning to alter as well, as she muses, "He may change me also / with the fox eye, the owl / eye, the eightfold / eye of the spider" (18-21). As Roslyn Jolly notes, "in 'The Wereman' the warping of perception becomes multiple. The choice is not merely between a reassuring illusion and a devastating reality, but among a whole array of forms and guises which familiar things may assume" (307). Jolly notes that this "plurality of existence (or non-existence) is exciting" but ultimately frightening for Susanna; the title of the poem "conjures the terrifying image

of intimacy become dangerously strange as the husband is identified with a monster" (307). While other poems in the collection suggest that Susanna is experiencing an internal division that is analogous to her husband's transformation, she cannot relate to him. She imagines him as "an X, a concept / defined against a blank" (2-3). She acknowledges that when he returns from the forest, "it may be / only [her] idea of him / . . . returning / with him hiding behind it" (13-17). Neither "The Planters" nor "The Wereman" provides any narrative closure about the relationship between Susanna and her husband; this is in stark contrast to the accounts of Susanna's children, whose lives are discussed with a tragic finality.

Atwood's attempt to capture that which hovers "just unsaid" in Moodie's sketches of John Dunbar Moodie involves the construction of a narrative of the couple's growing estrangement that focuses on the fictional Susanna's inability to fully understand or represent her husband in their new life in Canada. Crucially, "Husband, in Retrospect," a poem that depicts the exciting aspects of plurality and the shared experience of multiple perception as an opportunity for intimacy, was left unpublished. Our ensuing interpretation of the final draft of "Husband, in Retrospect" explores the closure that the poem provides; we then demonstrate, however, that Atwood's composition process in the four extant drafts reveals her resistance to such narrative resolution. Just as Atwood was interested in what Moodie left unsaid in her work, we are concerned with the penumbral aspects of character in Atwood's text, carrying on a reading practice of seeking out the shadows lingering in the text.

A close reading of the final draft of "Husband, in Retrospect," followed by an examination of the revisions made in the preceding three drafts, demonstrates that Atwood creates narrative resolution in the poem, and then obscures the markers of that resolution. In its fourth and final version, "Husband, in Retrospect" suggests that division—within the self and in relation to the environment—need not be equated with separation; it may occasion an intimacy between individuals that makes room for difference and multiplicity. While in the published *Journals*, John Dunbar's psychological complexity emerges through Susanna's inability to represent him, "Husband, in Retrospect" allows Atwood to have Susanna express her growing understanding of her husband's transformation in the bush and depict the intimacy that the couple experienced in that space. The opening stanza begins with a movement out of the wilderness, as Susanna describes an unnamed "they" who "[take] over" her husband and invite the couple out

of the bush (1-2). As this movement away from the wild landscape takes place and the husband and wife turn toward civilization, Susanna watches him

> diminish
> to a signer of important papers
> whose eating is rimmed by our decent plates
> who has many waistcoats
> and plays the flute after dinner. (3-7)

This image of a diminished man permeates the rest of the poem as the speaker turns nostalgically to look back at the husband and lover she knew in the bush. As the poem enacts the retrospective look its title promises, what else is lost in the shift from hardship to decent plates, waistcoats, and after dinner melodies becomes clear.

In the third and fourth stanzas, an image of the husband in the past materializes. He is defined by action and exertion, and he is remembered as overturning and feasting on the rural landscape. Although his exploitation of the land appears to be boundless, the earth does not sustain him; in Susanna's recollection, he "fed at a crude table / on dandelions and was left empty" (11-12). This image of the husband's failure to be satisfied suggests that he is unable to fully control the land and it is that lack of mastery that creates a space for the wilderness to begin to alter him. As in "The Wereman," the husband of this poem is undergoing a transformation in the bush, beginning to experience a version of double selfhood that parallels Susanna's own psychological journey. The shift between the opening stanza and the poet's retrospective gaze describes a man snatched from the natural world, whose rugged intensity and strength is domesticated through this departure. As the poem proceeds, the reader is led further away from the chastened husband of the present moment and is confronted with the rough and vital man in the bush.

The reader also begins to glimpse the dynamics between husband and wife in the final section of the poem, as Atwood elucidates the fraught and complex space of their connection. In these stanzas, a vivid parallel is drawn between the couple's relationship with the land and their relationship to one another. Susanna describes a man "who was early in history," as if to suggest not merely his status as an early Canadian pioneer, but also as one who exists (in time and in disposition) closer to a state of nature rather than to the burgeoning colonial establishment in the clearings. Susanna's description of her husband's relation to time is followed by a description of their physical relationship:

who pioneered across my body
and spaded children
out of me like potatoes
who whistled in the plank rooms
whose love was avid with poverty (14-18)

Here, the earlier image of the husband clearing the land is conflated with his sexual labour, a cultivation of his wife's body. The image of a lover who "pioneered across my body" suggests an intimacy that is fertile but is also a violent colonization. He harvests Susanna's body along with the earth but remains somehow impoverished, an image that recalls his relationship with the land and suggests that an exchange is taking place between husband and wife: Susanna continues to affect and alter him. Atwood allows this tension between detachment and intimacy to remain, the duality between love and violence to linger. This reading is further reified by the poem's final lines, which illustrate the mutual vulnerabilities of the couple in a setting characterized, paradoxically, by proximity and distance.

At the end of the poem, Susanna describes her husband in terms that capture the duality that was engendered in their relationship in the bush. He was a man

who was close to me as moss
who was faceless and unspoken
and without a shape and vague, a far
night shore (19-22)

These final lines demonstrate that, while Susanna's relationship with the land remains entirely separate from her husband's psychological journey, the Moodies are drawn together through their parallel experiences of double selfhood. Their distance draws them closer to one another instead of violently dividing them, for it parallels the contradictions they face together: settlers in a new land and exiles from the old, cultured colonizers cum frontier farmers in unforgiving terrain, and, finally, the dualities that are innate in intimate relationships. As well as revealing the complexities of the immigrant experience, "Husband, in Retrospect" lays bare the multiple and fluid nature of human relations. The wife's experience of her husband in the bush is at once full and empty, vital and bare; he is "close as moss," while at the same time, "unspoken," "vague," and "a far night shore."

The intimacy shared between the husband and wife is avid, vulnerable, and strong—much like their troubled and complex connections to the wild land. These are the very contradictions and moments of multiplicity mourned by the poetic voice. The poem's title "Husband, in Retrospect"

suggests an elegiac reflection on, perhaps, a deceased husband. Yet it is not death being lamented here; it is the loss of a multi-faceted and dynamic lover. Life in the clearings has domesticated and flattened the man who once appeared to be everything at once; a "faceless" possessor of an ardent love, he once teemed with contradictions and was a fully affecting force of and in nature. In the clearings, Susanna is able to realize the extent to which her husband was also trying to adapt to the wildness of the Canadian frontier.

In "Husband, in Retrospect," Atwood offers a detailed exploration of John Dunbar Moodie that is absent in *Roughing It in the Bush* and *Life in the Clearings*, fulfilling her stated objective of investigating what Moodie leaves unsaid in her writings. Yet Atwood's many edits to the poem reveal that her project is twofold: she is not only interested in creating an unspoken narrative, but she simultaneously aims to enhance the conflicts that arise from Moodie's efforts to express her experience. Indeed, the drafts of "Husband, in Retrospect" provide insight into Atwood's creative process as she approaches her source texts, as well as elucidating her reading of Moodie. Atwood begins by focusing on what Moodie does reveal about her husband in her memoirs, and then works to imagine Moodie's possible unspoken feelings surrounding her relationship. Finally, Atwood attends to the second part of her project as she begins to make cuts to sections of the poem in which the character Susanna approaches a more capacious understanding of her partner. With these edits, Atwood renders John Dunbar more distant from both the speaker and the reader, drawing attention to what she perceives as the historical Moodie's inability to fully reflect on and portray her relationship with her husband.

The earliest versions of "Husband, in Retrospect" can be found in a series of notebooks in the Atwood archives, alongside other first drafts of poems that would later comprise *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*. These initial verses appear to be poetic notes, penned in the earliest stages of composition while reading *Roughing It in the Bush* and *Life in the Clearings*. In many ways, these notes may be read as an imaginative transcription of the texts; Atwood extracts details and episodes articulated in the memoirs as the basis for her own narrative. For example, one untitled poem in the notebooks, which is clearly an antecedent for "Husband, in Retrospect," begins with the stark announcement,

> My husband was Dunbar Moodie
> who ~~could~~ can play quite well upon the flute
> & ~~who~~ got me into ~~all~~ this ~~in the first place~~
> By being a youngerson [sic] & ~~consequently~~ thus penniless. (1-4)

Here, Atwood explores details of the husband offered in the source texts and begins to translate them into poetic character. Susanna describes his musicality, his history, and his poverty. In another poetic sketch, the speaker reflects on the material wealth that has accompanied life in the clearings. She reflects,

> We are comfortably
> off, and my husband
> is the sherriff [sic] of Belleville,
> and I possess again
> a decent set of china. (13-17)

In the initial stages of composition, Atwood gleans details of pioneer life and personal struggle from the source texts. Throughout these expository notes, Atwood toys with what is expressed in the source texts and reveals her nascent ideas surrounding Moodie's unspoken perceptions of her husband. She then slowly transforms the historical figure into a poetic re-creation.

The four main drafts of "Husband, in Retrospect" emerge from these notes. After composing an untitled first draft in a notebook, Atwood gives each of her subsequent drafts a different title: the second draft is entitled "Looking Back on the Bush," followed by "Looking Back on her Husband," and a final version called "Husband, in Retrospect." Each draft shows evidence of revision. As Atwood moves from the notes to the untitled first draft, her distance from Moodie's texts increases and a fascination with what is left unsaid grows; she hunts for "the hints, the gaps between what was said and what hovered, just unsaid, between the lines." Atwood's creation of an unspoken narrative in the ensuing drafts involves removing referents to the source texts, including historical context and exposition, while imagining Moodie's suppressed responses to the events that she narrates. Through this process of composition, Atwood creates the poetic persona Susanna, a figure whose emotional state and charged relationship with her husband and the landscape emerge from the poet's interpretation and manipulation of Moodie's memoirs.

As Atwood constructs her own account of the character Susanna's experience, she also edits her narrative. Her revisions reveal a resistance to the closure that emerges when she begins to voice Moodie's omissions: an examination of the editing process reveals that Atwood has both developed the characters' relationship and obscured the details surrounding it. With each draft and its revisions, the figure of the husband is rendered more distant from the speaker and the reader, and the unspoken narrative of alienation that Atwood has sought out in Moodie's original is amplified.

For example, the prior intensity of the relationship between Susanna and her husband is hinted at when she recalls in the first three drafts of the poem how his "tallow candle / fever smoked through the rasped / plank room" ("Looking Back on her Husband," 21-23). These lines evoke the material conditions of pioneer life that Moodie focuses on, but if "fever" can also be read figuratively as a symbol of fiery intensity, these lines become an evocation of their life together and the intimacy they once shared. The "fever" that once smoked through the rooms of their home evokes a permeating and constant heat between them, a fire, a longing that has since dissipated. This stanza, however, is removed completely from the final version. Also, in the earlier drafts, there are images of the husband's intensity and unconstrained energy that are muted in the poem's final version: while in the first three drafts, the husband is a hungry, consuming figure who "gorged at a table / of earthenware and scant propriety," (14-15), his later incarnation is stripped of this power: he simply "fed at a crude table / on dandelions and was left empty" (11-12). These revisions reveal Atwood's movement away from a concrete and dynamic version of John Dunbar and toward the inaccessible and shadowy husband of the published collection. Atwood's choice to excise "Husband, in Retrospect" from the final collection may be understood as a reification of the theme of thwarted intimacy with which the poetic speaker grapples. This last editorial excision is the culmination of a composition process that has exponentially effaced the details of the source texts and looked to exacerbate the schisms between Susanna and her husband provoked by the move from the bush to life in the clearings.

The only hint as to the intended position of "Husband, in Retrospect" within the collection is the number nine written in the top corner of the second draft, which might indicate that the poem was meant to be the ninth in the second journal alongside poems set during Susanna's years in the clearings when she is dreaming and reminiscing about the bush. The other poems in this particular draft of the *Journals* are also numbered in a sequence that roughly resembles the order of the final collection, with some minor differences. "On the Death of her Other Children" is numbered ten, suggesting that Atwood planned to have "Husband, in Retrospect" contribute to the theme of loss that is present in this section. In her decision to cut the poem, however, Atwood withholds the closure that "Husband, in Retrospect" may have provided. Ultimately, she is more interested in the fraught communion between the speaker and her readers. In "A Bus Along

St. Clair: December," the final poem of the published *Journals*, Atwood offers a resolution that is reminiscent of the communion between husband and wife in "Husband, in Retrospect." She explores an acceptance of open-endedness and the possibility that Canadian people are connected to one another through their divided experiences of the land. The ghost or spirit of Susanna haunts the city of Toronto and reflects: "Right now, the snow / is no more familiar / to you than it was to me" (15-18). In this moment of recognition of a common relationship with the land, Susanna becomes "the old woman / sitting across from [the reader] on the bus" (22-23). She lingers among the living in Canada because they share her experience of divided selfhood. In this way, she is both distant from and close to those who have inherited the country.

The haunting final image of the collection is Susanna's revelation of the reader's schizophrenic inheritance of a divided selfhood. The speaker describes the old woman's destruction of the walls and the ceiling and exclaims,

> Turn, look down:
> there is no city
> this is the centre of a forest
> your place is empty. (25-31)

The stark image of emptiness that closes the *Journals* is evocative of Atwood's larger composition process. This process, as it unfolds in the four drafts of "Husband, in Retrospect," reveals Atwood's attraction to an unspoken narrative that is compelled by Moodie's own crisis of representation in her memoirs. Although Atwood's artistic and editorial choices give rise to poems that have a distant relationship to their source texts, they nonetheless return, in their final lines, to "the centre of a forest," retreating to a lost frontier.

Appendix A: Drafts 1-4 of "Husband, in Retrospect"

Untitled

When the Establishment took over my husband
[and ~~took~~ invited us ~~from the~~ out of the bush]
I watched him harden
Into a solid ~~2 dimensional official figure~~
a daytime signer of papers,
Who eats ~~nonchalant~~ easily
~~dines~~ from the ~~new plates china~~ decent plates
[Putters in ~~the garden~~ among the ~~nonchalant~~ shrubbery]
and plays (tolerably) the flute after dinner.

who spread himself once through the clearing acres
of ~~like energy~~
an energy, an effort
uprooting the stumps of trees
who gorged at a table
of earthenware + scant propriety; who was
early in time, who
pioneered across my body
and wrenched children ~~from me~~ out of me
like potatoes; who made crude music,
whose fever burned smoked through the rasped wooden
rooms, a cheap candle

who as close to me
as moss, who was faceless and unspoken
and vague as a night shore

Looking Back on the Bush

When the Establishment took over
my husband
and invited us out of the bush
I watched him harden
into an official figure,
ceramic solid,
a daytime signer of papers

who eats with choice from the decent plates,
putters among the shrubberies
and plays (tolerably) the flute after dinner;

who spread himself once through the clearing acres
an energy, an effort
uprooting the stumps of trees

who gorged at a table
of earthenware and scant propriety

who was early in time
who pioneered across my body
and wrenched children
out of me like potatoes

who made crude music

whose fever smoked through the rasped wooden
rooms, a cheap candle

who was close to me
as moss who was faceless and unspoken
and without a shape and
vague as a night shore

Looking Back on her Husband

When they took over
my husband
and invited us out of the bush
I watched him harden
into an official figure,
ceramic-solid
a daytime signer of papers

whose eating is rimmed by our decent plates
who putters among the shrubberies
and plays (tolerably) the flute after dinner;

Who spread himself once through the clearing acres
an effort
uprooting the stumps of trees

who gorged at a table
of earthenware and scant propriety

who was early in history

who pioneered across my body
and wrenched children
out of me like potatoes

who made crude music

whose tallow candle
fever smoked through the rasped
plank room

whose love was avid with poverty

who was close to me as moss
        who was faceless and unspoken
and without a shape and vague, a far
night shore

Husband, in Retrospect

When they took over my husband
and invited us out of the bush
I watched him diminish
to a signer of important papers

whose eating is rimmed by our decent plates
who had many waistcoats
and plays the flute after dinner;

Who spread himself once through the clearing acres
an effort
uprooting the stumps of trees

who fed at a crude table
on dandelions and was left empty

who was early in history

who pioneered across my body
and spaded children
out of me like potatoes

who whistled in the plank rooms

whose love was avid with poverty

who was close to me as moss

who was faceless and unspoken
and without a shape and vague, a far
night shore

Appendix B: Husband, in Retrospect (genetic version)

Words or phrases that have been changed from earlier drafts are indicated in footnotes demarcated by line numbers, while words or phrases that have been completely excised from the final draft are integrated into the poem, demarcated by square brackets. The letters A, B, C, and D refer to the four drafts of the poem: "Untitled" (A), "Looking Back on the Bush"(B), "Looking Back on her Husband" (C), and "Husband, in Retrospect"(D).

When they[1] took over my husband
and invited us out of the bush
I watched him diminish
to a signer of important papers

whose eating is rimmed by our decent plates
who had many waistcoats
and plays [(tolerably)][A,B,C] the flute after dinner;

Who spread himself once through the clearing acres
[an energy,][A,B] an effort
uprooting the stumps of trees

who fed at a crude table
on dandelions and was left empty

who was early in history

---

1 they] A,B: the Establishment.
2 invited us out of] A: took us from the
3 diminish] A,B,C: harden
4 to a signer of important papers] A: into a solid 2 dimensional / figure a daytime signer of papers B,C: into an official figure, / ceramic-solid / a daytime signer of papers
5 whose . . . plates] A: who eats ~~nonchalant~~ easily / dines from the new plates B: who eats with choice from the decent plates
6 who had many waistcoats] A: putters in the garden nonchalant among the shrubbery B,C: who putters among the shrubberies
11-12 who fed . . . empty] A,B,C: who gorged at a table / of earthenware and scant propriety
13 history] A.B: time

who pioneered across my body
and spaded children
out of me like potatoes

who whistled in the plank rooms

[whose tallow candle
fever smoked through the rasped
plank room][C]

whose love was avid with poverty

who was close to me as moss

who was faceless and unspoken
and without a shape and vague [as][A,B] a far
night shore

---

15 spaded] A,B,C: wrenched
17 whistled . . . rooms] A,B,C: made crude music
18-20 whose . . . room] A: whose fever burned through the rasped wooden / rooms, a cheap candle B: whose fever smoked through rasped wooden / rooms, a cheap candle

NOTES

1 Grateful thanks is due to Margaret Atwood for permission to reproduce her poem, "Husband in Retrospect," and to her assistant Sarah Webster for her invaluable assistance. "Husband in Retrospect", by Margaret Atwood. Copyright Margaret Atwood. Reprinted with permission of the author. From the Fisher Rare Book Library, Atwood Archives at the University of Toronto, MS Coll 200 Box 12. We would also like to thank Jennifer Toews and the staff of the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, as well as Heather Murray, Marlene Goldman, Colleen Franklin, and Melissa Auclair for their editing, input, and support. Finally, we would like to thank David Galbraith, for helping spark this work.

2 Atwood's characters in *The Journals* will be referred to throughout the article as Susanna and as John Dunbar to distinguish them from the historical individuals.

3 Helmut Reichenbächer's (2000) genetic analysis of the early drafts of *The Edible Woman* helps demonstrate that Atwood's tendency to favour ambiguity is consistent throughout her early writing career: Reichenbächer detects "a gradual elimination of material from the six extant drafts. This process results in gaps which the reader is expected to fill while interpreting the text" (266). Thank you to the anonymous reader of this article for pointing us to this work.

4 R. P. Bilan's "Margaret Atwood's *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*" (1978) is an example of this kind of uncomplicated application of the "Afterword" to the poems.

5 Diane Relke (1983) rejects the "Afterword" as "a convenient interpretive crutch that has encouraged critical laziness" (35); Jacqui Smyth (1992) argues that the "Afterword" is a part of the *Journals,* but that it should be subject to analysis alongside the poems.

6 See Sherrill E. Grace (1980), Laura Groening (1983), Ann Boutelle (1988), Kim Stringer (2002), and Faye Hammill (2003).

7 Other titles that Atwood considered and are found in her drafts include "Unspoken poems of S. Moodie, recorded by Margaret Atwood," "Susanna Moodie Autobiography from an Undetermined Location," and "Susanna Moodie: Autobiographies From an Unknown Location."

8 Hammill (2003) notes that the edition of Moodie's text that Atwood used for her poetry collection was likely the abridged 1962 New Canadian Library edition of *Roughing It in the Bush*, which for a long time was the most widely-available edition. John Dunbar Moodie has much more of a presence in the unabridged version, published by Virago in 1986. For example, in its original entirety, *Roughing It in the Bush* has four chapters and several poems by John Dunbar Moodie (see Gray 2006).

9 For other discussions of "The Wereman," see Judith McCombs (1981), Susan Johnston (1992), Erin Smith (1993), and Faye Hammill (2003).

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Denise Desautels

L'œil au ralenti

sans réserve ma voix couvre sa proie
il suffit de ne rien déranger
on succombe à la paresse
au bruit à la fatigue
on se dissout dans l'air impur
curieux mensonge parmi d'autres
la voix ruine toujours les mots

what an old wive's tale
the voice always ruins words
they fall prey to our lazy tired claptrap
our impure breath taints them
yet when everything falls into place
my voice deliciously savours its words

Translated by Norman Cornett

Performing Canidentities

Nina Lee Aquino and Ric Knowles, eds.
Asian Canadian Theatre: New Essays on Canadian Theatre, Volume One. Playwrights Canada $25.00

Moira J. Day
West-Words: Celebrating Western Canadian Theatre and Playwriting. Canadian Plains Research Center, University of Regina $39.95

Reviewed by Pilar Cuder-Domínguez

As its General Editor Ric Knowles explains, the *New Essays in Canadian Theatre* series consists of newly commissioned essay collections acting as companions to an anthology of plays in a combination that will be of particular interest for teachers of Canadian theatre courses. The opening book in the series, *Asian Canadian Theatre*, grew out of *GENesis: Asian-Canadian Theatre Conference*, held in Toronto in 2010. It brings together over twenty essays by academics and members of the theatre industry as a companion to *Love and Relasianships*, edited by Nina Lee Aquino. As the first collection ever published on Asian Canadian theatre, this is certainly a groundbreaking achievement, and one that is made all the more remarkable by its comprehensive approach to the field, drawing equally from the theory and the practice of drama.

Several essays consider the nuanced contours of the emerging field (Karen Shimakawa), its history in connection to Asian Canadian cultural arts organizations and activism (Dongshin Chang and Xiaoping Li), and its radical potential to interrupt hegemonic discourses (Sean Metzger). Attention is paid as well to intercultural negotiations with the Asian homeland (Daphne Lei and Siyuan Liu), to the performative use of space (Jenna Rodgers), or to the conjunction of race and comedy (Thy Phu). Other scholars provide an overview of the work being carried out by companies such as Concrete Theatre (Anne Nothof) and Carlos Bulosan Theatre (Ric Knowles), or else by playwrights like Jean Yoon (Esther Kim Lee). Shelley Scott pursues the convergence of feminism and anti-racism, whereas Eleanor Ty approaches drama from the frameworks of memory and migration studies, and Donald Goellnicht from queer theory. Finally, several chapters address the politics of recognition and the relation with the audience (Christopher Lee and Christine Kim).

The academic perspective is complemented by shorter pieces based on panel discussions held during the conference on a variety of topics. In these, dramatists and performers take stock of the work done so far, occasionally rehearsing some of the main arguments of the original discussion, but more often frankly sharing their personal views and experiences. Adrienne Wong and David Yee respectively discuss working in Vancouver and Toronto. Jean Yong muses on the younger generations distrust of professional associations. Brenda Kamino puzzles over the meaning of being a pioneer of Asian Canadian drama. Donald Woo sees mixed-race as an opportunity to create unique works. June Park shares her

views on how Asian Canadian subjectivities coalesce in different ways depending on the place, and Jane Luk recounts her experiences with stereotypical Asian acting roles and accents.

Overall, the volume is not only extremely rich in factual and critical information but is also full of insightful and complex perceptions of Asian-Canadian theatre and its practitioners. A running thread through the collection is the relationship of playwrights and companies with the Asian Canadian community in its multiplicity, not only historic or geographic but also generational, as well as a critique of mainstream Canadian theatre in which Asian Canadians (and, for that matter, cultural diversity as a whole) are clearly under-represented. However, one misses in this collection a tidier structure that might provide readers with some guidance through what is a rather overwhelming accumulation of thought-provoking discussions.

West-Words: Celebrating Western Canadian Theatre grew from materials first presented at the conference held at the University of Saskatchewan in 2007, and it brings together scholars and theatre artists. Here the editor Moira J. Day has imposed a more reader-friendly structure, neatly dividing the collection into four sections, three for the prairie provinces in east to west order (Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta), and a fourth on "Crossing Regional Borders." The organization of the first three is similar, each section comprising an overview, two or more articles on theatres, theatre companies and dramaturgical centres, and ending with a focus on plays and playwrights. The last section has a freer format, the only common ground for its four essays being its cross-regional scope.

The Manitoba section starts the conversation with playwright Bruce McManus' overview of the ups and downs of twenty-five years of writing for the theatre. Katherine Foster Grajewski thoughtfully weighs the implications of the small alternative theatre company Prairie Theatre Exchange's move to a shopping mall. Hope McIntyre discusses the (mostly budgetary) problems encountered by the feminist company Saravasti in staging local playwrights, and Claire Borody deplores the continued marginalization of experimental theatre companies like Primus Theatre. In the closing essay, Glen Nichols redresses critical bias by analyzing four of Carol Shields' published plays as theatrical pieces.

In the Saskatchewan section, Don Kerr's overview stresses the strong role that the University of Saskatchewan has played since 1946 in the development of the theatre in the province whereas Pam Bustin accounts for the success of Saskatchewan Playwrights Centre in providing a space free from the tensions of the marketplace. Two interesting essays follow on the subject of minority theatre. Louise H. Forsyth explains how the only Francophone professional company has met the challenges of catering for a community scattered across the province, while Alan Long traces the origins of Aboriginal theatre in Saskatchewan to the activist plays developed by Maria Campbell since the 1970s. Ending this section, Wes Pearce explores the creation of a Prairie Gothic in Daniel Macdonald's *MacGregor's Hard Ice Cream and Gas* (2005).

Mieko Ouchi opens the Alberta section with an overview that highlights the connection between the province's oil boom of the 1980s and the rise of theatrical activity and talent. Publishing plays, and specifically publishing Western Canadian plays, is the subject of Anne Nothof's chapter, followed by John Poulsen and Kathleen Foreman's description of Wagonstage, the forty-year-old summer troupe bringing theatre to young audiences in Calgary. Moira Day's essay addresses the politics of the arts coverage in the province as performed in Frank Moher's 1988 comedy *Prairie Report*.

The collection closes with four interesting pieces on a variety of subjects: critical

neglect of plays on the Great Depression written by Western Canadian women (Arnd Bohm); the reception of a play that interrogates both regional and gendered identities (Shelley Scott); the suitability or not of the very concept of regionalism as a form of cultural critique (Martin Pšenička); and the opening opportunities for creating new forms of audio drama (Allan Boss and Kelley Jo Burke). Like *Asian Canadian Theatre, West-Words* repeatedly points out the unequal access of larger theatres and small troupes to funding and facilities, as well as a certain marginalization of the more experimental companies. Moreover, they see the prairie theatre industry as disadvantaged in the larger federal context.

To sum up, the editors of these two collections have managed to gather a rich range of materials on Canadian theatre that, while being of most immediate usefulness in the classroom, can appeal to a much wider readership of people interested in drama and performance. Moreover, they attest to the strength and vitality of Canadian theatre today, charting its history, dwelling on past and present challenges, and envisioning new creative possibilities.

Canyons of Darkness

Jonathan Ball
The Politics of Knives. Coach House $17.95

Pamela Mordecai
Subversive Sonnets. TSAR $17.95

Susan Gillis
The Rapids. Brick $19.00

Reviewed by Emily Wall

These three poets ask us to explore the dark crevices of humanity. They take us to scenes of rape, of slavery, of dislocation in the twenty-first century, and of deep loneliness even in places of beauty. All three ask us to take note of the failures of humankind, and the ways in which we can so deeply harm each other.

The Politics of Knives by Jonathan Ball is a book of negation, absences, and loss. Ball uses language in original and sharp ways to make us feel the loss at the core of his poems. One of the most interesting techniques is his use of repetition. In several of the poems, perhaps most notably "The Most Terrible of Dogs" he uses it so heavily (the word "waiting" is repeated one-hundred and two times) that it forces the reader's dislocation from language itself. We cannot read the word that many times without beginning to skim, to skip ahead, to try and land on something else.

Perhaps the most successful poem is "Psycho." Ball fragments the Hitchcock film and moves us through an image collage, offering us little slices of movie. Here, he achieves something unique—the movie becomes closer to our own experiences than it would ever have been on screen. Those slices of image, some of them repeated several times, help us recognize how that film shaped our own understanding of fear and desire and psychosis. He ends the poem with the line "Why would we ever harm a fly?" Readers recognize that moment from the film, of course, but by isolating it like this it too becomes our own experience.

A number of moments focus on the camera itself. As readers we are often given the image of the camera—sometimes along with what it is viewing as well. This hyper-awareness of the way we see things underscores Ball's themes of dislocation and loss. The "I" rarely appears in these poems, but there is someone standing off to the side, wry and objective, aware of both the scene and the camera. This, too, is a kind of dislocation. Readers are not invited into the life of the speaker or even the emotional landscape.

The Rapids by Susan Gillis is also a book of dislocation. Gillis' gift is her seductive images. Most poems are constructed of images and then end with a statement. What's jarring is that the statements rarely

seem to have a strong connection to the images. By fragmenting the narrative this way, she removes any trace of speaker from the landscape she's just created. The speaker tries to connect to the images but ultimately doesn't. In the poem "In the Storm" she tries to garden but can't keep up, can't get into the world of its beauty. In the end it "was the garden dividing me."

Gillis' most powerful moments are her listings of images. Some of the poems offer long lists of beautiful objects but don't connect the objects or the speaker to the objects. Perhaps the strongest is "Anchor." In this poem, which is almost entirely a list, the speaker packs everything from eucalyptus fronds to a lame man in her suitcase. But nothing connects the speaker to the objects—she is unable to anchor herself to the world through her listing.

While the language and image work is smart and does a perfect job of creating dislocation, a reader might wish that Gillis would take more risks. She has small moments of narrative ("divorce" and "hotel rooms") that make her presence suddenly known, but she doesn't follow those dark, personal moments. She repeatedly takes us to the edge, but not *over* it.

Unlike in the poems of Ball and Gillis, Pamela Mordecai is incredibly present in *Subversive Sonnets*. She takes on a multitude of voices and personae, but she's right here, vivid and complex. There's no detached cynicism or language play. She doesn't comment on any of the stories—there is no meta-poetics here. She just lets the stories stand. And like all good stories, they make us feel like part of the fabric of humanity.

These poems are a brilliant blend of lyric and narrative. Most of them are narrative poems, but they also play with the sonnet form and end rhyme to excellent effect. Mordecai has built very seductive, musical stories. She translates the sonnet form into something new and it works beautifully. Her end rhyme comes and goes—she creates schemes, but isn't wedded to them. Because it's more fluid, it arrives like an upswing in song and then falls away again—exactly as music in poems should.

These poems are fierce. Unafraid. Mordecai shows us shocking images and tells us terrible stories. However, it's the presence of the speaker that makes them so powerful. She's not afraid to become the characters in her stories and to probe the darkest places of humanity.

They are not all dark, though. They are irreverent and biting and full of moments of beauty too. We have a poem where orphans fall in love with a nun who has a funny accent. We have Auntie Vida who says about a lover and incompatibility, "Oh no, / my dear! You're not looking at this the right way at all . . . / You have the income. I am pattable." ("Counting the Ways and Marrying True Minds"). These moments of levity let us breathe, and also make the darker moments all the darker for the comparison.

All three poets have their own strengths and their own visions, and all ask us to look into the darkness for a while. They lead the reader down a dark road that ends in a dark canyon and then they ask: will we dare to look over the edge?

De l'Espagne au Québec

Carmen Mata Barreiro, dir.
Espagnes imaginaires du Québec. PUL 27,00 $

Compte rendu par Kim Beauchesne

Le magnifique ouvrage collectif *Espagnes imaginaires du Québec* dirigé par Carmen Mata Barreiro est sans aucun doute une contribution significative aux domaines des études à la fois québécoises et hispaniques. Dans un contexte où la culture latino-américaine, elle-même d'une grande richesse, prend de plus en plus d'ampleur sur la scène intellectuelle du Québec, il est tout à fait pertinent de considérer la place qu'occupe l'Espagne dans l'imaginaire

collectif de cette province francophone. Comme nous le rappelle la professeure Mata Barreiro au début de son œuvre, le Québec et l'Espagne (la communauté autonome de Catalogne y compris) partagent plusieurs aspects en commun qu'il convient d'explorer davantage.

L'un des points forts de ce recueil d'essais est qu'il se propose de déconstruire les stéréotypes de l'Espagne qui abondent dans le paysage culturel du Québec, souvent reliés au mythe de Carmen, à la tauromachie et aux plages légendaires. Même si ces images sont incontestablement fondées, il va sans dire qu'on se doit d'aller au-delà des lieux communs, comme le démontrent les réflexions sur *Dehors les chiens* de Jacques Folch-Ribas ou les poèmes de Juan Garcia parus dans la revue *Liberté*.

Un autre apport appréciable de cet ensemble d'écrits est l'énorme variété des thèmes couverts, ce qui reflète la diversité des dialogues émanant de la tradition de la *tertulia*. Des entretiens et récits d'ordre autobiographique à l'interprétation québécoise de *La Celestina*, il parcourt une panoplie de manifestations culturelles qui éclairent les interactions constantes entre la production artistique de l'Espagne et celle du Québec. Plus précisément, l'ouvrage se compose de trois parties : « Représentations de l'Espagne au Québec » porte sur la présence notable de l'Espagne dans la littérature québécoise; « Des représentations aux recréations » aborde les « voyagements » du théâtre québécois par rapport à son contact avec la culture espagnole; « Traduire l'Espagne, traduire le Québec » traite de la traduction en tant que processus et produit culturels. Chacun des textes qui sont inclus dans ces parties y a sa place, d'autant plus que quelques-uns d'entre eux permettent même de reconsidérer les œuvres d'artistes francophones de renom, tels que Robert Lepage et Jean-Pierre Ronfard. De plus, ce livre réunit les perspectives complémentaires de chercheurs (hispanistes et canadiens-québécois), créateurs et écrivains provenant de divers horizons professionnels : entre autres, Marie-Célie Agnant, Nadia Ghalem, Javier Rubiera, Beatriz Calvo Martín, Lucie Lequin, Isabelle Miron et Louis Jolicoeur.

Mis à part quelques coquilles, cet ouvrage collectif est admirablement rédigé et fait preuve d'une organisation exemplaire. Il a le potentiel d'attirer tous ceux qui s'intéressent au métissage culturel et à la mondialisation, notamment dans le cadre des études hispaniques et québécoises tant au Canada qu'en Europe. Quoiqu'il soit évident qu'une œuvre de ce genre ne peut épuiser le sujet en question, il s'agit d'un excellent point de départ qui nous invite à continuer de réfléchir sur les échanges culturels qui caractérisent notre monde actuel.

How Free is Free?

David Bezmozgis
The Free World. HarperCollins Canada $32.99

Pablo Urbanyi and Hugh Hazelton, trans.
Silver. Cormorant $20.00

Reviewed by Nanette Norris

In 1978, Prime Minister Menachem Begin of Israel, President Anwar Sadat of Egypt, and President Jimmy Carter of the United States met to carve out the Camp David Accords; Pope John Paul II was elected; Soviet Jews were being granted exit visas and looking for sponsorship around the world. This is the official history: the real history of a people lies in the delicate tracings of memory.

With the timelessness that Freud says is characteristic of memory, David Bezmozgis' *The Free World* opens a window on the life of these Jews in exile—the daily details, the strands of life which link a difficult present, as emigrés passing through Rome, to a past in communist Russia. Frame by frame emerges remembrance of betrayals, strip-searches, infidelities, childhood innocence, and murder, blending into a present of humiliation, resignation,

criminality, and the myriad human compromises that join the past with the present in interlocking layers.

Through it all one hears the voices of the people in transit: the father, Samuil—who watched his father die at the hands of the invading Germans—became a Revolutionary, shed blood for Russia, was an apostate, only to find himself out of place as an emigré, a man who "could no longer bear to look at the past—or the future. His revolution was over." Emma, his wife, the quiet lynchpin around whom the chaos of poor choices swirl. Polina, who was neither forced nor coerced to leave Russia, but chose to marry, to marry a Jew, and to leave, with cautious hope. Her emotional entanglements ring true. And of course Alec, of whom we see the most, and for whom we bleed the most. Always somehow second to his brother Karl, who is "tireless and liable to appear anywhere, selling anything," he draws ever nearer to the flame of illicit dealings in the emigré underground. *The Free World* is rich with memories of displanted Russian Jews struggling to define themselves on their journey from East to West.

Pablo Urbanyi's *Silver* is best appreciated in light of Kafka's "A Report for an Academy," which it follows fairly closely and builds upon. Like Kafka's "free ape," Silver recounts how he was captured, how he came to live with Diane and her husband Gregory, and how he learned human behaviour. Like Kafka's ape, Silver accommodates himself to a socially acceptable existence as a wheelchair-bound drunkard, seemingly neutered and insensate. What happens in the middle, however, is both a hoot and a testimony to the ability of the translator, Montreal writer and poet Hugh Hazelton, to seamlessly render the original Spanish.

The more human Silver becomes, the more the humans regress, until the narrative becomes a French farce, funny, poignant, and disgusting, all at the same time, as Gregory comes home and finds Diane and Silver . . . well, I won't spoil it for you. Needless to say, this is far too human for the average misanthropic society, so Silver is carted off to a new cage where he waits to be rescued and freed once more.

Diane is loosely based upon Dian Fossey, the American zoologist and gorilla researcher who was murdered in 1985 in the mountain forests of Rwanda. The tongue-in-cheek association between the woman who loved gorillas and the ape-lover is, in this reader's view, not as funny or ironic as it was perhaps meant to be. Neither, in my mind, is the association between Silver's next rescuer, Jane, and the British primatologist, Jane Goodall, whom I met when she came to the University of Guelph to speak to a group of schoolchildren about her work with the chimpanzees. When one considers how this soft-spoken, unassuming woman has bridged the gap of understanding between humans and primates, her caricature in *Silver* is nothing short of pillory.

However, the nuts-and-berries amongst us who want to return all beings to their so-called "natural" surroundings take note: it just is not that easy. *Silver* reminds us, in the most amusing way possible, of the complexity that is the human animal, for whom "natural" is "unnatural."

Both *Silver* and *The Free World* encourage us to take a hard look at what freedom really means, how we perceive it, mould it, aspire to it, and, finally, compromise for it, in order to achieve some semblance of what it means to be a free individual.

Voix plurielles

Edward Dickinson Blodgett
Invention à cinq voix : une histoire de l'histoire littéraire au Canada. PUL 47,00 $

Compte rendu par Srilata Ravi

La parution de l'œuvre de E. D. Blodgett, *Invention à cinq voix* : *une histoire de l'histoire littéraire au Canada* élégamment traduit de l'anglais *Five Part Invention: History of Literary History in Canada* (2003) par Patricia Godbout, met à la disposition des chercheurs francophones du Canada et de l'étranger un outil de recherche indispensable pour tous ceux qui s'intéressent aux études canadiennes au-delà des constructions essentialistes de la nation et du multiculturalisme. On peut d'ailleurs se demander pourquoi ce projet de traduction n'a pas été initié dès la publication de l'original? Pour Blodgett, l'histoire de l'histoire littéraire du Canada est, d'une part, une orientation, pas nécessairement fructueuse, vers la reconnaissance d'un Autre présent depuis le début, « sous une forme fantomatique ou réelle», et, d'autre part, un récit qui ne sera jamais définitif.

Ce livre est le fruit d'un travail méthodique d'un comparatiste de très haut calibre. Il impressionne par l'échelle de l'entreprise et la richesse théorique des analyses offertes. Inspiré des travaux de Hayden White sur les pratiques historiographiques comme modes rhétoriques, il consiste en une étude de plus d'une soixantaine d'histoires littéraires de la littérature canadienne anglaise et française, ainsi que des histoires littéraires des Premières Nations, des Inuits et des « minorités ethniques ». Il s'agit donc d'une histoire des histoires littéraires à voix multiples qui ne résonnent pas ensemble pour produire une harmonie quelconque mais qui, au contraire, marquées par leurs différences, restent enclavées dans leurs spécificités d'usage et de fonction. Le titre de la traduction française me semble mieux convenir au double projet de construction et de déconstruction au cœur du livre. Il est intéressant de noter qu'un chapitre entier est dévoué élogieusement à *La vie littéraire au Québec* (sous la direction de Maurice Lemire), choisi comme exemple unique d'une histoire littéraire qui inscrit une vision et qui expose à la fois la signification et le mode de fonctionnement. Les trois derniers chapitres qui ont pour but de lire le Canada multiculturel en tant qu'altérité, vue à la fois de l'intérieur et de l'extérieur, cherchent à défaire les essentialismes ancrés dans les cultures des deux groupes dominants. Il est dommage que sa propre méthodologie basée sur les tropes historiques de rupture et de frontière limite l'auteur dans ses analyses à une lecture européocentrique; une comparaison avec les historiographies australienne et néo-zélandaise aurait apporté des précisions signifiantes sur les questions de la vérité, de la moralité et de la responsabilité dans l'histoire des histoires littéraires dans d'autres situations postcoloniales. En dépit de la présentation convaincante et érudite de la thèse, le dernier chapitre nous oblige, tout de même, à nous demander si l'auteur lui-même ne regrette pas cette « histoire littéraire d'une fédération qui refuse de voir la valeur et la pertinence d'une fédération » et qui valorise les particularismes au détriment d'une unité édifiante? Cela dit, cette hésitation n'est-elle pas la condition *sine qua non* de l'entendement de toute narration procédurale, plurielle et perpétuellement en cours?

"Travelling, Companions"

Alanna F. Bondar
There are Many Ways to Die While Travelling in Peru. Your Scrivener $17.00

Julie Bruck
Monkey Ranch. Brick $19.00

John Gilmore
Head of a Man. Reality Street $9.50

Reviewed by Weldon Hunter

There are Many Ways to Die While Travelling in Peru by Alanna F. Bondar is a hybrid text of poetry and prose that juxtaposes her experiences as an eco-tourist in Peru with the familiar and familial landscapes of Northern Ontario. Bondar announces her discovery of the surprising relations between the two at the beginning of her poetic narrative: "You are among the first to be told of Peru's tourism cover story. This secret knowledge is your reward for reading Canadian poetry." As national and continental boundaries are blurred, so are the distinctions between prose and poetry. Bondar employs the forward slash to mark linebreaks (/) within prose paragraphs to disrupt generic conventions and geographic spatiality:

> What the traveler takes into the virtual reality tank is everything & nothing at all. // You are reading the output from my collected data—from Northern Ontario, my home and native land & Peru, likewise remote & in spots under-populated, with space to explore a wilder geopsyche.

Bondar alternates narrative perspectives between places, frontiers, and "solitudes," always in lively and convivial voices.

Julie Bruck's collection, *Monkey Ranch*, is notable for winning the 2012 Governor General's Award for Poetry, as well as for possessing the kind of cover that will garner curious looks if read in public. The poems themselves are witty and formally elegant, often balancing the tragic with the comic, the human with the anthropoid. Bruck's poems are "keenly observed," but they go further than that rather pedestrian classification in exploring what happens to our perspective when our non-human companions stare back at us—at zoos, in our homes, and even on the covers of our poetry books! In "The Mandrill's Gaze," the titular beast's "hazel eyes, are small, deep-set, and when / he fixes them on yours, I dare you, / turn away." Bruck also raises the question of how we look at, look for, and look *after* our fellow humans. In the poem "Missing Jerry Tang," when the search for that titular character peters out, the flyers of the missing man are "replaced with more recent sightings: / pictures of the two blue herons who nest here, / an egret teetering on its fragile orange legs." There is the sense that animals and humans live parallel, but not always synchronous lives, where momentous human events, like the destruction of the Twin Towers, only present a "small disturbance / quickly settled" to the eels of Jamaica Bay, Queens, in the poem "Scientists Say."

John Gilmore's *Head of a Man* presents an unusual twist on the conventional travel narrative. The protagonist of this spare, lyrical novel remains mostly in one room, sequestered in a hostel in an unidentified Asian country. Unlike other tourists, who come to "see the valley and the terraces . . . stay a few nights, and then move on," our reluctant narrator (who may or may not be named "Joe") is locked in an unsettling stasis, unable or unwilling to provide the details of a recent trauma. In fact, he seems, as much as the reader, to be waiting for his story to surface: "I am at rest. A tongue at rest. Waiting." The novel shows that our societal discourse of distress is no easy path to catharsis. Instead of language "containing" trauma, in the sense of healing or holding within bounds—the "talking cure"—our narrator reveals how language is comprised of dangerous elements, which can inflame our suffering: "Words cut the throat. Scratch stone. Leave lines behind. Once incised, indelible." Gilmore's

minimalism would make for an interesting travelling companion with Bondar's loquacious volume.

Dans la nuit du poème

Jacques Brault

Dans la nuit du poème. Noroît 13,00 $

Compte rendu par Jean-Noël Pontbriand

En 1965, dans un texte intitulé, *Quelque chose de simple*, Jacques Brault se demandait : « Qu'est-ce que la poésie? » Il répondait : « Je ne sais plus, j'ai cru savoir ». Il tenta, dans trois courtes pages, de mettre le doigt sur cette réalité quasi indicible qu'on nomme poésie, pour finalement conclure qu'il est plus facile d'éprouver son absence que de la définir.

On ne pourrait donc connaître la poésie que d'une façon indirecte, grâce aux conséquences délétères que son absence engendre en nos vies. Qui n'est pas intéressé par l'existence de la poésie ne pourrait donc point éprouver ni sa présence ni son effet parce qu'il lui manque l'expérience de ce vide au fond duquel se cache le désespoir, mais également cet autre visage du mystère qu'on appelle poésie.

Quelques années plus tard, en 1972, l'auteur, en relisant son texte, a senti le besoin de parler de l'écriture pour mieux situer son propos. Il parle de la poésie, du sentiment poétique que nous pouvons éprouver par et dans l'écriture et conclut que, généralement, malgré les nombreuses « pages griffonnées, raturées, barbouillées », la poésie n'est pas au rendez-vous, l'émotion n'habite pas les mots, le miracle d'une parole juste et efficace ne se produit pas. Difficile constat qui ne peut que stimuler la recherche d'une définition du poème qui, selon l'opinion courante, est le lieu privilégié permettant à la poésie de se révéler autant à l'écrivain qu'au lecteur.

Ce raccordement de la poésie à l'écriture ouvre la voie à une autre interrogation : qu'est-ce qu'un poème? *Dans la nuit du poème* tente de répondre à cette question. Peut-on cerner véritablement ce qu'est un poème réussi, en qui et par qui la poésie se manifeste à la conscience prête à l'accueillir? Car il faut établir une nette distinction entre un texte fidèle aux lois ou aux normes de la versification, lesquelles ne sont pas, surtout en notre époque de modernité, fixes, à supposer même qu'il en reste, et un texte dans lequel la poésie se manifeste avec évidence. Dans ce court essai, l'auteur convoque les principaux témoins susceptibles de lui permettre d'éclairer sa question et d'établir des paramètres à l'intérieur desquels il semblerait que le langage doive se situer pour avoir un minimum de chance de rendre la parole à elle-même et, par cela, la poésie au texte.

L'enquête, menée par Brault, le conduit du Moyen-Âge aux temps dits modernes et lui permet de constater que « la langue versifiée n'est pas la poésie », d'une part, et que, d'autre part, l'usage versifié de la langue n'est pas le seul qui puisse prétendre à la poésie.

Pour tenter de jeter un peu de lumière sur cette nuit, Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Valéry, Ponge, Michaud, Aragon, Paz, Blanchot et Collot sont interrogés. Ce qui permet à l'auteur de constater qu'aucun de ces praticiens n'a réussi à vraiment résoudre la question du poème comme lieu de la poésie. Il y a le poème comme lieu d'exploration du langage, le poème comme architectures sonores susceptibles de permettre à ceux qui les visitent d'être éblouis par l'audace des lignes et l'ampleur des espaces dégagés, mais trop souvent incapable d'engendrer ce quelque chose sans lequel tout l'édifice semble vide et peu propice au recueillement. C'est que le poème, aussi bien en prose qu'en vers (les deux sont examinés dans ce court essai), ne contient pas, dans sa structure même, ce qui aurait pour effet de le rendre parlant dans la langue des Dieux. Certes il faut jouer de la langue et du langage, casser la fausse cadence pour

permettre la naissance du rythme, cet élément que tous reconnaissent comme étant nécessaire à l'éclosion de la parole, mais dont personne n'est vraiment capable de préciser la recette d'application.

L'ensemble de cet essai écrit dans une langue elle-même remplie de silence et de sous-entendus, convoque celui qui accepte de le lire à un voyage à travers les mots, l'histoire et l'expression qui tente de trouver son rythme de naissance et son lieu d'exploration.

Une souffrance sans résignation

Jacques Cardinal
Humilité et profanation : Au pied de la pente douce de Roger Lemelin. Lévesque éditeur 25,00 $

Compte rendu par Mélanie Beauchemin

Le premier roman de Roger Lemelin, *Au pied de la pente douce* (1944), rompt « avec le discours de l'obéissance, de la pauvreté édifiante, de l'ordre établi, annonçant de la sorte le discours émancipateur et conquérant des années soixante ». À l'instar des *Plouffe* (1948), il dépeint avec réalisme et humour un microcosme paroissial en quête de son identité. Illustrant une modernité québécoise en voie d'urbanisation, théâtre de l'ascendance de l'Église catholique sur la collectivité, ces deux œuvres de Roger Lemelin lui valent une reconnaissance exceptionnelle qui traverse les frontières.

Une année avant la parution de *Bonheur d'occasion* de Gabrielle Roy, autre texte révélateur des mœurs urbaines de la jeune génération, *Au pied de la pente douce* illustre pour sa part une réalité nouvelle, soit la dénonciation de l'humilité d'un certain discours catholique qu'adoptent de faux dévots « dominés par des préoccupations égoïstes ». C'est cette fausse représentation de la piété, ce semblant de vertu dont se réclament de nombreux personnages frustrés, désireux « d'accroître leur pouvoir sur la scène paroissiale », que met en relief Jacques Cardinal, professeur de littérature à l'Université de Montréal, dans son essai *Humilité et profanation* (2013), récemment paru chez Lévesque éditeur.

Abordant *Au pied de la pente douce* sous un angle d'analyse encore inexploré, Cardinal va bien au-delà de l'évocation d'une « peinture de mœurs » au ton léger et humoristique en s'intéressant à « l'ironie profanatrice » d'un texte qui dénonce à travers l'humilité chrétienne « le discours idéalisant du roman de la terre » et, par l'entremise du personnage de Jean Colin, la représentation sublimée de la souffrance et de la mort qui mènent à la transcendance. L'agonie de Jean Colin, pour ainsi dire profane puisque « au service d'aucune sublimation », illustre selon Cardinal une lucidité cruelle, un refus de « l'appel à Dieu » contraire aux principes de l'idéologie chrétienne qui appellent à la mortification, « sinon au martyre, pour éprouver [la] foi et trouver [le] salut ».

Grâce à la lecture fine et à l'écriture maîtrisée de Jacques Cardinal, l'œuvre de Roger Lemelin, quelque peu « délaissée par les chercheurs », gagne un souffle nouveau. *Humilité et profanation* explore avec brio une satire sociale cédant peu à peu la place au « récit-cauchemar fait d'angoisse, d'humiliations et de désespoir, envers du rêve et de l'illusion ». Un essai qui saura intéresser les lecteurs de Lemelin, au service d'un grand roman.

Culture Unsettled

May Chazan, Lisa Helps, Anna Stanley, and Sonali Thakkar, eds.
Home and Native Land: Unsettling Multiculturalism in Canada. Between the Lines $29.95

Susan Gingell and Wendy Roy, eds.
Listening Up, Writing Down, and Looking Beyond: Interfaces of the Oral, Written, and Visual. Wilfrid Laurier UP $85.00

Reviewed by Heather Macfarlane

It is a pleasure to be intellectually unsettled, and both *Home and Native Land* and *Listening Up, Writing Down, and Looking Beyond* manage to destabilize dominant narratives that stand in the way of change. While the goal of breaking down to open up is the same in both texts, this is where the similarities end: the former revisions multiculturalism, while the latter seeks to break down hierarchies of artistic production. Chazan, Helps, Stanley, and Thakkar assert in their Introduction that "the meaning of multiculturalism is not, and never has been, fully settled." What is settled seems to be the central position of multiculturalism in the national imagination. While the majority of the contributors to this collection agree that the *idea* of multiculturalism promotes equalization and decolonization, most conclude that its *policies* are destructive, since they assume a colonial centre, and mask the very real questions of racism, gender inequity, and poverty that are bound up in the term. The aim of the essays in this collection is to put racism and poverty back into discussions of multiculturalism, and the editors take this task seriously. The unsettling begins, in fact, with the painting by Winnipeg-based artist Anders Swanson that decorates the cover. It depicts three figures in a field, and the ground beneath them is filled with the bones of hundreds of human bodies, along with old parts of machinery, roads, and boats. Since burial represents the ultimate claim to land, the painting, as the editors contend, "resonates with [the] title, asking, ironically: *whose home and native land?*"

The editors and contributors point to the recent "crisis in multiculturalism" as an opportunity for change. With 9/11, concerns over cultural allegiances and questions of security have been pushed to the fore, and the assumption of seamless assimilation into the multicultural ideal has been put into question. Sociology professor Rinaldo Walcott, in the first essay, points to the anxiety of "white aggressors," who, afraid of their ever-decreasing power, desperately attempt to legitimize their perception of the world as the *only* perception. Multicultural policy, constructed along these lines, serves only to preserve colonial structures, and Dene scholar Glen Coulthard reinforces this when he states that the recognition put forth in Charles Taylor's "politics of recognition" serves to reinforce colonial-Indigenous binaries. One of the most succinctly and effectively argued essays in the collection is written by professor of politics Grace-Edward Galabuzi, who also concludes that multiculturalism preserves hegemony and serves only to segregate cultural groups. This idea of segregation is alluded to in several other contributions, and is discussed explicitly in an essay that stands apart for its specific treatment of the arts. In her discussion of Indian classical dance, law professor and dancer Natasha Bakht argues that multicultural policy too often demands a kind of cultural authenticity, which leaves no room for artistic experimentation. This, of course, carries broader implications, and points to the dangers of segregation and static cultural identities.

In perhaps the most controversial essay in the collection, Nandita Sharma, professor of ethnic studies and sociology at the University of Hawai'i, emphatically states that in debates concerning the role of Indigenous peoples and multiculturalism,

immigrants should not be equated with the colonizers, since many have themselves been subjected to colonial rule. This argument, while it does call attention to the specific concerns of refugees, is also problematic, since everyone settled on Native land inherits responsibility for being there. Environmental studies scholar Brian Egan, in a similarly provocative essay, underlines the very fundamental difference that exists between immigrants and Native peoples, and that is the question of land ownership, which brings us back to the original question that frames the collection—"*whose* Home and Native Land?"

The discursive nature of the collection is one of its greatest strengths, and the differing points of view of the various contributors offer a valuable interdisciplinary examination of the multiple discussions surrounding ideologies and policies of multiculturalism. What the variety of disciplines does demand, however, is access to a vast and diverse terminology and set of frameworks central to each domain. Terminology, therefore, sometimes makes arguments less accessible to individuals outside the field in question. Then again, the collection is not aimed at specialists of literature—it falls under the categories Critical Race Studies/Politics/Sociology. The contributors are scholars in law, sociology, history, environmental studies, First Nations studies, political science and geography. George Elliott Clarke is the only writer of fiction and professor of literature. That said, it is of course essential that scholars of Canadian literature possess an understanding of debates surrounding multiculturalism.

For those who do begin to despair over the questioning of multicultural ideals, Margaret Walton-Roberts' essay is an important inclusion. While reminding the reader of the alternative multiculturalism offers to the divisiveness of regional concerns, she presents immigration as "a process that engenders a number of opportunities for citizenship participation via rights that are transnationally, as opposed to nationally, constructed." This, in itself, is counter-hegemonic. In much the same vein, George Elliott Clarke's contribution consists of a manifesto demanding "a multicultural, multi-faith, multiracial Canada," and this manifesto is a reminder of the power of activism to promote change.

The same energy and optimism conveyed in Clarke's manifesto characterizes Susan Gingell and Wendy Roy's *Listening Up, Writing Down, and Looking Beyond*, a collection of epic proportions which, interestingly enough, opens with an essay by Clarke on performance poets d'bi young and Oni Joseph. The approach of the editors is appropriately unconventional—something you might not expect from the dark, conservative packaging of the book. The editors do precisely what they intend, however, which is to break down the barriers between the written, the oral and the visual, and destabilize the hierarchies between genres. While capitalizing on the academic infatuation with the "trans" and the "multi," Gingell and Roy display a staggering breadth of knowledge of their field—something that could only be achieved by established and experienced scholars. This collection, in fact, refreshingly recalls the playful poetic experimentation of the 1960s and 1970s, something reinforced by the introductory reference to poet bpNichol, and a contribution by Paul Dutton, a contemporary of bpNichol and one of the four horsemen. Continually playing with language, the editors invite readers to move "toward a more fully embodied knowing, a knowing that issues from attending to the complete sensorium and thus pleasures the knower with a knowing that doesn't forget to have fun."

The collection has its roots in the June 2008 conference "The Oral, the Written and Other Verbal Media: Interfaces and Audiences,"

and the accompanying eVOCative! festival that took place in Saskatoon. In spite of sometimes excessive boundary-breaking terminology, the scope and breadth of the text is its greatest strength. The editors, by including both analytical and creative works in the collection, and by placing analyses of such diverse things as dub poetry, medieval English, Serbian *guslars*, and Cree "story bundles" side by side, succeed in opening doors and shifting perceptions. This strength, however, is also its weakness—at times I craved a more sustained analysis. In other words, the wide range of essays does not allow for a concentrated focus on any one topic, just as the celebration of the multifarious credentials of some of the contributors, while intended to break down generic divisions, sometimes makes them seem over-extended. Some of the terminology the editors put forward in an effort to break down barriers, while reinforcing the conversant nature of the text, also creates a level of semantic difficulty which the reader must decode in context.

These are very small details, however, and I'm not sure that the editors could have addressed them without sacrificing the "opening up" that the collection so successfully accomplishes. The participatory, democratic nature of the text comes through in the conversational elements, and in spite of their expertise, the editors approach their material with a humility that conforms to their goals. They invite feedback in the RSVP to their introduction, and include reference to a website in lieu of a written chapter. Other highlights for me include the encyclopedic nature of the introduction, Helen Gregory's "Insights from Slam," Paul Dutton's essay on "The Speech-Music Continuum," and Wendy Roy's examination of the "Spoken Story." How might a text of this scope be of use to teachers and scholars of literature? It really does shift the parameters of artistic production and reception, which opens up possibilities for teaching in particular. The collection "unsettles" generic limitations, and promotes a return to the sensual that is too often absent from the analysis of literary production and reception.

The Remains of Identity

Rey Chow
Entanglements, or Transmedial Thinking about Capture. Duke UP $23.95

Christopher Lee
The Semblance of Identity: Aesthetic Mediation in Asian American Literature. Stanford UP $50.00

Reviewed by Guy Beauregard

Toward the end of *Entanglements*, Rey Chow draws our attention to what she calls "the paradigm shift taking place today in the study of Asian cultures in a globalized academy." What forms of critical engagement could adequately grapple with the implications of this "shift" in contemporary literary and cultural studies? The two books under review energetically address this question and, in the process, encourage us to reconsider what Chow evocatively calls "the linkages and enmeshments that keep things apart; the voidings and uncoverings that hold things together."

Readers of *Canadian Literature* may already be familiar with Christopher Lee's groundbreaking essays on various aspects of Asian Canadian literature and culture, including his work on "Engaging Chineseness" (published as the lead article in issue 163) and on "Enacting the Asian Canadian" (again published as a lead article, this time in issue 199). These, along with other related essays, vividly demonstrate Lee's attentiveness to close textual analysis *and* to the politics of field formation, and have helped to establish his reputation as one of the most exciting contributors to contemporary Asian Canadian critical thought.

In *The Semblance of Identity*, Lee turns his attention to the field of Asian American

literary studies, where he sets out to examine "how figures of identity anchor or undermine the epistemological and political claims of narrative fiction." Lee underlines that he is not simply arguing for, or against, identity and identity politics. Instead, he puts forward a nuanced two-part argument that first traces "the persistence of a theoretical figure that [he calls] the 'idealized critical subject,'" a figure which, he contends, "operates throughout Asian American literary culture and cultural criticism as a means of providing coherence to oppositional knowledge projects and political practices." The second part of his argument attempts to "reframe this figure in relation to the aesthetic in order to specify its cognitive structure, which comes to the forefront as it is textualized into literary narrative." In doing so, he asks: "What makes Asian American identity so compelling and alluring when we have never been under the impression that it is anything but constructed and, perhaps, illusory?"

Lee's rigorous engagement with this question draws on a wide range of intellectual sources—including the work of Kant, Lukács, and Adorno, from whom he has adapted the notion of "semblance" and its relation to aesthetics—to craft a critical narrative that cuts across a series of canonical and non-canonical texts. This narrative begins by situating the work of Eileen Chang as an entry point into what Lee calls "a prehistory of the Asian American idealized critical subject." It then moves across more familiar terrain in Asian American studies: the topic of Asian American cultural nationalism and its oft-noted masculinist and heteronormative imperatives, notably in the work of Frank Chin; the canonical work of Maxine Hong Kingston, attentively read via its representation of musical and other sonic materials; Chang-rae Lee's *A Gesture Life* and its representation of what Lee memorably calls "the unshakable remains of identity"; Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost* and "the work of comparison" (about which I have more to say below); and the work of José Garcia Villa. Especially noteworthy is Lee's discussion of the work of Eileen Chang who, Lee points out, is rarely read as an "Asian American" writer despite the fact that she spent more than half her life in the US. His analysis, which works across Chinese and English materials and a scattered archive of sources, is a model of transnational and multilingual reading that productively questions "how the terms 'Asian' and 'American' can come together and the necessary acts of translation that make this pairing possible."

At the heart of Lee's project is a direct engagement with what he aptly calls "a post-identity turn" in Asian American studies. As such, *The Semblance of Identity* needs to be understood as a field-specific intervention—a point underlined by its appearance in Stanford UP's "Asian America" series—which builds upon existing critical studies by Lisa Lowe, Kandice Chuh, Viet Nguyen, Mark Chiang, and others who have, in various ways, attempted to question and reposition received notions of "Asian American" identity and the reading practices that accompany it. Lee's study extends this important line of critical inquiry by arguing that "[i]n our attempts to 'hollow out' the field [of Asian American studies] from within, the pressing task is to scrupulously expose the dangers of identity politics while recognizing its critical potential." In taking on such concerns, *The Semblance of Identity* deserves to gain a wide readership in the field.

Yet, when read in the context of Canadian literary studies, *The Semblance of Identity* raises further questions about its own arguably idealized subjects. And here, Lee's discussion of Ondaatje's work is likely to be of particular interest. His discussion opens by addressing the "transnational turn" taken by Asian American studies, a turn that has

implicated the field in what he calls "the politics of knowledge in a post-colonial world." He observes that one consequence of this turn is "the tendency to use materials from non-US contexts with little or no attention to contextual differences." Yet, while Lee acknowledges the need to be wary of such "acts of appropriation," he nevertheless underlines the inadequacy of simply making calls for "specificity" and instead calls for "a more nuanced account of comparison as an inescapable intellectual operation that takes place whenever Asian American Studies encounters what is outside itself." The inclusion of *Anil's Ghost* in a study of Asian American literature accordingly becomes a way to "[raise] further questions about the political, national, and geographic parameters of the field." To be sure, the reading developed here—especially concerning "the shame of diaspora"—is resonant and bold. But readers of *Canadian Literature* may nevertheless wonder about the stakes involved in situating this text by what Lee calls a "Sri Lankan Canadian writer" into an "Asian American" frame, especially following the prominent production and circulation of readings of Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* as an "Asian American" text in the 1980s and early 1990s. While the deployment of *Anil's Ghost* in Lee's study is by no means interchangeable with such readings of *Obasan*, readers might still reasonably ask what this deliberate "entanglement" (in Chow's vocabulary) might illuminate about contemporary Asian American cultural criticism in its apparent search for exemplary narratives of transnationality.

Such questions about field formation and the organization of knowledge animate Rey Chow's *Entanglements*, a collection of essays that brings together work previously published from 2001 to 2011. The ambitious form of "transmedial thinking" developed here cuts across the terrains of modernism, philosophy, comparative literature, area studies, postcolonial studies, film studies, and visual culture. In doing so, Chow engages with an eclectic range of sources including the work of Brecht, Flaubert, Lao She, Arendt, Auerbach, Said, Derrida, Foucault, and Deleuze; the photography of Julian Rohrhuber (with whom Chow co-authored one chapter); and films by Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, Lee Chang-dong, Akira Kurosawa, and Ang Lee. It's notable that Chow's compelling discussion of this last text—focusing on Lee's controversial film *Lust, Caution*, which was in turn based on a short story by Eileen Chang—first appeared in a remarkable 2011 issue of *PMLA* dedicated almost entirely to literatures and cultures across Asia, thereby drawing attention to topics that, as Patricia Yaeger has euphemistically observed, "have often gone missing from the pages of [this] journal." In this way, the material history of the circulation of Chow's ideas helps to mark out the "new visibility of the Orient" that Chow sets out to scrutinize.

Especially noteworthy in this respect is Chow's attempt to address what she calls "the difficult question of the changing status of the modern Far East in the Western, in particular the US academy after the Second World War." With characteristic acuity, she asks: "If, as China ascends to the position of an economic superpower, it is no longer possible to approach China as a subaltern nation . . . how should the clichés, the stereotypes, and the myths as well as the proper scholarly knowledge about the modern Far East be reassembled?" Chow pushes the implications of this line of inquiry beyond the domain of area studies understood narrowly into a sustained consideration of the politics of knowledge produced in other fields including comparative literature, drawing our attention in this instance to the aspirations of major figures such as Auerbach and Said for what Chow calls "an ethically tolerant world literature." Here and elsewhere, readers of *Canadian*

Literature may encounter shocks of recognition—and also a chance to reconsider the organization of the knowledge produced in what is presumably "an eth(n)ically tolerant" Canadian literary studies following its "multicultural turn." For while the "discursive loop of 'the Far East of the West'" tracked by Chow does not explicitly address the knowledges produced in or about the cultures of Canada, the implications of her call for "[s]ome other loop, as yet unthought" could nevertheless be brought close to home.

Critical Dis/Orientations

George Elliott Clarke
Directions Home: Approaches to African-Canadian Literature. U of Toronto P $39.95

Reviewed by Alessandra Capperdoni

Ten years after the appearance of his first collection of essays, *Odysseys Home: Mapping African-Canadian Literature*, George Elliott Clarke returns with an equally comprehensive, though less monumental, volume comprising previously published work from 2001 to 2007. But it would be a mistake to read *Directions Home: Approaches to African-Canadian Literature* as a sequel to the previous publication. The belief that "to understand any culture, one must excavate its past" (*Odysseys* 7) informs both books but the essays contained in *Directions Home* are better connected through an invisible thread. A concern for the geopolitical and the historical conditions that produce it runs throughout Clarke's volume. Although not fleshed out in theoretical terms, such concern shapes the book into a collection situating African Canadian literature as writing and reading practice casting a shadow on different geographies and political conditions, as well as identities.

The introductory chapter to the volume invokes the connections between the two publications through its very title, "Divagation: Approaching African-Canadian Literature (Again)" and establishes a scene of address to the reader. Clarke retraces the "accidents" of his entry into the field of study of African-Canadian literature and the motivations for pursuing the research that led to *Odysseys Home*: the discovery of the systemic exclusion of blackness from the construction of CanLit but also the constitution of the African-Canadian experience as a blind spot in the fields of African American and Diaspora studies. But this recollection soon shifts to the examination of the different responses that the appearance of *Odysseys Home* generated—most notably the 'confrontation' between Clarke and Walcott. The movement from self-location to reading practice—from author to reader—foregrounds the early volume's participation in the forging of a reading community of African-Canadian literature but also defends a methodological choice—the delineation of textual genealogies—that was often received under the sign of (nationalist) conservatism. Clarke notes that in looking back at *Odysseys Home*, he sees "a militant book, a loud volume. Yet, I do not look down upon it. Rather, I turn away now to look forward here" (*Directions* 9). Indeed, metaphors of movement abound in the introduction and underwrite the volume's attempt to delineate possible approaches to the reading of African-Canadian literature. If the figure of "home" in the title may seem to evoke the spectre of cultural nationalist discourses of "here," as well as the teleologies and anxieties of place-based identity and its exclusionary strategies, once we immerse ourselves in the reading it soon appears that "home" is a textual community, one that is grounded in the complex multiplicity of African-Canadian experience and the different circumstances that produced it.

In the first essays of the collection, Clarke strongly argues for the research of genres

that may be conceived as historians' territory rather than that of literary critics. His appeal for the inclusion of Canadian slave narratives and Church narratives in literary study brings to light the various locales in which cultural expression and identity first took place. At the same time, Clarke probes the establishment of African-American studies and their assimilation of the slave narrative genre as a quintessentially "American" (read US) genre despite its different locations. The question is less one of exclusion or inclusion but, rather, the deconstruction of literary canons as the breeding ground for various nationalisms. Clarke is not only widening the horizon of what constitutes Canadian literature but also, and most importantly, raising questions about the ideological forces shaping the literary. This is certainly not a novelty in literary and cultural criticism but rarely have these debates addressed relationships between minority cultures. Attention to the geopolitics of the literary also informs essays attending to the shifting positioning of black cultural figures. Here W. E. B. Du Bois' "Double Consciousness" and Paul Gilroy's "Black Atlantic" are both invoked as frameworks to reread the competing claims and national identifications of A. B. Walker and Anna Minerva Henderson in relation to assimilation, pan-Africanism, nationalism, and exile, while the historical conditions that produce the tension between nationalism and cosmopolitanism is explored in an essay on Arthur Nortje.

While Stuart Hall is not specifically mentioned, Clarke addresses cultural representation in relation to gender and sexuality in two essays focusing on literature and media. Tropes of family, identity, and crisis in G. E. Boyd's plays are explored in the context of larger discourses about black masculinity. Clarke fleshes out the complexity of gender in relation to the "ideal" of the heterosexual family, while the demonization of the black male body (or sexual Negrophobia) is discussed in a comparative reading of the racialized reportage of journalist Phonse Jessome and Darius James' fiction. Gender and representation is also the focus of Clarke's reading of plays revisiting the infamous story of Angélique's hanging. This textualized Angélique sheds light on the import of Canadian state narratives of law and race, while the discourse of "black lawlessness" is further explored in an essay on vice in the short fiction of H. Nigel Thomas and Althea Prince.

Attention to textual production and circulation also informs key essays on the different practices of "ethnic anthologies" in the 1970s, specifically African-Canadian and Italian-Canadian, within and against the context of official Multiculturalism. Clarke also considers the meaning of location for literary practices exceeding the boundaries of region and nation. Where is Europe in African-Canadian literature? And what happens when Caribbean-Canadian literature exists outside of the boundaries of the nation? Although these essays could have benefited from a deeper theoretical framework, Clarke's deft exploration resonates with current investigations about the scale of the national—rather than its geographically bound essence—and its relation to the cultural. The essay on Brand, though replete with insightful comments, is perhaps the most disappointing of the collection, since the notion of "voice" is only marginally explored in relation to the dynamics of the geopolitical that run as a thread in the book. Finally, three essays foreground location and subjectivity in poetic practices that explode conventional representation of identity and place through the cross-pollination with mass media and mobility, or their engagement with sound, performance, and jazz.

In true Clarkeian fashion, *Directions Home* thwarts the expectations of academic writing and reading. The larger than life authorial voice, the passion of his ideas,

and the (only apparently) loosely connected essays do not satisfy the thirst for monography or well-wrapped collection into which scholars are trained. Clarke's research is impressive and humbling. Yet this is not the only reason this book is a must-have and must-read. Although its idiosyncratic form may elicit dubious responses, it should also warn us of the importance of resisting formulas and crystallized language. Indeed, a question that we may want to ponder is the "directions" opened by the form itself. For Clarke has not substantially embraced earlier criticism of *Odysseys Home* as "cobbled-together" miscellany or "assemblages, bits of fabric with all kinds of threads hanging out" as Terri Goldie once called it. But should he? Clarke's "directions" are as much a matter of *orientation* as *deviation* from well-trodden paths: there is no promise of return in our investment in reading. What happens then when form falls apart? What knowledges does it open up? Will different textual communities emerge in its wake? Food for thought.

Words About Things

George Elliott Clarke
Red. Gaspereau $19.95

Lorna Crozier
The Book of Marvels: A Compendium of Everyday Things. Greystone $19.95

Jan Zwicky
The Book of Frog: un amuse-esprit. Pedlar $20.00

Reviewed by Alison Calder

As a writer, Lorna Crozier has always been concerned with seeing the small things of the world. *The Book of Marvels* makes that project official. This collection of 124 prose poems, arranged alphabetically from "Air" and "Apple" to "Yo-Yo" and "Zipper," voyages through topics both concrete and abstract. One intention of the collection is to "negotiate a trip into the thickness of things," to quote from the passage by Francis Ponge that serves as an epigraph to this book. Where Ponge describes this trip into "things" as a violent "revolution . . . comparable to that accomplished by the plough or the spade," though, Crozier's approach is less radical, a gently repetitive list structure cushioning her metaphors.

Metaphor is both device and subject in this collection, as the pieces are ultimately as much about figures of speech and language in general as they are about the things they purport to define. In "Hinge," for example, this self-reflexivity is explicit, from the poem's allusive opening ("Easy to tell a hawk from a handsaw, but what about a hawk from a hinge?") to its meditation on how poetry works: "The present hinges on the past, the cure on the skill of the physician, the passion on the quality of the kiss. These being proof that metaphor is a kind of hinge. It makes the mind pivot. Hinge one word to another and see what suddenly swings open, like a gate meant to keep wild horses from the house." Other poems deal with representation more obliquely, through allusion to authors as varied as Gertrude Stein, Mordecai Richler, William Blake, and Ann Landers. The real topic here is language itself, the ways in which it can and cannot approximate the things of western domestic life. In the poem "X," Crozier writes, "You remember it drawn on the blackboard at school, the teacher saying '*X* is the unknown.' You couldn't help thinking it could be chalked across everything outside the self." In a sense, these poems continue that chalking, with the words that attempt to articulate the object evoking it, but also X-ing it out.

In "Objects," Crozier writes that "If you gaze at one [object] – a wrench, a cheese grater, a paper clip – with rapt attention, after twenty minutes you'll be worn out and have to take a nap." Indeed, a reader who tries to go through this book from cover to cover in one sitting may be fatigued by the accumulation of phrases, as each object is

defined and redefined numerous times. Taken together, the definitions, although each rooted in specifics, assume some general qualities, a blending assisted by Crozier's repeated use of the poetic "you" for her pronoun. As a reader, I found myself wishing occasionally for the more pointed "I"—what might these objects be to a particular individual, rather than to an undifferentiated collective? The general "you" begins to feel a little coercive, as a singular response is made to represent the whole. In smaller doses, though, the book preserves its charm, as the poet's imagination animates the things on which so much depends.

The Book of Frog by Jan Zwicky is subtitled "*un amuse-esprit*," and readers may need to be in a particular spirit to enjoy it. Much of the collection is a series of epistolary prose pieces, many of which are in the form of emails between Frog, who is a rock with four barnacles for legs, and Al, who is an imaginary albatross with a twelve-foot wingspan. Many of their communiqués concern the romantic life and activities of Liv, a musician who travels a lot, and her partner Hugh. These missives, many of which seem to be written by Liv and Hugh using Frog and Al as personae, focus on daily life—a delayed flight, a damaged toilet paper holder, an unexpected visit from a friend—but also allude to topics with heavier import.

It's hard to quiet one's monkey mind when reading this book. Allusions go everywhere, and nowhere. Is this Basho's frog talking to Coleridge's albatross? Is Liv's name "live" or "leave"? Could "Hugh" mean "human" and/or "you"? References to the Golden Ratio, baseball, Warren Buffet, the nature of language's relation to the world and itself, Facebook, the possibility of communication through metaphor, transience, transcendence, and noise and silence, to name a few topics, promise some sort of weightier discussion. But how to make sense? The book has to be about *something*. Frog's closing statement that "everything is always about everything" gives the reader an easy way out. Readers wanting to exercise themselves by making connections will enjoy this book. Others may find the conceit just too twee.

If you found one of the poems from *Red* lying on the ground, anonymous and lost, you would know immediately that it had been written by George Elliott Clarke. Here, Clarke's lyrics are at their most hyperbolic, the lines dominated by his trademark exaggerated shifts from romantic excess to bluesy innuendo.

Clarke describes *Red* as "Redskin, blackmouth blues." The poems, divided into sections on the basis either of form ("Odes") or content ("Nova Scotia"), range wildly through varied topics. The section "Red Eye" includes a lengthy reiteration of the Black stud White woman trope ("My Negro organ exults, milking, / Blanching, that sugary cavity!"), while "Red Star" contains a retelling of Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*. Other poems concern the poet's father, Charles Mingus, and Italy. One noteworthy poem, "Looking at Alma Duncan's *Young Black Girl* (1940)," provides a thoughtful examination of Duncan's painting. While there are some beautiful lines in individual pieces, overall the cacophonous conglomeration of topics and language combines to produce only a blurred impression.

Vancouver *nostalgique*

Claudia Cornwall
At the World's Edge: Curt Lang's Vancouver, 1937-1998. Mother Tongue $29.95

Chuck Davis
The Chuck Davis History of Metropolitan Vancouver. Harbour $49.95

Diane Purvey and John Belshaw
Vancouver Noir: 1930-1960. Anvil $25.00

Reviewed by Nicolas Kenny

It has become something of a cliché to think about Vancouver as a place without history. Young, dynamic, open to the world, it is

seen as a city that constantly reinvents itself, chasing world fairs, Olympic games, and "most liveable city" titles; a busy, forward-looking place with little time for time past, the vestiges of which are bulldozed to make way for sleek glass towers and slick name-brand coffee shops. As author Charles Demers astutely points out in his portrait of some of the city's still heteroclite neighbourhoods, "long memories don't go well with either consumerist or colonial societies, and Vancouver's both, often at the same time." The books presently under review go a long way to deepening that memory. All three were published in 2011, a year marked by quasquicentennial celebrations in Vancouver, and during which perhaps more attention than usual was paid to its history. Each, in very different ways, reminds us that beneath the self-consciously cultivated, resort-town image lies the messier, sometimes violent, sometimes touching, and often entertaining story of a city that has much more history, and perhaps even more personality, than it sometimes lets on.

Chuck Davis was a highly popular writer, columnist, and broadcaster who spent decades accumulating all matter of historical tidbits about the city he loved. Troubled that the children he met on school visits systematically mistook George Vancouver for George Washington, he set to work on a book that would instil in Vancouverites more understanding and passion for their city, a book he promised would be "fun, fat, and filled with facts." That it is, but Davis's massive *History* is, technically speaking, not a history at all. It is a chronicle in which notable events, personalities, and stories are recorded for each year of the city's existence. Predictably, the volume takes the arrival of white settlers in the region as its starting point (the birth of George Vancouver is the first recorded event), but a lengthy sidebar describes the diverse Aboriginal groups they encountered. From here, Davis takes us on a year-by-year trip through Vancouver's fast-paced development, honing in on the way major historical events shaped the destiny of the city and its region, peppering his account with pithily captioned images and humorous anecdotes, coincidences, or mishaps. Davis, sadly, passed away before he could complete his opus, but a number of private sponsors and ghost writers stepped up to complete the project.

The book will regularly make readers smile or shake their heads in amazement. But the drawback of this layout is that stories develop over several years, giving rise to much repetition as the same events and people are referred to many times over. The stringing together of facts gives the book a somewhat disjointed feel, and it can be disconcerting to see points of trivia (the first of this, the largest of that . . .) given the same billing as matters of arguably much greater social, cultural, or political import (evidence of changing racial or gender dynamics, for example). Though there is no thesis or analytical standpoint, the objective is to make the non-history reader love and care about the city. As a result, the book is largely celebratory in tone. Darker moments and attitudes are acknowledged, but hastily given a more positive spin. While this is not the book for those seeking a critical perspective on Vancouver's history, it is successful in piquing the readers' curiosity about the city and fostering a sense of continuity with the past. Even the most seasoned Vancouverites will feel all the more at home after reading it, knowing the origin of a particular street and imagining how it might have looked and felt before their own time.

The stated intention of Diane Purvey and John Belshaw in *Vancouver Noir* is also to help overcome the city's collective amnesia. Vancouver's reputation as "guarded, polite and somewhat boring," they argue, has been "assiduously cultivated by journalists, historians and politicians," intent on papering over its hard-edge past in order to impose bourgeois norms of thought

and behaviour. During the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, Vancouver's unique racial mix, industrial economy, and flashy neon made it the ultimate *noir* city, where illicit drinking, gambling, corruption, and murder were the talk of the town. Plunging into newspaper coverage and police reports, the authors regale us with a wide array of sordid dramas played out by shady or glamorous characters. The narrative is entertaining but sensitive to avoid sensationalizing the tragedies and suffering it recounts. Scores of photos snapped with the "speed graphic" cameras of the day make the book a visual delight as well, though some of the images, particularly in the chapter on murder, are not for the faint of heart.

Some may find reductive the idea of analyzing the complex and shifting class, race, and gender relations of the period through the lens of a Hollywood genre. But the authors are careful to explain how the era's distinctive tone and style were as much popular culture's reflection of reality as its creation. Their broader point is that the tantalizing features of *noir* were to a large degree the fabrication of a reform-minded bourgeoisie, holding it up as a "dark mirror" that served to articulate the ascendant middle-class values that have deadened Vancouver's image of itself. The bootleggers and bandits were the ideal foils to the discourse of civility and respectability. Analyzing this period of transition, argue Purvey and Belshaw, forces us to challenge our view of normalcy as we "reorient" our "mental map" of the city. The rough and tumble east end is presented as the authentic Vancouver, while the west side rings "*faux*," a putatively homogenous wasteland of manicured lawns that embody conformity and restriction. While there is something essentializing about the rigidity of this social and physical divide, it is nonetheless a telling symbol of the tension between the lively city of social protest and roaring good times, and the dull, individualistic and profit-oriented bourgeois city they suggest Vancouver was becoming. By the 1960s, Purvey and Belshaw conclude, "[t]he battle for the city was over. The city lost."

In that sense, Claudia Cornwall's biography of Curt Lang offers some consolation, showing that a spirit of rebelliousness and iconoclasm stayed alive and well in Vancouver, at least through the end of the twentieth century. In this book too, Vancouver is presented as "a city that dwells more on the future than on the past," which is why, according to Cornwall, the poet, painter, photographer—and later fisherman, boat builder, and software designer—felt so at home there. Lang was born and raised in the midst of East Vancouver's *noir* era, keeping something of its grit in the "brash, kick-ass attitude" that characterized him. Cornwall's account is moving, portraying Lang as a man possessing enormous talent, but in some ways unable to handle it, as evidenced by his troubled interpersonal relationships and tendency to rush into another pursuit just as he mastered the previous one. The author's sympathy for her old friend is evident, though she does not shy from discussing his flaws as well.

While Lang's life is the focus, told through his poetry and diary as well as countless interviews with people close to him at various times in his life, Vancouver is also a key character in the story. "It was either art or crime," noted painter Bob Sutherland of life choices available in 1950s East Van. Lang chose art, and through Cornwall's fluid narration, we follow him amid the highs and lows of the beatnik scene of the following decade. Always scraping to get by, Lang left the city to fish along the west coast in the 1970s, before returning to build boats and finally dive head first into the high tech industry that boomed in Vancouver during the 1990s, applying his smooth, streamlined aesthetic to all of his projects. The city's rising bourgeois mentality described by Purvey and Belshaw notwithstanding,

Vancouver deeply inspired Lang. To him, it was a place where art, poetry, and debate flowed, where insouciance bred creativity, where improbable encounters, like his teenaged friendship with the much older and renowned writers Malcolm Lowry and Al Purdy, blossomed. A stunning set of 1972 photographs by Lang showcase a bustling, working-class city, which, if no longer coloured by the *noir* mystique, certainly held on to its rugged and ragged edges. In the end, it was also this city, "at the world's edge," that owed much to the poet, and to his unbridled imagination and artistry. "His life," muses Cornwall, "was like a great wind that blew through Vancouver, a great, mocking, laughing wind . . ."

An agreeable hint of nostalgia pervades all three of these books. The stories they tell are at once enthralling, romantic, and tragic. More than providing a snapshot of Vancouver's growth and transformations throughout the twentieth century, they tease out the city's nuances and temperament. To a city that seems so little preoccupied by its own past, Davis, Purvey and Belshaw, and Cornwall offer an opportunity for introspection, a chance to look beneath the shiny, postmodern patina and to ponder much rougher surfaces. In their engaging style and intimate perspective, they create a sense of place for Vancouver in a way that most scholarly studies cannot. And they make the reader want to know more, to experience this past directly, to step into the streets, to look behind the trendy condos and cafés, and to see how much of that history, troubled as it was, is really still there.

Shave the Milk Mustache

Ivan E. Coyote
One in Every Crowd: Stories. Arsenal Pulp $15.95

Cyndi Sand-Eveland
A Tinfoil Sky. Tundra $19.99

Ben Stephenson
A Matter of Life and Death or Something. Douglas & McIntyre $22.95

Reviewed by Crystal Hurdle

The three books under review each tell the child protagonist and/or the reader that "you are important," the custody judge's words to Cyndi Sand-Eveland's twelve-year-old Mel. Her tale is labelled for children, while Ben Stephenson's, with the (too?) precocious ten-year-old Arthur, complemented by narratives from the Forest and notebook excerpts from mentally disturbed Phil, is for adults. Ivan E. Coyote's series of moving story vignettes, some previously published, most of which read easily as memoir, many about teens, are dubbed as "specifically for queer youth." All are bildungsroman. Sort of.

Labels are an issue. Coyote decries the use of "dyke" and "faggot," in an impassioned plea for tolerance of the "queer or fat or nerdy or smart or slow or brown or from somewhere that is not here" (except for the likes of Stephen Harper, Christian fundamentalists, and herds of teenaged girls, not without reason). Bullying that leads to suicide (Coyote), the threat of homelessness (Sand-Eveland), and mental illness (Stephenson) are serious issues, explored well.

Writing offers redemption through Coyote's stories, some about her profession as storyteller in the public school system and elsewhere. Mel had left a journa behind at her mother's abusive boyfriend's. A library card provides escape through books, and, improbably, her first boyfriend/first friend and a job. Arthur, who in his woods discovers a cryptic journal written by Phil, questions his neighbours to discover the diarist's identity. He acknowledges Phil's

suicide and writes in the blank pages what should have happened. The co-authored, completed book ages and composts to new life among the omniscient Trees.

Coyote deems herself a "connoisseur of characters" (and one might say, too, of character), with larger-than-life members of an extensive extended family, the fey boy Francis, who likes dresses (aging in a series of stories, until he himself uses the hurtful word "faggot"), burly bikers with hearts of mush. Showing these characters in action works better than the later pieces, in which she, however sincerely, repeatedly recounts encounters with gay youth who have moved her or vice versa. Yet this redundancy would be a turn-off to the intended audience of teens. In *A Tinfoil Sky*, though many of the characters are generic, Mel's cold grandmother and mother—who breathes love by blowing cigarette smoke, a "white light"—are worth the price of admission. And although Phil's disturbing diary makes for wincing reading, the multi-layered characters of *Matter*, such as Aunt Maxine who snail mails Arthur letters from scant miles away, fascinate.

Sand-Eveland gives glimpses of mental illness. The grandmother seems to be a hoarder and has covered her windows with tinfoil (paranoid? schizophrenic?). Mel is oddly incurious with the same sanitizing in the life-on-the-street scenes. Homelessness, mentioned as a possibility, never seems real, beyond a night or two in a Pinto. More despair provoking is Stephenson's love-lost Phil. Early on, I wondered if Phil were (in a parallel universe) Arthur grown up or perhaps Arthur's "real" father, for whom he yearns, because their quirks (genetic?) seem similar. Is mental illness, on one level, home-schooled childhood curiosity gone rampant? Arthur's political correctness (he does not sit like an "Indian," for example) annoys, as does dismissiveness about his adoptive father. Constant fantasies begin "meanwhile, my *real* dad would [insert over-the-top activity]." Nevertheless, with his intriguing malapropisms ("prisoner in sanitary confinement"), dislike of maple syrup farmers, whose tapping surely hurts the trees, love of real-life Rosie, running around the world for a cause, Arthur appeals as a character, "a secret shaped like a boy."

One in Every Crowd contains nuggets of wisdom: "[D]on't pay attention to the haters," "let your engine warm up," "do not cave into the pressure from mainstream society [or from the queer community] to fit in." In the final story, Coyote seeks advice about embarking on married life: a sweet ending to a droll, authentic collection. Of fathers set to spank wayward kids for playing something dangerous, "nothing like pain to remind you of how much you could have been hurt," and "what any self-respecting butch does [after a break-up] . . . [is to throw herself] heart-first into a complicated home improvement endeavour."

Coyote's early stories of childhood in the Yukon suggest life before the nanny state, freedom now unrecognizable, with comb-ball until someone cries and rolling in giant tires down hills. Stephenson's Arthur builds an in-room igloo out of Styrofoam blocks, but he also explores his Forest. Sand-Eveland's somewhat timid Mel (for whom the reader roots) gravitates to the small-town library in what seems a bit of a throwback novel, complete with an old-time store-owner from her grandparents' past, root beer, and matinee magic. By the novel's end, she has recalled her early life, gaining a sense of self. Similarly, Coyote looks at childhood photos and asks family members if they had seen her lesbianism then. She recognizes, as she has with others, such as her endearing, ever-wimpy cousin Chris, that s/he was "just born like that."

Stephenson advises, in the form of a kind neighbourhood hermit, to ask questions which "you *can* answer." Paradoxically, though Phil's referential mania is like that

in Nabokov's "Signs and Symbols"; self-discovery through another's journal mirrors that in Ellis' *Odd Man Out*; the protagonist's quest, illustrations, and his frequent use of adjectives ("excruciatingly" so) are similar to Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*; and the narrative voice is clever like that of Zusak's *The Book Thief*, yet the book is unique.

If as Coyote says, "gender is a spectrum, not a binary," so too is classification of intended audience. For kids, for adults—does it matter? Arthur says, "I could draw my own universe." Mel might be able to do the same, and Coyote, through revealing how she, a "gender outlaw," has invented a happy life, invites others, not just teens, to do so. Delightfully, she answers, "Are you boy or girl?" with "yes." Arthur asks, "If a tree falls down in the forest . . . does it still make a sound?" and wonders about the X variable involved. Audibility is less an issue than the trees' power to witness: "[W]e are reading and we are memorizing. . . . We cannot forget." Nor will the reader forget these books.

Preliminary Nichols

Frank Davey
aka bpNichol: a preliminary biography.
ECW P $22.95

Reviewed by Kit Dobson

Over the past few years, Frank Davey has begun to write retrospective work connected to his life in the world of Canadian literature. *aka bpNichol*, while largely unrelated to his previous book *When TISH Happens: The Unlikely Story of Canada's 'Most Influential Literary Magazine,'* continues this recent line in his writing. While *When TISH Happens* is a book that closely documents Davey's own literary endeavours, *aka bpNichol* offers the first biography of the radical experimental poet bpNichol. It is a book about which a number of readers are sure to have critical opinions (more about that in a minute), but it is also one that also offers a valuable take—a "preliminary" one, as Davey puts it—on one of the most varied, challenging, and contested poets in recent Canadian literary history. This book is certain to provoke much conversation.

Frank Davey's literary career spans from the 1960s to the present, a time that saw a great deal of development in Canadian writing through its stridently nationalist period and into the present. As a student at the University of British Columbia, he was involved with the poetry publication *TISH*, which controversially for the time took its inspiration from American and international sources. It was in TISH that he began developing his own poetic practice. Davey subsequently worked as an academic at Royal Roads, York, and Western, and has been heavily involved in developments in poetry across the country. His critical works—particularly *Surviving the Paraphrase* and *Post-National Arguments*, for this reviewer—have been very influential on the academic study of CanLit. It was his role on the board of Coach House Press in the 1970s and 80s, as well as his role as the Director of York University's creative writing program around that time, however, that brought Davey into close contact with bpNichol. Their association until Nichol's death in 1988 provided the original impetus for this book, one that Davey expands upon in completing this endeavour.

aka bpNichol provides a largely chronological development of Nichol's life, development as a writer, and untimely death shortly before his forty-fourth birthday. Davey's approach is traditional in this respect. He works with the material traces of the poet's life: his extensive notebooks and materials held in the Simon Fraser University archives and elsewhere provide a basis for understanding Nichol's family's movements throughout western Canada during his childhood (with stops

in Port Arthur, Winnipeg, and Vancouver, in particular, alongside the family history that goes back to Plunkett, Saskatchewan). His published work and journals provide insights into the development of his writing practice. Interviews that Davey conducted with Nichol's friends from different periods of his life furnish him with additional considerations.

This book is sure to be controversial for at least two reasons. First, and as Davey notes, criticism on Nichol's work is incredibly divided. The divides can be described in at least a few ways: between those who knew Nichol personally and those of a younger generation who perceive his work quite differently than some of his peers; between those who value Nichol's more lyrical moments, particularly the meditative quality of portions of *The Martyrology*, Nichol's multi-volume life poem, and those who assert the primacy of Nichol's pataphysical work and his Dada-inflected experimental writing; and between those who might correlate Nichol's therapeutic work as a "lay therapist" with the Therafields organization with his creative practice and those who focus on Nichol more purely as a writer. There are, moreover, divides between people who might be aligned with any one of these foci. Nichol is perceived differently by different people who have written about him—often vastly so—and these differences are unlikely to be assuaged by this biography. Davey falls into the former of all of those divides: he writes as someone who knew Nichol personally, focusing on *The Martyrology* and related work, and closely aligning Nichol the writer with Nichol the therapist.

The second reason that this book will generate controversy is that Nichol's widow, Eleanor Nichol, decided not to support this book upon reading part of the early manuscript. Davey suggests that this fact is his "main regret" upon completing the book, and a number of the footnotes in the text discuss points at which Davey and Eleanor Nichol's perspectives have differed. A number of Nichol's close associates, who might have been expected to appear in this book in more depth, also do not do so beyond the public record, prompting me to wonder at some of the gaps—gaps that Davey also notes. The primary consequence of Eleanor Nichol's decision not to support the book is that Davey has been unable to include photographs or to quote materials that have not been previously published. As a result, Davey relies a great deal upon paraphrasing Nichol's notebooks and using publicly available photographs and documents. The reason for her lack of support, Davey suggests, is that she may have "assumed that a 'literary biography' would make many fewer references to his private life and suggest fewer links between it and his writing." Davey and Eleanor Nichol appear also to have disagreed about Nichol's relationship with his parents, which Davey writes about as having been an unhappy one.

The connections between Nichol's personal life and his writing, to which Eleanor Nichol may have objected, form the crux of this book. It is also the crux as to whether many readers will appreciate it. Davey's reading is heavily Oedipal. From Davey's perspective, this approach makes sense: Nichol's "day job" for much of his adult life was as a therapist influenced by Freud and Lacan, and Nichol does at times note the correlation between his writing and his life in his published work and in his notebooks. Davey takes the time to justify this approach and is explicit about his decision to choose to do so. At the same time, this approach creates challenges: in the first instance, from the perspective of a literary critic (as Davey knows very well, given his own role as such), Davey commits an intentional fallacy, and/or resuscitates the dead author (yes, both literally and in the more academic sense) in order to provide a basis for his readings of, in particular, *The*

Martyrology. Additionally, the continual return to Oedipal explanations to understand Nichol's life leaves Davey referring over and again to Nichol's supposedly repressed desire for his mother. In Freudian terms, the heteronormative male psyche may necessarily cope with an Oedipal relation in this front; however, in *aka bpNichol*, this anxiety returns often (indeed, it is the return of the repressed) and it can prove distracting.

Any biography of bpNichol is bound to have its challenges, however. Davey's foray into this vexed terrain would have been extremely challenging to write. It is a popular work rather than a strictly academic one, which may allow for a closer relation to be drawn out between the writer and his texts. It manages to effectively narrate the key events of bpNichol's life from his early perambulations to his life in the midst of Toronto's Therafields community and in a writing community that was in the midst of developing its experimental self-confidence, to his death on an operating table in Toronto as the result of complications from surgery, and to his critical "afterlife." The book is a useful history of an important poet who was central to multiple writing communities and will hopefully enable future contributions in this area.

Sur la terre comme au ciel, l'Acadie?

James de Finney, Hélène Destrempes et Jean Morency, dirs.
L'Acadie des origines. Prise de parole 22,95 $

Compte rendu par Thierry Sauzeau

Les contributions de dix auteurs ont été rassemblées dans ce petit livre très documenté qui s'attache à présenter l'Acadie dite « des origines ». L'ouvrage se lit comme un essai de définition. L'Acadie y apparaît sous les traits d'une entité humaine à géométrie, à géographie et à chronologie variables. Le premier écueil, celui de l'assise territoriale, est abordé sous l'angle de la géohistoire. Grâce à l'analyse d'une collection de cartes anciennes, l'Acadie apparaît sous de multiples traits, fonction du statut du géographe et du moment dans lequel s'inscrit son activité. Ce « toponyme sans territoire fixe » pour Samuel Arsenault, devient une représentation au service de projets — la colonisation, la renaissance de la nation acadienne — sous la plume des explorateurs et voyageurs — de Lescarbot à Rameau de Saint-Père — qui fournissent autant de prismes déformants d'une réalité que l'historien peine à restituer, pris au piège d'une documentation qui, lorsqu'elle existe, est le plus souvent orientée. C'est là que James de Finney et Tania Duclos identifient certaines composantes du « récit » national acadien. Un corpus de textes fondateurs sert encore de base culturelle aux témoignages des années 1880-1930, en dépit du fait que le Canada bascule alors dans la modernité industrielle. Les auteurs de cette période sont divisés entre leur obsession pour l'Acadie rurale et catholique d'antan — ou ce qu'il en reste — et la promotion du modernisme. Hélène Destrempes donne corps à cette opposition autour du couple Memramcook — Moncton. La référence à Memramcook, berceau de la nation acadienne rénovée, dans son écrin de verdure, efface ainsi systématiquement la référence à Moncton l'industrieuse, en pleine croissance autour de son carrefour ferroviaire. La littérature du vingtième siècle, reprend d'ailleurs assez largement à son compte ces clichés travaillés sur le temps long et appropriés par les francophones des Maritimes. De *Au Cap Bomidon* de l'abbé Lionel Groulx à *Pas Pire* de France Daigle, les fictions recyclent le corpus hérité de l'Acadie mythique, mais Jean Morency souligne qu'il s'agit désormais plus de se démarquer de la légende et moins de la revivifier ou de la personnifier. De ce corpus de représentations, associé à des bribes d'histoire,

émergent les contours d'une Acadie des origines qui penche autant vers le mythe que vers l'histoire. L'un de ses « caractères » réside par exemple dans la figure de l'Acadien, tenace, courageux, pieux et brave, que Pierre M. Guérin identifie bien dans les œuvres littéraires inspirées de l'histoire du gouverneur Subercase, dont la défaite fut pourtant fatale à l'Acadie française (1697). Caroline-Isabelle Caron, montre bien comment les éléments constitutifs de ce « mythe » — au milieu duquel trône la figure tutélaire d'Evangéline — servent de plus petit dénominateur commun aux associations de familles acadiennes, qui s'en réclament, tout en s'appuyant essentiellement sur leur environnement bien concret et contemporain pour alimenter leurs activités. Certes, Annette Boudreau souligne bien qu'au-delà de ces aspects imaginaires, la pratique de la langue française dans ses variantes assumées — l'acadien, l'acadjonne et le chiac — est constitutive d'une identité vécue, faite du désir de s'affirmer au sein d'une francophonie plurielle. Reste que cette langue française trouve sous la plume des auteurs des Maritimes une source d'inspiration très riche dans la fondation prospère, le destin tragique et la renaissance énergique de l'Acadie. François Dumont nous entraîne sur cette piste, à la suite de l'essai de Michel Roy, *L'Acadie perdue*, dans cette quête d'identité que les Acadiens mènent aussi à bonne distance de la trajectoire québécoise. Le recueil de poésie *Nous, l'étranger* de Serge-Patrice Thibodeau est d'ailleurs compris par Benoit Doyon-Gosselin comme un appel à prendre en compte la diversité de l'identité acadienne, entre fierté et humiliation, entre enracinement et errance. La grille de lecture qu'en propose Monique Boucher, plonge aux racines du mouvement de renouveau national des années 1880, et offre trois idées-forces pour comprendre la notion d'Acadie : la primauté de la notion — positive — d'exode sur celle — péjorative — d'exil; la partition sociale entre des élites acquises à cette notion d'exode et une culture populaire davantage pénétrée par l'idée de défaite et de perte consécutives; la mise en scène symbolique de la mort dans les récits acadiens qui renvoie aux cycles vie–mort–renaissance que connaissent les civilisations anciennes. On ne peut que souligner le caractère très stimulant de cet ouvrage collectif dédié à une question complexe et on regrettera seulement la rareté des références relatives à l'Acadie des îles, autour de Caraquet, autre pôle important de la nation acadienne dans les Maritimes.

Les Balles du passé

Martine Delvaux
Les Cascadeurs de l'amour n'ont pas droit au doublage. Héliotrope 21,95 $

Marie Hélène Poitras
Griffintown. Alto 22,95 $

Compte rendu par Marion Kühn

Le deuxième roman de Marie Hélène Poitras, *Griffintown*, offre un voyage dans le monde aussi méconnu que menacé des cochers de Montréal. Son « Western spaghetti sauce urbaine » oppose le clan de « Ceux de la ville », partis à la « conquête du Far-Ouest » pour y construire un « Griffintown 2.0 », à la faune bigarrée du Horse Palace dont la survie est sérieusement mise en question depuis la mort violente du propriétaire de l'écurie.

Même si l'enquête hésitante du palefrenier sur la mort de son supérieur finit par se transformer en vendetta personnelle de la mère du défunt — une sorte de Ma Dalton tirant plus vite que son ombre — le meurtre n'occupe que l'arrière-plan de l'intrigue qui raconte « la dernière saison de calèche ». C'est une cochère novice, Marie, que le lecteur accompagne lors de sa découverte des codes de l'univers délabré et dur des cochers, une poignée de marginaux échoués dans un « cabaret de la dernière chance ».

De multiples insertions étoffent le récit

révélant les légendes et les blessures du passé qui hantent « cette civilisation cochère » et font de Griffintown un « champ miné de souvenirs ». Livrant des portraits tantôt tragiques, tantôt crus, voire grotesques, dans une posture narrative aussi détaillée que détachée, l'auteure éclaire tous les coins sombres en tenant les rênes un petit peu trop serrées dans son bel hommage aux cow-boys urbains de Montréal.

Si l'écriture sert à ériger un monument à la culture cochère montréalaise dans *Griffintown*, elle relève d'un besoin existentiel dans *Les Cascadeurs de l'amour n'ont pas droit au doublage*, le troisième roman de Martine Delvaux. Le monde de la narratrice a basculé quand ce qu'elle croyait être l'amour de sa vie s'est transformé en cauchemar étouffant. Fuyant le lieu de l'échec, Montréal, c'est à Rome, qu'elle essaie de tourner la page dans une longue lettre destinée à « [c]et homme que je venais de quitter parce que c'était ça ou lui abandonner ma vie ». En écrivant, elle « met . . . en pièces [s]on image » à lui, dégage les couches de son propre aveuglement et analyse le mépris grossier de cet immigrant tchèque envers son pays d'accueil. L'intérêt du roman réside toutefois moins dans la représentation d'une communication interculturelle échouée, le véritable combat auquel se livre la narratrice étant celui contre « la dictature du désir » qu'elle décortique en puisant dans l'imaginaire de la guerre. Ainsi, elle dégage la dynamique destructrice de sa relation avec celui auquel elle finit par reprocher de vivre dans une « pièce noire, isolée, à laquelle je n'avais pas accès ». Les multiples références aux grands classiques littéraires ne servent pas seulement à souligner l'universalité de cet amour-passion, mais permettent souvent un regard distancié à la narratrice-auteure qui conçoit son livre comme sa dernière balle. Non pas pour attaquer son ennemi, mais comme dernier recours contre la folie de l'amour dont ce roman est un témoignage intense.

Dialectical

Robert D. Denham
Remembering Northrop Frye: Recollections by His Students and Others in the 1940s and 1950s. McFarland $55.00

Brian Russell Graham
Necessity of Opposites: The Dialectical Thinking of Northrop Frye. U of Toronto P $45.00

Reviewed by Jeffery Donaldson

With 2012 being the centenary of Northrop Frye's birth, we are being treated to a number of conferences (Toronto, Budapest) and critical books furthering the work of consolidation and assessment in Frye studies. A hundred years is plenty of time for any writer's reputation to ride out at least one high and one low, and Frye is no exception. He has gone from seeming to be very nearly the only show in town in the 1950s and 1960s, to the doddering has-been of inevitable later configurations, to the more recent *eiron* figure at court, the winking outsider still waiting for others to catch up. Is the fact that we are now heading back to a more measured response to Frye's work and legacy part of another swing back—Frye with his mojo?—or a rising above swings back and forth altogether? The issue is important: it has to do with a historical dialectical process, and a process of dialectical thinking, explored by Brian Russell Graham's *Necessity of Opposites*: *The Dialectical Thinking of Northrop Frye*.

Graham's very readable study takes Frye back to his roots, as others have done, to his essentially Blakean apprenticeship and orientation. The relation in Blake of the imaginative to the actual, the spiritual to the material, provides Graham with a kind of original formula for dialectical thinking that he then traces through broader areas of concern in Frye's writings, relations between literature and society, between modes of education, between the political left and right. These return to their source

in a form of spiritual double vision that lies at the heart of all these concerns and provides us with the model for a mental strife that I think will increasingly become part of Frye's lasting legacy. Graham quotes Frye himself—from his *Words with Power*—on the nature of dialectical thinking, as adduced naturally from Hegel:

> What Hegel means by dialectic is not anything reducible to a patented formula, like the "thesis-antithesis-synthesis" one so often attached to him, nor can it be anything predictive. It is a much more complex operation of a form of understanding combining with its own otherness or opposite, in a way that negates itself and yet passes through that negation into a new stage, preserving its essence in a broader context, and abandoning the one just completed like the chrysalis of a butterfly or a crustacean's outgrown shell.

Graham's careful analysis of dialectical thinking in Frye's work is a welcome addition to our improving understanding of Frye's resistance to any kind of either/or thinking. It also gives the lie to a comment by Terry Eagleton—published in 2001 in the *London Review of Books*—that Frye "seems not to have learnt Yeats' lesson that no humanism can be authentic which has not passed through its own negation—that nothing can be whole without being rent." Whenever he writes on Frye, Eagleton seems peevishly disinclined to address Frye's own insights into Marx and even his partial identification with him, perhaps because Eagleton would have had no taste for Frye's own revelation of a mythopoeic initiative at the heart of Marx (that Marxism too must be part of a dialectical momentum that will pass through it). It would be nice, in any case, if Graham's book put to rest these now rather tired "summaries" of Frye's thought.

At the same time, I'm not sure that Graham doesn't make things awkward for himself in ways Frye might wish he had avoided. I detect a language of "safe at last" in his account of Frye's dialectic, where the act of "rising above" an opposition is presented as more or less unproblematic transcendence: "Frye dialectically moves above the level of historical oppositions to a third set of ideas, an alternative on a higher level of understanding, which may be said to represent a supra historical alternative." Or Frye "aims to combine considerations of both poetic 'truth' and beauty and move beyond radical and conservative view points, thereby transcending the ordinary history of ideas." Such phrasings, which one tends not to find in Frye himself, puts Eagleton back in the driver's seat, with some idea that Frye lacks the final stage of self-erasure that characterizes a genuinely rigorous attempt to move beyond one's own limitations. I think I prefer Robert Denham's account—in his *Northrop Frye: Religious Visionary and Architect of the Spiritual World* (2005)—of Frye's use of Hegel's unique "Aufhebung" (German for *transcendence*), whereby a superseded idea is both cancelled *and* preserved by what follows. This is the language of Hegel and Marx that Eagleton himself borrows from when he tries to show Frye wanting. It is the paradox of metaphoric thinking itself, which Frye knew a good deal more about than Eagleton. At the very least, Frye should have returned to him, with interest, his right to the slippery ironies that Eagleton himself prizes. Graham's rewarding book will add a further voice to this call for a correction.

Those who enjoy the biographical or quotidian side of Frye's wrestlings with the mundane and spiritual as a dialectic will value Robert Denham's compilation of epistolary recollections of Frye. A couple of years after the critic's death, Denham sent out to friends and former students an invitation for personal stories, impressions, and anecdotes of Frye the teacher and scholar. The ensuing correspondence from some eighty-nine respondents may

be particularly welcome for those of a later generation who will wish to know more about Frye as a teacher of undergraduate and graduate students. What gives this collection a unique dialectical flavour of its own, and I think distinguishes it from other aural and epistolary memoirs of its sort, is that Denham includes comments that Frye himself made about these later respondents in his early diaries (indeed, the diary entries themselves provided the occasion and the mailing list for Denham's original invitation). How fitting is the antiphonal spirit of call-and-response that leaves us with the impression of a Frye who was both subject to worldly concerns and capable as always of rising above them, anticipating even his own remembrances from beyond the ruins of time.

Girlhoods of Difference

Kristen den Hartog
And Me Among Them. Freehand $21.95

Lori Ann Bloomfield
The Last River Child. Second Story $17.95

Robert Pepper-Smith
House of Spells. NeWest $14.95

Reviewed by Margaret Steffler

Burdened by their identities as a giant, a bad omen, and a pregnant teenager, the central characters in these three novels yearn to belong to worlds that push them away through fear and ostracize them for difference. Ruth, daughter of James and Elspeth in Kristen den Hartog's remarkable novel, *And Me Among Them*, towers clumsily above other children. Like the ample Hoda in Adele Wiseman's *Crackpot*, Ruth is painfully eager to be one of the group, her desperate vulnerability cruelly exposed through her visibility and excessiveness. Ruth's isolation is accentuated by her desire to share her point of view with other children as she imagines herself directing them—"Close an eye and encircle the open one with your thumb and finger, and through that lens you can see the fine details of your kneecap or your hand"—but she is never given the opportunity. Sensing something "primal" about herself and something "formal" about her parents, Ruth looks back in order to tell her story, which she acknowledges is just one "version"; she knows it is not up to her "to decide the absolute truth of things, or why *the* truth might not be *my* truth." Den Hartog's novel is powerful and evocative. I was entirely taken by Ruth's first-person narration with its complicated shifts to third-person omniscience incorporating James' and Elspeth's lives and thoughts. The grotesqueness of Ruth's difference, resulting in taunts such as "*Horse Face*" and "*Monster Girl*," effectively conveys the intensity of less extreme causes and cases of girlhood exclusion and alienation. Focused on the size, shape, and proportion of the girl's body, the measurement of difference in the case of Ruth is an exaggeration of familiar requirements of "normalcy" for growing girls. The presence of Elspeth's dressmaker's dummy, which can be wheeled from room to room, serves as an ever-present reminder of the norm and goal of female growth and development. The inclusion of the physical, historical, and mythological origins and stories of "giants" not only contextualizes Ruth's story, but also pushes readers to research the "authenticity" of the many versions offered. Exposed to actual and imaginary giants, the reader is told that "there is an uncanny resemblance between real giants and giants in fairy tales." Den Hartog's great success lies in her convincing and deft interweaving of the two.

Lori Ann Bloomfield's first novel, *The Last River Child*, explores Peg Staynor's exclusion and isolation. Set primarily during the early years of the twentieth century, the narrative reaches back to the childhood of Peg's mother, Rose, who, like her daughter, was shunned by a close-knit community. Peg is suspected of being a river child, capable of releasing the treacherous spirit-child

trapped within the Magurvey River. Feared and derided by the people of Walvern, Peg, like Ruth in *And Me Among Them*, anticipates school as a place of promise that will embrace her. School disappoints, however, allowing Peg to "pretend she belonged" while inside at her desk, but marking her as an outcast "during those long, jarring moments of recess" when "she stood apart." Like Ruth, Peg tries to be unobtrusive, in her case doing "her best to appear harmless" since she is associated with treachery. Her affinity with the landscape defines her as uncanny, which increases others' distrust of her. Unfortunately, the novel becomes unwieldy as it attempts to develop a number of characters and subplots initiated by the impact of the First World War on Walvern. The conventional narration of forty-seven chapters does not succeed in successfully containing or conveying the sprawling story, despite the compelling characters who enter and exit the narrative.

House of Spells by Robert Pepper-Smith explores the isolation caused by pregnancy, along with the complication of the baby being adopted within a small community, a situation that also occurs in *The Last River Child*. The novel explores narrator Lacey Wells' friendship with Rose, whose pregnancy leads Lacey to discover the source of Mr. Giacomo's wealth, which has been a local mystery in their town in southeastern British Columbia. Remembered and told by Lacey from a fire lookout in BC's Palliser Mountains, the story is closely connected with the terrain and history of the region. References to a dam flooding a local valley and the activity of horse loggers focus the narrative on the land as it has been used and misused by those who inhabit it. After the novel ends, events will take Lacey away from southeastern British Columbia to Guatemala City, broadening the view and the story as seen from the fire lookout. Pepper-Smith's novel is both a haunting mystery and an intimate exploration of loss, friendship, and family. In addition, sensuous descriptions concentrate on paper and the process of paper-making undertaken by Lacey's father, who sold it to Japanese-Canadians in nearby internment caps during World War II. He now sells the snow-bleached or sun-bleached sheets to artists in Baltimore and New York. When Lacey buries the paper in the powder snow of the Illecillewaet snowfields, she notes "the light filtering through ice crystals bleached the paper" so that "it acquired a pure, enduring whiteness that made it rare and valuable." When Lacey asks her father why he does not wear gloves while working, he responds that it is "because the strands are like new skin—they needed to be touched, caressed, to make them receptive, sensitive. In this way, he said, the paper will acquire stability, coherence."

Like the narratives about giants in *And Me Among Them*, the descriptions of paper and paper-making in *House of Spells* engage the reader intellectually, emotionally, and aesthetically. Both of these novels succeed in conveying the isolation, fear, and vulnerability of a girl who is different. Pepper-Smith places his character in the region that produced her difference whereas Den Hartog's "giant" fills the novel and becomes larger than the region she inhabits.

"she was owed a party . . ."

Lisa de Nikolits
West of Wawa. Inanna $22.95

Reviewed by Alexandra Gilbert

The premise of *West of Wawa* seems promising: a young, disillusioned Australian woman goes on a journey across Canada to find herself and make peace with life. Canada's vast expanses of prairie, forest, and mountain provide ample opportunities to travel to remote places and reflect on one's journey through life. However, despite its plausible storyline and setting, *West of*

Wawa falls significantly short of its potential as a novel.

The most significant issue is with Benny, the main character who quits her job to travel by Greyhound bus from St. John's to Vancouver. Unfortunately, a protagonist has to have strength of character in order to be sympathetic, and Benny is not. At the slightest sign of impending discomfort or emotional difficulty, she collapses. When she arrives in St. John's, she has a moment of panic because of the unstructured time spreading out in front of her, and her response to this situation is to "[m]edicate to the gills and pass out." She does this with increasing frequency, even after a semi-epiphany in the Yukon.

De Nikolits trivializes prescription drug abuse, as does the publisher (Inanna), who describes Benny as a "road warrior with a backpack of opiates" on the back cover. Benny takes codeine as well as Xanax, Lorazepam, sleeping pills, and even Percoset with such regularity that with her small frame and diet of salad and chewing gum, she would be a full-blown addict within months. She would not be able to take her usual cocktail of meds and then go for a ten-mile bike ride around Churchill, Manitoba. The narrator's tone is alarmingly casual whenever Benny "crunches" a codeine tablet. And why does she chew something that would taste like aspirin? Characters are not people, but they have to be believably human.

Further, Benny does not seem to have a real reason for her reliance on drugs. People who abuse substances typically have underlying issues that are triggered by an event. In Benny's case, she received one negative review of her first art show (among many positive ones), and her marriage ended because it turned out her husband was gay. But she does not reveal anything sufficient to explain her reaction, and her own excuses are insufficient.

In her professional life, Benny is initially presented as intelligent and relatively educated. However, a dialogue in Juneau with Phoebe, one of the many random travel friends she meets and discards, reveals implausible ignorance:

> "Surely that must be a joke," Phoebe said, frowning. "I can't see them really selling reindeer meat. Do reindeers [sic] even exist?"
>
> "Maybe moose are reindeer?" Benny offered.

Although *West of Wawa* is supposed to be about "feminist learning" (Inanna), de Nikolits has done a disservice to women in general. And for the record, moose are not reindeer.

New Translations for a New Body of Women's Writing

Louise H. Forsyth, ed.
Anthology of Québec Women's Plays in English Translation: Volume III (1997-2009). Playwrights Canada $29.95

Reviewed by Kailin Wright

Selected for their "beauty, relevance, and potential for theatrical and social renewal," ten new plays form the third volume of the *Anthology of Québec Women's Plays in English Translation*. Edited by Louise H. Forsyth, the newest anthology features plays written between 1997 and 2009 by some of Quebec's most innovative women dramatists. Taken together, the three volumes span the years from 1966 to 2009 and not only offer a corpus of Quebec women's drama but also a sample of the changing issues and aesthetics of feminist writing in Quebec. The contribution of the third edition is threefold: it builds an emerging canon of Québécoise dramatists; it provides English translations that help give these works a wider audience; and it underscores the particular socio-cultural and linguistic contexts of these plays.

Forsyth's comprehensive introduction takes us through the years of the 1950s and 60s when "only a few bold and gifted women were starting to give serious consideration to a writing" career. She then explores the political upheavals of the 1960s, 70s, and 80s with the Quiet Revolution, Sexual Revolution, and civil rights movements as well as the sidelining of feminist issues in the 1990s. Her introduction concludes by concentrating on present-day issues of consumerism, maternity, and patriarchy. While the historical overview will be valuable to readers coming to the anthology for the first time, it raises the question of how to define feminism in Quebec today. Evelyne de la Chenelière's assertion that any women's writing is a "powerful feminist act" only complicates matters: indeed, is all women's writing feminist? And if all women's writing is a feminist act, then what exactly are the issues, aesthetics, and values of feminist writing today? Forsyth embraces this open-ended use of feminism and explains that the anthology's original plays offer "many diverse possibilities to explore what it means to be human, as seen through women's eyes and experienced in women's bodies and minds."

The anthology begins with Nathalie Boisvert's *Catch a Tiger* (*L'Histoire sordide de Conrad B.),* translated by Bobby Theodore, which is a gripping psychological play about an overly controlling mother who keeps her thirty-three-year-old son Conrad under strict lock and key. Marie-Ève Gagnon also explores the interiority of a mother in *When Books Come Tumbling Down* (*La bibliothèque de Constance*). Translated by Forsyth, this beautiful yet troubling play concentrates on a physician, Constance, who treats female patients with eating disorders. Troubled by bulimia herself, Constance at once struggles with her need to overconsume and then purge and she struggles with the many authoritative books that wall her office and symbolize the professional patriarchal discourse she must adopt.

Many of the plays engage with political issues, including women artists' perceived role as mere shadows of their male counterparts in Dominick Parenteau-Lebeuf's *Chinese Portrait of an Imposter* (*Portrait chinois d'une imposteure*). Marilyn Perreault's *Rock, Paper, Jackknife… (Roche, papier, couteau…)* explores refugees in a northern community, which the introduction tells us "could be Inuit or First Nations." In *The Sound of Cracking Bones* (*Le bruit des os qui craquent*), Suzanne Lebeau depicts the enslavement of child soldiers, which as one of the epigraphs to her play expresses, "may be impossible to understand, but it is imperative to know." The imperative to know haunts the characters and audience of each play in the anthology, whether it is an individual, a familial, or a public matter.

Along with Forsyth's substantive, comprehensive introduction, the anthology also includes short introductions to each play and playwright. While these introductions examine the narrative, themes, and character types in detail, they would benefit from greater attention to potential or historical staging choices. The critical apparatus is at its best when it gives consideration to experimental production elements and translation issues together with literary analysis.

The *Anthology of Québec Women's Plays in English Translation* gives due attention to the artistic act of translation itself. The introductions and translators' notes to the plays explain key changes and strategies in rewriting the French script for an English audience. In many cases, certain details cannot be directly translated, such as the original's use of the formal "vous" (you), or the popular nineteenth-century song "Le Temps des cerises" in Carole Fréchette's French version of *Earthbound* (*Violette sur la terre*). Because the revolutionary resonance of "Le Temps des cerises" would likely be lost on English audiences, John Murrell

substitutes the English ballad "Where Have All the Flowers Gone" for Fréchette's song. With Evelyne de la Chenelière's play *Public Disorder* (*Désordre public*), a direct account of the original in any language is impossible because there is no single authoritative script. Resisting theatrical norms and a fixed play text, Chenelière revised the script before each performance and created a constantly evolving play. Chenelière's approach to writing captures one of the anthology's overarching themes, that of renewal.

Each play dramatizes the renewal of self, family, memory, theatre, or artistry, and, in some cases, the tragic need for social renewal and change. This anthology offers a valuable resource for theatre practitioners as well as theatre and cultural historians by gathering original scripts by Québécoise playwrights and translating them in English for the first time.

Striking a Balance

Christiane Frenette; Sheila Fischman, trans.
After the Red Night. Cormorant $21.00

Rebecca Rosenblum
The Big Dream: Stories. Biblioasis $19.95

Johanna Skibsrud
This Will Be Difficult to Explain and Other Stories. Penguin $28.00

Reviewed by Jodi Lundgren

Sometimes literary fiction is ponderous at the expense of readability. What a delight it is, then, to encounter books that are both accessible and thought-provoking. *After the Red Night,* a hypnotizing novel told in two alternating time frames (1955 and 2002), takes place in Rimouski, Quebec, where in 1950, a fire destroyed half the town, though it killed no one. This historical event becomes a metaphor for any pivotal incident that divides a life into "before" and "after" segments: "[F]rom the red night, a new world has been born." Motifs of running away, returning home, starting over, and rebuilding interweave the time frames, which are also linked by felicitous images such as that of the phlox flower.

Omniscient narration in the 1955 sections creates intimacy with three characters: Thomas (a gardener), Romain (a doctor), and Marie (Romain's wife). Particularly affected by the "red night," Thomas has claimed responsibility for starting the fire, though "electrical lightning" is the reputed cause. After five years spent institutionalized in Quebec City, receiving shock treatments that erase parts of his memory, Thomas returns to Rimouski hoping to integrate his past with his present. Despite his skill with plants, the "scorched" Thomas has difficulty nurturing human connection, even with Romain, a childhood friend. Drawn to Thomas, Marie is an archetypal 1950s housewife: fertile, domestically accomplished, and unfulfilled to the point of clinical depression. Thomas wears the emotional brokenness that Marie shares but must conceal; she envies as freedom what Thomas experiences as isolation.

According to Lou, Marie's daughter and the first-person narrator of the 2002 sections, "if running away means refusing one's origins, there was something to be refused that escaped me." Indeed, Lou—who runs away at sixteen and maintains her "fugue state" for thirty years—sees her mother only as remote, brittle, and disapproving, whereas the reader knows the depths of Marie's suffering. While reserving a special tenderness for Thomas, Frenette skilfully employs shifting points of view to cultivate compassion for all her characters. In the end, she suggests, certain formative experiences can be neither fully remembered nor wholly forgotten, and some wounds cut so deep that to promise recovery would trivialize the injury. A dreamlike story suffused with melancholy yet teeming with life, *After the Red Night* dignifies both suffering and resilience.

In *This Will Be Difficult to Explain and Other Stories,* Johanna Skibsrud's themes

include memory, storytelling, misrepresentation, and estranged relationships. Like many women publishing fiction in Canada, Skibsrud has been compared to Alice Munro. "The Electric Man" evinces a similarity in characterization: a young American woman working at a French hotel dislikes one of the patrons but cannot refuse when he asks to paint a portrait of her; her insight—like that of so many Munro heroines—does not render her invulnerable to eccentric and pathetic older men. In "Cleats," one of the collection's strongest stories and one of several that juxtapose past and present time frames, Skibsrud approximates Munro's structural prowess: the protagonist, Fay, receives a gift of gardening cleats from her husband. When wearing them, she gets stuck in the ground, and her panic reminds her of a long-ago car accident and her own scream. With satisfying narrative logic, the inset story of a teenage drinking and driving incident dovetails with events decades later, culminating in Fay's release from a confining marriage. Skibsrud also at times uses a simpler narrative through line, as in "French Lessons" and "Clarence," two entertaining stories that turn on tragicomic misunderstandings.

Finally, both Munro and Skibsrud frequently offer instructive generalizations on various topics through their focalized characters—but here the resemblance ends. Whereas Munro employs in such passages all of her own acumen and articulacy, rarely letting contemplation overwhelm the story, Skibsrud typically endows her characters with average intelligence and then dwells on their internal ruminations. The redundant self-reflexivity contained in the phrase "[p]erhaps, Ginny thought to herself" (might she be thinking to someone else?) indicates the tenor of most of these meditative passages.

For example, "The Limit" emphasizes the idea of perception, culminating in the protagonist's realization that "[i]t is possible just to see and see until it gets hazy and you can't see anymore—and even at that point, at the point where you stop being able to see any longer, it's not because what's out there is covered up by anything, it's just—that's the limit." This epiphany and its conceptual build-up are much less engaging than the story's events (such as buffalo-hunting) and its characters (such as Cheryl, a meat-packer with impeccably manicured nails); in fact, how the story's declared theme relates to the plot is unclear. Unfortunately, as happens too often in this collection, the characters' thought processes (and Skibsrud's own impulse to philosophize) dominate the story in a way that quells narrative interest.

While Rebecca Rosenblum does not shy away from ideas in her finely crafted second collection, *The Big Dream*, storytelling takes precedence. For example, in her story "Loneliness," she explores the abstraction contained in the title but brings it to life in a tale of mutual attraction between two single executives. The assertion that "[d]esire only increases loneliness"—which Skibsrud would belabour—serves merely to crystallize a conundrum that the story dramatizes.

Most of the collection's stories concern employees of "Dream Inc," a fictional "family of lifestyle magazines" whose Canadian branch is located in Mississauga, within sight of the Pearson Airport. Rosenblum shows people both at work and as shaped by work. The collection is carefully organized, so that a story set in the workplace alternates with one set off-site, but chronology is deliberately flouted. For example, we meet laid-off customer service representatives early in the collection, and read about the executives preparing to lay them off near the end—a non-sequential order that effectively expresses the reigning states of shock and chaos.

As the company flounders and lay-offs become widespread—the entire call centre is outsourced to India—characters react to the stress in various ways: Grig fantasizes about his supervisor, eventually coming

to believe in the delusion that she is his girlfriend; Rae, a designer and mother of two who is undergoing a trial separation from her husband, sobs in his car; a junior researcher becomes mentally unhinged, obsessively collecting unsolicited data about company employees; and the second-person protagonist of "How to Keep Your Day Job" slips on a staircase at work and breaks her leg. Although Rosenblum thus critiques the damaging effects of corporate culture, she consistently points to the redemptive value of human connection. For example, when a technical support person's abscessed tooth bursts before he has secured health benefits, it is his co-workers who plan to take him to the "ER": "They'll have to treat him at least a little, right? Must've gone septic by now, and that's medical not dental." Even though most of the characters lead highly compartmentalized lives—keeping to themselves personal details such as whether or not they have a partner or children—those in crisis often find help, forgiveness, or camaraderie in each other. Rosenblum writes with exquisite attention to detail, not to mention an astute sense of comedic timing: her uniquely troubled and wholly convincing characters should appeal to readers of commercial and serious fiction alike.

Apprendre à (s')écrire

Guy Gaudreau et Micheline Tremblay, dirs. *Je voudrais bien être un homme : Correspondance littéraire inédite entre Simone Routier et Harry Bernard.* David 30,00 $

Compte rendu par Fanie St-Laurent

Simone Routier, une auteure célibataire de vingt-sept ans à l'aube de publier son premier recueil de poèmes, *L'Immortel adolescent*, et Harry Bernard, trente ans, journaliste au *Courrier de Saint-Hyacinthe,* marié et père, entretiennent une correspondance de quarante-six lettres entre septembre 1928 et mars 1929. Simone Routier est à la recherche de conseils à la fois sur l'écriture, sur la langue, sur le milieu littéraire, et désire ardemment que son livre soit connu, qu'on en parle dans les journaux, qu'on le critique. Harry Bernard accueille sa vision du métier, lui donne son aide et publie ses textes et des critiques de son travail poétique. Une amitié saine, mais peut-être peu commune entre un homme et une femme à cette époque, se développe entre eux, non sans éveiller les soupçons de l'épouse de Bernard qui parviendra inopinément à mettre fin à leur échanges.

On ne peut que remercier Guy Gaudreau et Micheline Tremblay d'avoir mis au jour cette correspondance inédite entre Routier et Bernard. La recherche préalable est remarquable et dénote un travail d'érudition tant sur le parcours de l'une que sur celui de l'autre. La présentation en début de volume est claire et concise, ne répétant pas les travaux déjà réalisés par d'autres chercheurs. L'accent, ici, est vraiment mis sur la vie des auteurs résumée dans une chronologie, sur la correspondance, sur certains documents explicatifs (poèmes, lettres à d'autres correspondants, illustrations, critiques de *L'Immortel adolescent*) et sur un substantiel appareil de notes. Concernant les notes, le lecteur qui ne veut rien manquer préférerait sans doute des notes de bas de page, plus conviviales que les notes de fin de volume.

En parcourant *Je voudrais bien être un homme*, on trouve un nouvel exemple de l'importance du mentorat masculin pour une nouvelle venue dans le milieu littéraire de la fin des années 1920. À l'instar de Laure Conan qui soumet *Angéline de Montbrun* à l'abbé Henri-Raymond Casgrain et des auteures qui gravitent autour d'Alfred DesRochers (Routier en fait aussi partie), Simone Routier recherche des alliés, des mentors qui lui permettront d'améliorer son style, de faire connaître son travail, mais aussi de s'intégrer dans le milieu littéraire. Les lettres de Routier font ressortir toute sa détermination, ses ambitions et son « âme

de gentleman », lesquelles se distinguent de la rhétorique féminine habituelle. Pour un lecteur contemporain, il est aussi impressionnant de constater la place occupée par la poésie dans l'espace médiatique de l'époque, puisque *L'Immortel adolescent*, une œuvre d'une nouvelle écrivaine, suscite pas moins d'une dizaine de critiques dans les revues et les journaux, dont certaines sont très élogieuses et très complètes.

Enfin, en observant tout le travail, les échanges, les demandes, les lectures qui naissent de la correspondance de Routier et de Bernard, on ne peut que déplorer que leur correspondance cesse abruptement. Avec du recul, on se demande également comment pourront se faire les recherches sur la genèse des textes de création à l'ère du courriel et des programmes informatiques dont la rapide désuétude limite la conservation.

Pathos and Presence

David Groulx
A Difficult Beauty. Wolsak & Wynn $17.00

Reviewed by Michelle La Flamme

A photograph evoking the sombreness of the winter sunset seen through the broken glass of a windowpane is followed by a single black page with the title "A DIFFICULT BEAUTY" in bold black font on cream paper. The visual starkness of the cover and introductory pages of *A Difficult Beauty* prepare us for the cryptic poems that follow.

This collection of poetry is a passionate snapshot of poignant aspects of life on the rez depicted in simple scenes that are propelled forward with a sparse economy of language. It is little wonder that Groulx has won awards for his poetry and that his poems have appeared globally in over one hundred periodicals. In addition to the stark realism of the poems, the crushing blows of poverty are evinced in poems such as "ONE SET OF TRACKS": "this is skid row / here everybody drags their body / from pawnshop to bar stool." The collection includes poems punctuated by ontological concerns, as in

> I AM STILL
> Frozen were
> These veins in my throat
> Life chains
>
> My bones dripping
> Into these rivers
> I am being made into memory

The landscape, song, the natural world, and the highway weave their way into the reader's mind. The symbolism of the widening highway on the rez—"[i]ts teeth clamped down / on the Indians, dogs and their houses"—is a frightening personification of impending encroachment. Some of the poems represent the anger of the impotence that is part of this existence, as in "URBAN INDIAN," "HATE IS LONG DISTANCE," "THE HUNT," and "CHANGING NAMES," where the uranium mine and the highway make adamant demands for social justice. Death themes, hard labour, survival, and asphalt are woven with memoirs on the effects of alcohol on self and family in "DANCING WITH MY FATHER" and "MONSTERS." These poems that deal with harsh realities mingle with those such as "I AM HERE" and "SWEAT" that offer solace and ceremony, told in storytelling fragments that aid in the healing from the violence of colonization.

The overarching poetic statement "I've done my time / America" is understood through the body of poems that chillingly recount the impact of history and personal and cultural memory. The mental, emotional, and physical effects of colonization on the soul are told here in a dense and personal poetry that is almost cinematic in its crispness, as when the reservation is described simply as "the colony of broken fridges and worn down / houses" in "RETURNING TO THE REZ."

These poems ultimately resist and describe the effects of colonization. The visual imagery and layers of symbolism in this frank book of poetry depict survival despite the chaos of an occupied postcolonial Canada for Aboriginal peoples.

Doric Germain pour tous

Lucie Hotte
Doric Germain. David 19,95 $

Compte rendu par Mathieu Simard

Dans son dernier livre, Lucie Hotte, professeure au Département de français de l'Université d'Ottawa, décortique l'œuvre de l'un des écrivains les plus étudiés dans les écoles secondaires de l'Ontario français : Doric Germain. Le romancier né au Lac Sainte-Thérèse se fait connaître en 1980 avec *La Vengeance de l'orignal*, puis avec *Le Trappeur du Kabi* (1981) et *Le Soleil se lève au Nord* (1991). Publiés aux Éditions Prise de parole et destinés à un public adolescent, ces trois romans mettent en scène le Grand Nord ontarien et interrogent les rapports à l'Autre, qu'il s'agisse de la Nature, des anglophones ou des Amérindiens.

Intitulé *Doric Germain*, le livre de Hotte s'adresse aussi bien aux étudiants et aux professeurs de français qu'aux chercheurs universitaires qui s'intéressent à l'œuvre du romancier franco-ontarien. L'auteure consacre la première partie de son ouvrage à une analyse détaillée de chacune des trois œuvres pour la jeunesse de Germain. En fait, Hotte reprend le format type de la collection « Voix didactiques — Auteurs » des Éditions David, dont son livre constitue le huitième numéro. Après avoir résumé le récit, elle étudie la représentation de l'espace et du temps, puis passe en revue les différents personnages. Enfin, elle présente les principaux thèmes de l'œuvre, opère un examen narratologique du texte et se questionne sur le genre auquel il appartient. Clair et concis, le premier segment du livre offre également plusieurs pistes de réflexion qui incitent le lecteur à approfondir sa compréhension des romans de Germain.

La deuxième partie de l'ouvrage est un dossier qui offre une documentation complémentaire à la section précédente. Hotte y présente un aperçu historique et sociologique de deux lieux d'importance dans les textes de Germain : la réserve amérindienne de Constance Lake, majoritairement anglophone, et la ville de Hearst, majoritairement francophone. Hotte retrace également les sources d'inspiration littéraires de Germain et propose une entrevue qu'elle a réalisée avec lui. Dans cette entrevue, il est question de la genèse des textes de Germain, de ses romans *Poison* (1985) et *Défenses légitimes* (2003), de même que de l'intérêt de l'écrivain pour la nature et le Grand Nord. Le lecteur apprend par ailleurs dans cette entrevue que Germain a commencé à écrire des romans adaptés aux préoccupations des jeunes afin de leur faire aimer la lecture. Quant à savoir si tous les textes de Germain sont adressés à un public adolescent, le romancier répond « qu'on n'écrit pas toujours pour un lecteur en particulier, mais souvent en réponse à des œuvres qu'on a lues ». Germain raconte que, jeune, il lisait les romans des Américains James Olivier Curwood et Jack London, dans lesquels « le beau rôle était donné aux anglophones »; et Germain aurait commencé à écrire afin de donner, pour une fois, le « beau rôle » à des francophones.

Le Retour de Babel

Catherine Khordoc
Tours et Détours : le mythe de Babel dans la littérature contemporaine. PU Ottawa 29,95 $

Compte rendu par Molleen Shilliday

Avec son ouvrage court et concis *Tours et Détours : le mythe de Babel dans la littérature contemporaine*, Catherine Khordoc comble une lacune de la critique littéraire

en mettant en lumière la pertinence du mythe babélien vis-à-vis des problématiques contemporaines qui foisonnent au centre de cinq œuvres francophones. Khordoc montre que « la tour de Babel semble être en voie de reconstruction en ce début du XXI^{e} siècle ».

Khordoc, qui est professeure de littérature francophone au Département de français à l'Université Carleton, choisit un corpus varié pour lever le voile sur un objectif central de son projet : la mise en relief de la transnationalité de ce thème. Elle ouvre l'étude avec une synthèse approfondie et pluridisciplinaire des références babéliennes contemporaines en se penchant essentiellement sur la littérature et les médias dans lesquels on voit Babel proliférer. Avant d'entamer son étude des livres — *L'Algarabie* de Jorge Semprún, *Babel, prise deux ou Nous avons tous découvert l'Amérique* de Francine Noël, *Ainsi parle la Tour CN* d'Hédi Bouraoui, *Babel-Opéra* de Monique Bosco et *Tambour-Babel* d'Ernest Pépin — Khordoc dédie son premier chapitre aux nombreuses interprétations du mythe et à une étude étymologique. En délimitant les diverses facettes du terme — théologique, littéraire, linguistique, sociologique, philosophique — Khordoc met en exergue les contradictions qu'il contient et la richesse que connote sa présence.

Selon Khordoc, « l'opposition malédiction/bénédiction demeure au cœur de l'interprétation du mythe de Babel ». Or, elle développe l'idée que, depuis toujours, ce terme est d'une ambivalence tranchante qui est marquée par la multiplicité et l'uniformité, l'ordre et le chaos, la compréhension et l'incommunicabilité. Elle stipule qu'aujourd'hui ce mythe sert de métaphore pour la diaspora, la migration, l'urbanisme, le multiculturalisme et la traduction. Cette thématique souligne les manières diverses dont on habite ce monde labyrinthique, postmoderne, qui est aussi enrichissant que déboussolant.

Son étude de *L'Algarabie* de Semprún débouche sur une question : « Le mythe de Babel serait-il le symbole par excellence du postmodernisme? » Elle relève le lien entre le mythe babélien et les imperfections de la langue, l'intraduisibilité et la déchéance de la communauté qui est au cœur du roman. Le chapitre portant sur *Babel, prise deux* de Noël établit le rôle du mythe comme métaphore de la tension et de la réconciliation des cultures diverses au sein de Montréal. Au sujet d'*Ainsi parle la Tour CN* de Bouraoui, Khordoc réfléchit sur le ludisme qui peut accompagner la transculturalité. *Babel-Opéra* de Bosco est, selon Khordoc, l'œuvre la plus dysphorique du corpus : Khordoc nous émeut avec son analyse du lien entre le mythe et le côté traumatique et douloureux de la dispersion dans le texte. *Tambour-Babel* de Pépin est un texte significatif selon Khordoc, car Babel y sert à montrer « le côté positif du plurilinguisme et de la créolisation ».

Les arguments de Khordoc sont originaux et finement élaborés; son étude est une contribution incontournable concernant la relation entre ce mythe originel et la littérature contemporaine francophone.

Return of The Golden Dog

William Kirby; Mary Jane Edwards, ed. *Le Chien d'or/The Golden Dog: A Legend of Quebec.* McGill-Queen's UP $39.95

Reviewed by Cynthia Sugars

It is regrettable to see the acclaimed Centre for Editing Early Canadian Texts (CEECT) series come to an end. Established in the early 1980s at Carleton University under the directorship of Mary Jane Edwards, the CEECT series has produced a set of reliable and widely cited Canadian editions—including such texts as *Wacousta*, *The Clockmaker*, and *Roughing It in the Bush*. The publication of *The Golden Dog*, edited by Edwards, marks the twelfth and final

edition in the series. For the first time, *The Golden Dog* appears in its full, unabridged, and authoritative form, thereby avenging the long history of publishers' fraud that plagued the book from its beginnings. *Le chien qui ronge l'os* has finally taken its promised revenge!

Published in 1877, *The Golden Dog* is one of the most well-known novels of nineteenth-century Canada. Set in 1748 in the decade leading up to the Conquest, the book is a historical romance that places the blame for the fall of Quebec on the decadence of the French *ancien régime*. Writing in the years immediately following Confederation, William Kirby sought to produce a novel that not only relayed the unique character and antiquity of New France (replete with local folk traditions), but also, as Dennis Duffy has observed, one which explicitly "enfold[ed] Quebec's history within that of anglophone Canada."

The introduction, at 145 pages, offers a thorough discussion of the novel's publication history. The story behind *The Golden Dog* is a tortuous one. Kirby, for almost ten years, attempted to find a publisher for his manuscript, with British publishers asserting that a story of Canada's "past history . . . would fail to secure the favour of many English readers." And yet, the novel would eventually meet with enormous success—championed by both Queen Victoria and Alfred, Lord Tennyson. The novel was first published in 1877 by Lovell, Adam, and Wesson in New York. Its post-publication history, however, was what Kirby's friend William Withrow termed "an Iliad of disasters." When the company filed for bankruptcy in 1878, Kirby learned that the publishers had not secured Canadian copyright for the novel and, indeed, had sold the plates to an American. As a result, Kirby had lost the rights to any subsequent editions. As he bitterly stated in a letter to L. C. Page in 1897, "I have been shamefully cheated out of my right in the Golden Dog and any body is at liberty to make a prize of it. . . . If a thief had run off with my horse or purse I could retake it whenever found but the product of my pen made with immense work & cost I cannot recover." Over the years, Kirby became increasingly frustrated because he had no control over the countless editions that were appearing. When L. C. Page of Boston offered to create a new set of plates on the condition that Kirby identify their edition as the "only" authorized one, Kirby agreed. Upon publication, however, Kirby learned with chagrin that Page had substantially abridged the book without his knowledge, including having removed an entire chapter. The "authorized" edition was a dud. Edwards provides a compelling and full history of these and other controversies in order to stress the importance of the CEECT edition. Critics, she asserts, have for years been "interpreting a flawed text." The publication of a reliable edition of *The Golden Dog* is a welcome and long-overdue event.

Translating the Self

Louise Ladouceur; Richard Lebeau, trans.
Dramatic Licence: Translating Theatre from One Official Language to the Other in Canada. U of Alberta P $34.95

Eva C. Karpinski
Borrowed Tongues: Life Writing, Migration, and Translation. Wilfrid Laurier UP $39.95

Reviewed by Lee Skallerup Bessette

E. D. Blodgett, in his introduction to Louise Ladouceur's book *Dramatic Licence: Translating Theatre from One Official Language to the Other in Canada,* notes that "there is a predilection for ethnocentric translation" in the reproduction of literatures of the other. The study of translation, thus, is as much about the hegemonic values of the target culture as it is about how this word or that was rendered in a different language. Both Ladouceur's book and Eva C.

Karpinski's work, *Borrowed Tongues: Life Writing, Migration, and Translation,* deserve a broad audience for this reason: they are both serious meditations about the impact that translations have on texts, as well as the forces that influence those translations.

Ladouceur's book, translated from the French by Richard Lebeau, won both the Prix Gabrielle Roy in Canadian and Quebec Literary Criticism and the Ann Saddlemyer Book Award for Theatre Research in Canada when it first appeared in French. It fills an important gap in terms of the history of translating theatre in Canada. As the author herself points out, most of the work done in translation studies in Canada has dealt primarily with poetry and prose. In fact, the history of theatre translation in Canada has been relatively short, only really taking root during the 1980s. Through a polysystem approach, she looks to understand the hows and the whys of theatre translation in Canada. Complicating things is the performative and linguistic elements that are essential to theatre. For example, how does one translate the *joual* of Michel Tremblay's plays, and if the particular vernacular is ignored for the benefit of the audience, what does that say about the receiving language and culture and their "interest" in the other?

Statistical analysis is woven together with a narrative history of theatre translation in Ladouceur's book, and she provides a number of close readings of translations and adaptations of plays from one language into the other. Also invaluable is the exhaustive bibliography of Canadian plays in translation, complete with production history. Ladouceur also subtly highlights the importance of programs that encouraged and facilitated cultural exchange and translation. The establishment of an exchange program for translated theatre texts by the Centre d'essai des auteurs dramatiques in 1985 and the relative abundance of anglophone, but nonetheless bilingual, playwrights living in Montreal fostered a new era in theatre translation. But this book should appeal to anyone with an interest in Canadian literary and cultural history. Theatre is as much a "happening" as it is a work of literature.

Karpinski, on the other hand, looks at the challenges facing transnational and diasporic life-writing by women. Much like theatre at times, life-writing is often a secondary concern of literary studies, especially life-writing in translation by women. As put by Karpinski, the target culture has "a tendency to swallow up and assimilate the immigrant other for its own enrichment, or to lock up the unassimilable other in a position of romanticized or demonized difference." What then does an author do in the face of such powerful forces working against their complex messages of resistance and empowerment? Further adding to the complexity is the fact that the authors themselves are writing in the language of the colonizer, literally a "borrowed tongue." The subjects are both translating themselves for, and are translated by, their new culture.

Karpinski uses feminist, post-structuralist, and postcolonial approaches to interrogate the "translation" that does or does not take place in the works of eight immigrant women authors. She connects the idea of postcolonial, feminist life-writing to a kind of performance on the part of the authors, thereby attempting to translate their experiences as a resistance to colonial dominance. Most interesting is the chapter on Caribbean diasporic authors Jamaica Kincaid and M. NourbeSe Philip and their relationship to a language that sought to repress and oppress them both in their home and adoptive countries. These practices of resistance are traced as far back (in Canada at least) to Laura Goodman Salverson, the author of Canada's first "ethnic" novel. Karpinski beautifully weaves the disparate life stories and strategies of these authors into a larger narrative of resistance.

In the conclusion of her book, Karpinski points out why it is important that we, in academia, pay attention to these narratives: "If academic institutions can be viewed as a microcosm of such transnational contact zones, I am convinced that we can benefit from the findings of research on life writing in order to learn to read each other's stories, listen to multiple voices, and find the possibility of plurivocal exchanges. . . ." I can think of no better words to illustrate why both books are important for a more general audience, in addition to those who specialize in the often marginalized sub-genres of translation, theatre, and life-writing.

Enfant du XX^{e} siècle

Perrine Leblanc
L'Homme blanc. Quartanier 21,95 $

Compte rendu par Adina Balint-Babos

C'est l'histoire de Kolia, enfant né dans les monts K. en Sibérie et élevé dans les prisons de Staline. *L'Homme blanc*, avoue Perrine Leblanc, comme « le titre de la seconde période des *Enfants du paradis* de Marcel Carné et le nom qu'on a déjà donné au Pierrot, au mime ». « Enfant du XX^{e} siècle » parce que son existence couvre le siècle : né en 1936, prisonnier libéré, clown au cirque à Moscou, et finalement, vieux et fatigué en 1995, en quête de Iossif, son premier instituteur du camp, disparu, dont le souvenir le hante et l'accompagne.

« Kolia avait six ans quand ses parents moururent. » Un inconnu du nom de Iossif lui apprit à compter et à écrire en russe, jusqu'au jour où, en 1953, il se réveilla homme libre de s'inventer une vie nouvelle. C'est là, dira-t-on, le parcours classique d'un enfant de la guerre, passant de la misère aux rêves inattendus, d'orphelin à mime talentueux — Kolia prouve au terme de son parcours de la prison à la liberté, qu'il est doué, et surtout qu'il est un artiste.

Dans ce roman, il y a aussi l'histoire d'une génération en URSS : « 1937, 1943, 1953 . . . les grandes purges, la guerre, la fin de Staline ». L'enfant-jeune-adulte Kolia en est le prototype. Son destin est un concentré de contradictions sociales, de ces accidents de la vie qui ont marqué le déclin du terrible empire soviétique. Les quatre parties du roman illustrent merveilleusement « l'entrée de l'Histoire dans la fiction ». Dans un style qui allie l'art du détail et la sensibilité d'un rythme dépourvu de pathos, Leblanc nous livre le mouvement complexe d'une vie d'exception : celle de « l'homme blanc » — le mime sauvé des camps — qui semble porteur de la pureté blanche de l'enfance et de la noirceur de la Sibérie orientale. D'un côté, tout ce qu'il y a de positif dans le devenir-artiste d'un enfant voué à périr dans le goulag et, de l'autre, ce qu'il y a de minable, de pourri dans un régime totalitaire.

Ces deux volets, nourris par la passion pour la Russie de la jeune écrivaine québécoise — lauréate du Grand Prix du livre de Montréal en 2010 — nous font découvrir des lambeaux de l'Histoire de notre modernité, de ses colères, de l'atmosphère à la fois fétide et bouillonnante des années cinquante et de l'après. La tension entre la liberté sauvage de l'imaginaire et la rigueur violente du sujet impose au récit un ton original, inoubliable. Kolia nous « parle » par ses silences : « Ne compare pas : le vivant ne se compare pas ». Ce vibrant épigraphe d'Ossip Mandelstam ouvre le roman et pourrait le fermer, nous laissant songer à la singularité de chaque destin qui fait histoire.

On aurait envie de lire la suite.

Momentous Gap on Quebec's Literary Map

Linda Leith

Writing in the Time of Nationalism: From Two Solitudes to Blue Metropolis. Signature $18.95

Reviewed by Judit Molnár

Readers of Canadian literature may wonder with apparent reason about what has happened to the glorious days of literature produced in Montreal after World War II, a period associated with the names of Hugh MacLennan, Mavis Gallant, and Mordecai Richler among others. In her memoir, Linda Leith invites us to a guided tour focusing on Montreal's literary life since the 1940s—more precisely, to an exploration of a rich segment of this body of literature invisible and unheard of for so long on the Canadian literary scene. Behind her proposed mission lies her contention that the strong nationalist sentiments in the 1960s both inside and outside Quebec had an enormous influence on the development of anglophone writing in Quebec in the decades to follow. Anglophones as a minority within a minority became homeless—without a viable literary community and without recognition. According to Leith, the social, political, linguistic context in which writers work is of crucial importance indeed. That said, we can understand why anglophone authors of the above mentioned period were silent and/or silenced in Montreal. However, there were some attempts made on the authors' part to make their voices heard and be listened to: think of the Véhicule poets' endeavours hand in hand with those of the Montreal Story Tellers.

Leith, as an academic, a journalist, a translator, an editor, a publisher, and novelist herself, has assumed the role of an ardent cultural and literary activist too, determined to change the situation for the writers who have chosen Montreal, the metropolis, for their creative activities. The multi-faceted and unique ambiance surrounding these writers left some of them indifferent, some disappointed, and others somewhat annoyed and even offended. As an adamant insider of this grim reality, Leith supported but was obviously not satisfied with the notable accomplishments of organizations like the Quebec Society for the Promotion of English-Language Literature and the Quebec Writers' Federation. In her book, she gives an elaborate and highly detailed account of the possible ways and means she has used and turned to in order to realize her plan, which was to bridge linguistic and other divides between the two and the other solitudes. Her idea was to create a possible *rapprochement* between and among the different communities. The cumulative, immense, and often incredible number of difficulties she had to grapple with is beyond description. This may explain why at times the tone she uses is too personal and repetitive. Her ambitious and unceasing attempts to raise funds of different sorts often failed and fell on deaf ears. But stern as she is, she never gave up; as a result, the *Write pour écrire* event was followed by the creation of the Blue Metropolis Foundation (1997), just a step away from her role in establishing the annual Blue Metropolis Montreal International Literary Festival (1999) as the artistic director. The word "blue" has been carefully chosen, for it has many meanings and many connotations as well; therefore, Leith hopes that it will satisfy all involved and concerned.

From the very beginning, Leith has been a firm believer in international recognition that may easily precede recognition in the home country. This certainly held true for the aforementioned MacLennan, Gallant, and Richler. Accordingly, Leith's clear idea behind this unique festival was to mix writers from different backgrounds in and outside Quebec and even outside Canada to provide them with an international and multilingual setting, a location in Montreal, for possible *échanges*.

Toward the end of the book, Leith compiles various lists that include the names of writers from Quebec who have recently won literary prizes internationally, demonstrating their phenomenal and unprecedented success. What one might miss, however, in this laudatory ending is a more detailed, powerful, and argumentative account of why one should read these works that are part and parcel of the Anglo Literary Revival and highly appreciated around the world.

Breathing Fire into Life

Robert Lepage and Marie Michaud; Fred Jourdain, illus.
The Blue Dragon. Anansi $19.95

Reviewed by Katie Mullins

Robert Lepage and Marie Michaud's graphic novella *The Blue Dragon* presents an engaging and colourful adaptation of the original theatre play. Illustrated by Québécois artist Fred Jourdain, the book tells the story of forty-six-year-old Claire Forêt, who goes to China in the hope of adopting a little girl. During her stay, Claire meets with her ex-lover Pierre, a Canadian who lives in China and runs an art gallery, and his young Chinese girlfriend, artist Xiao Ling. Claire and Xiao quickly form a close friendship, and when Xiao discovers she is pregnant with an unwanted child, all three characters are forced to confront their future directions in very different ways. At the heart of the narrative lies an exploration of the complexities of interpersonal relationships, but the story also engages with issues of aging, reproduction, parenthood, gender, cultural difference, and creativity. Although the narrative at times borders on soap opera territory, the scenes are written and illustrated with enough nuance that the story remains compelling. Similarly, the conclusion—in which the same scene is repeated three times, but with three different outcomes—complicates what might be an otherwise predictable and simplistic plot, allowing the narrative to remain open-ended and intriguing, even if a little unsatisfying in its denouement.

By far the most impressive feature of the novella is Fred Jourdain's artwork. Jourdain's bold use of ink and his subtle washes bring great energy and vitality to the story, and his cinematic, sepia-tinged depictions of Chinese cityscapes and urban interiors provide a brooding, atmospheric backdrop to the narrative events. The range of Jourdain's style is impressive: his tightly rendered figurative drawings, usually presented within panels, are contrasted by full one- and two-page spreads and abstract compositions. Frequently, and particularly in the case of some of the two-page spreads, the illustrations stand by themselves as reflections on the characters' experiences of alienation and attempts to locate meaning in Shanghai. My one complaint about the illustrations is that the story's female characters often appear over-sexualized or doll-like. Claire, for instance, is presented with idealized physical proportions, and the opening scene immediately draws attention to her breasts. Such choices push the novella hazardously close to engaging in the problematic representation of women in comics for which the form has received much criticism, and threaten to undermine the story's otherwise tender exploration of the conflicts between career, artistic pursuit, and parenting that the female characters face.

The book's most noticeable weakness is that its integration of word and image is sometimes heavy-handed, likely because it presents the full dialogue of the stage play without transferring some of the detail to visual storytelling. Although the prologue points to the important relationship between textual and visual communication—the opening pages discuss the art of Chinese calligraphy and its ability to suggest complex and multiple images—the

narrative does not consistently succeed in achieving the kind of dynamic interplay between word and image that graphic narrative can perform so powerfully. For me, the story is at its strongest when the dialogue is included within panels rather than rendered as script outside of the illustrations, and when scenes occur without overly intrusive or explanatory dialogue.

Still, the provocative issues the narrative raises through each character's search for meaning and fulfillment keeps the story engaging, and Jourdain's artwork is frequently spellbinding. *The Blue Dragon* shows how human lives never follow simple trajectories, and how the endings we think we desire can be altered by the choices we make.

Keeping It Real

Billie Livingston
One Good Hustle. Random House $22.95

Rawi Hage
Carnival. House of Anansi $20.95

Reviewed by Timothy E. Dugdale

So some whiz kid has developed an algorithm that is able to cut to the chase of news feeds. Perhaps the thing can be tweaked because "too long, did not read" is a problem that continues to vex contemporary literature. Too many publishers are pumping out the works of too many MFA graduates who too often have fallen for the dubious charms of George Saunders, Zadie Smith, David Foster Wallace, and, of course, Jonathan Franzen. Thus magic realism and hysterical realism ride high, at least until the kid's algorithm mows them down.

But why wait when you can pick up Billy Livingston's charming and breezy new work, *One Good Hustle*. Sammie is a young character forced to grow up too fast. Her father has disappeared and her mother is a con artist limping from hustle to hustle. In the opening part of the book, Marlene spirits Sammie to Vegas to run swindles on lonely gamblers looking for love. Marlene has no scruples but she has drugs that she uses to spike drinks. The problem is she doesn't put in enough and the guy beats her silly. It falls to Sammie to get her mother back to Vancouver. Marlene begins to slide into boozy despair, Sammie runs away to a friend's house, and thus begins the summer that changes everything.

Livingston knows she has a winner in this story and refuses to add extra weight to a ride built for speed. Sammie's voice is lovely. She's tough and precocious but hardly jaded. This is a book about real people living real lives, lives that are compromised by bad choices and other people trying to impose their bad choices. At a bush party, Sammie takes stock. "Jesus. All these jerks want to do is get drunk and stoned. Like Marlene. What they don't get is, if you act like Marlene, you end up like Marlene. Fucked up and lonely and broke." When Sammie does hustle, her heart really isn't in it. She wants to play it straight. Security and comfort are cool enough for her.

Rawi Hage runs his own race on a bob-tailed nag. *Carnival* is a book carrying the ballast of both magic realism *and* hysterical realism. That is to say, there are plenty of allegorical motifs awash in a sea of observations, digressions, and general carrying on about this that and the other thing. Through his hard-boiled narrator, a taxi-driver in some imaginary mega-city, we are told the world is a glorious, nasty chaos of noise, filth, fury, and frivolity. At times I felt like I was reading an over-caffeinated Roberto Balano on assignment in Montreal 2050. Even casual conversations are set pieces for profound apercus and existential posturing. Sure, history is full of scoundrels and dodgy rebels and Hage hits us with everything from the French in Algeria, the Portuguese in Angola, and Stokely Carmichael in Oakland. He also wants to take on Islam and its incompatibility with a modernity that is beyond the powers of an

antique theology to understand or control. But if you're going to give me a lecture, please do so through a compelling plot with believable characters moving towards some goal. Where's the mystery? Where's the savage detective to solve it? Very late in the book, there is a killing and detectives do show up. But this only seems a pretext for Hage to start winking at *The Stranger*, *The Name of the Rose*, and even *Howard's End*. Oh that devil, postmodernism.

If this book was half the length, it would double its impact. The best parables are the ones that say their piece quickly and leave you teasing out a truth that is maddeningly just beyond reach. *Carnival* could easily be a novella and much the better for it. What plot there is would come more into focus and the characters would do less blabbering and ruminating. In his debut novel, *DeNiro's Game*, you had a sense that Hage would eventually get to *Carnival*. He has a tendency to over-write or rather to lard his sentences with pseudo-mystic import. Reality is never just reality; it is infused with deeper connections and meanings that spiral or echo into other realms—past, present, and future.

But sometimes reality itself is the best hustle.

Death and Transcendence

Tom Managhan
The Bottle Collector. Scrivener $20.00

Mark Sedore
Snowmen. 3-Day $14.95

Dean Serravalle
Reliving Charley. Oberon $19.95

Reviewed by Justin Shaw

The male protagonists in these novels are concerned with transcending death—literally and figuratively. All three men take journeys to reflect upon their pasts and to challenge themselves to affirm their existences, with varying, though sometimes predictable, results.

Dean Serravalle, in his debut novel *Reliving Charley*, delivers a cautionary tale on a recurrent theme in Western narrative: mortality and the desire to transcend it. Serravalle's economical prose articulates the heavy existential subject matter with clarity and ease, avoiding pontifications on the plight of humanity. Rather than focus on the tragic process of individuation and the Romantic confrontation with death, Serravalle instead examines how death can be a catalyst for raising a greater social awareness. The novel opens with the titular character mourning his wife's recent death. Charley's friend Samuel then reveals that he has developed a stem-cell serum that regenerates cellular growth and reverses aging. However, this Faustian tale eventually undermines Charley and Samuel's attempts at death-transcendence, and suggest that their desire for immortality is the same selfish impulse evident in the acquisitive lifestyle of the youth-oriented American Dream.

Serravalle explores the gendered aspect of the American ethos of acquisition, as both men attempt to use their "invigorating" youth to (re)acquire the love of Linda, a common love interest. Aligning this masculinist orientation with the ethos of capitalistic acquisition that support the American Dream, Samuel begins to envision Jay Gatsby as his personal mentor in hallucinations—a side effect of the serum. In this sense, the reverse-aging serum is more than a simple means to transcend physical death; it also gives Charley and Samuel a second chance to "live out [the] imaginings" they suppressed in the past, including excesses such as infidelity. But the serum has an unanticipated feature: stressful situations, such as those brought on by the acquisitive lifestyle, drastically increase the rate of regression, bringing them closer to birth/death. Samuel, whose acquisitive orientation is stronger than Charley's, eventually succumbs to this

reverse fate, while Charley learns to temper his selfish inclinations to prolong his youth indefinitely, which secures his relationship with Linda. Thus, Serravalle suggests that dreams of immortality must always be approached with caution: there is always risk in "liv[ing] out our imaginings."

Mark Sedore's debut novel *Snowmen* was the winner of the thirty-second 3-Day Novel Contest. Sedore also tackles mortality and its attendant existential concerns, though he does so with a detached irony that is both his strength and weakness. *Snowmen* depicts the cold relations between brothers Charlie and Larry, the latter of whom has Asperger's, which only exacerbates the situation. When Larry is diagnosed with cancer, he decides to raise money for cancer research by being the first person to walk solo across the Arctic Circle. But when his sickness prevents him from doing so, Charlie decides to do the walk for him.

With its alternating narrative structure, between Arctic present and past backstory, Sedore's novel shifts from survivalist fiction to family drama/romance. His spare prose captures the sublime Arctic landscape, while also articulating the quotidian idiosyncrasies of Charlie's experience. In the most notable instance of the latter, Charlie identifies and articulates common sounds and vocal utterances in their musical note equivalents: a character "cackles a crazy frozen laugh that measures from middle C to F-sharp," and he hears a "wail or howl . . . in the G above middle C."

Charlie's motives for making the trip are selfish rather than altruistic. Not only does he do it to "spite" his dying brother (after a violent altercation over a disputed love-interest), he also sees it as a way of proving he can survive the hardship. Thus, fund-raising concerns are peripheral, and Larry is assigned the role of antagonist, providing Charlie with the negative, fist-shaking impetus to keep moving. And though their relationship is often caricatured, Charlie's journey and his freely chosen confrontation with mortality sits uneasily with his brother's forced confrontation with the same. Thus, the reader's sympathy for Charlie's self-imposed middle-class plight wavers throughout. But maybe this is precisely Sedore's point: both men are equally cold in their own way. They are the titular snowmen, and their coldness exists between them rather than in one or the other. In this sense, Sedore's novel is more an exploration of contemporary masculinity and the gender expectations that sometimes stifle the bonds between men—even brothers.

Tom Managhan's *The Bottle Collector* is an episodic novel that depicts the solo sailing trip of Mark Weathers, from Windsor to Thunder Bay. As a retired psychologist steeped in middle-aged reflection, Mark is unhappy that his life has failed to measure up to his past ideals. Thus, he decides that if he doesn't find a reason to keep living at the end of his journey, he will commit suicide. The novel vacillates between sweeping existential meditation and everyday observation, the latter eventually leading Mark to appreciate the simple goals and achievements in life, such as the search for bottles undertaken by two peripheral characters in the novel. Managhan's humour, as channelled through Mark, is sarcastic and occasionally condescending, symptomatic of the protagonist's self-loathing as projected onto others. And though Managhan depicts Mark as wavering between offensive defensiveness and apologetic self-reproach, his character is often difficult to sympathize with. Particularly problematic are Managhan's representations of rural characters through Mark's point of view: most are unflattering rural stereotypes, from boisterous and uncultivated to simple and docile country folk. This representation is sometimes subtle, other times humorously foregrounded—but either way, the condescension is there. This criticism aside, Managhan's novel is at times both funny and insightful, as Mark learns to appreciate

the links between the collection of discarded bottles for redemption as a redemptive process in itself, and his own previous occupation as a psychologist who tried to redeem those left behind by a society with loftier goals in mind.

Three Debuts

Emily McGriffin
Between Dusk and Night. Brick $19.00

Sarah Pinder
Cutting Room. Coach House $17.95

Sara Peters
1996. Anansi $19.95

Reviewed by Sue Sinclair

Perhaps you've noticed a swing in current critical approaches to literature. I say "swing" because it's largely a response to years of sociopolitical unpacking of texts from various points of view: Marxist, feminist, post-colonial, etc. In the wake of these practices, a question has arisen: "What about the work of art as art?" Witness Terry Eagleton's move away from Marxist analysis and toward the literariness of literature in *How to Read Literature* (2013). Or consider art critic Dave Hickey's disdain for sociopolitical considerations that he says have run roughshod over the American art scene (*The Invisible Dragon* 1994). Closer to home, there's James Pollock's identification of himself as a "new aesthete" in his 2012 collection of essays *You Are Here*. For critics, he says, "aesthetic value should always have priority." I'm glad of this swing in some ways. I didn't pursue graduate studies in English partly because I was alienated by lack of attention to the effectiveness of the book in engaging readers through its author's skill in creating and/or reflecting a world. What makes me nervous, however, is the danger of moving too far to the other extreme. Full consideration of an artwork would seem to require thought about form, content, and the relations between the two, and it's from this perspective that I approach these three collections of poetry.

Sarah Pinder's *Cutting Room* is aptly named for the collection is fragmentary on at least two levels of composition: 1) many of the poems are juxtaposed fragments, and 2) the whole is arranged into eight short sections. This constant breaking of the collection's flow is unsettling and keeps it feeling unfinished. However, this book isn't interested in tying up its loose ends. Take for example its resurrection of obsolete objects (loose ends par excellence) or images such as Henry Darger's painted girls "like scattered improbable shrapnel, / dispersing toward the future in pairs and packs" or the deliberately contradictory title "Praising and Disparaging the Functional," which points in two directions at once. The choppy form is in key with the poems' imagery and concerns. Yet sometimes the relations between the parts of a poem are tenuous. Consider part two of the three-part "Draught": "One cough fits in the sealed envelope: thank him or the text written over. One container dreams another, nested quiet in the shipyard, and makes rote inquiries." In part one the speaker is hanging wallpaper and there's no clear connection between that activity and the cough. Not being able to quote the whole poem, I can only refer readers to this passage and allow them to question what the connection may be. The connection between part two and the last part is also unclear. Some may consider the surfacing of these very questions of relation the work of the poem, but a question is only as illuminating as its prospective answers, and I haven't yet found such prospects in this poem. By contrast, "End Times," also a three-part poem of juxtapositions, is loosely centred on the intersection(s) of body and technology, and although it shifts around a good deal, it has enough cohesion to create interesting friction. This is Pinder at her best—loose but not too loose. Her disjointed mappings

are often moving, and I'm a particular fan of the low-key but persistent depiction of technology's effects on our thinking and perception. I'm sobered by lines like "with colour values bled, every room / approximates a ward," and also by moments like the "End Times" account of a Skype call in which a stray moth "dive-bombs" the screen and defies the ability of autofocus to capture it. This sort of imagery alerts me to the danger of embracing technology so wholeheartedly that its limitations become mine.

Like *Cutting Room*, Sara Peters' *1996* features multiple short sections, but to somewhat different effect. Her individual poems are wholes, more "finished" than many of Pinder's, with regular numbers of lines per stanza. The poems also tend to be grouped thematically. The effect of the short sections, then, is partly that of disrupted flow, apt in this case because her poems often feature lonely children not well-enough loved, cut off somehow from their families. It is also apt in light of Peters' focus on transgressive acts that are by definition disruptive of the status quo. But because the frequent section breaks aren't echoed in the poems themselves, they aren't as front and centre as they are in *Cutting Room*. They seem to exist primarily to create space around the poems, letting them resonate powerfully. The poems, furthermore, often map intense experiences—adrenalin-producing moments of riveting cruelty—so focusing attention from readers by including fewer poems per section (indeed, the book itself is not long) moves us toward embodiment of those experiences.

I admire Peters' skill in juxtaposing sweetness and innocence with abandonment and cruelty. Such stark contrasts could easily have been heavy-handed or melodramatic, but Peters has an eye for the particular, which allows her to create images of distinctively creepy beauty. There's the green net bag of oranges in the poem in which two sisters act out being raped; there's the wind blowing "fresh and sweet as an apple" while a child vivisects a gopher. And I can't get out of my head the image of tiny gold fawns that "jerk and shudder" as they dangle from the ears of the mother-abuser in a poem that addresses the real-life murder of a four-year-old. The earrings are partly a display of power in miniature, tiny hunting trophies. But as an element of the mother's dress, they also reflect her: I find myself wondering about how vulnerable she has felt, and about the strange bond that can exist between abuser and abused. The beauty of the image is disturbing in its evocation of the child's helplessness and suffering. Every time I think of the gold fawns, the beauty of the image gives me a certain uplift, one that I reject in the same moment. But the spark of pleasure I feel is inextinguishable—I feel it every time—and it makes me complicit in the crime even as I'm overwhelmed by compassion. Such is often my feeling as I read these poems. I'm no fan of delving into disturbing experiences for a thrill, but Peters is instead (or also?) asks readers to confront the complex intertwining of innocence and cruelty, compassion and complicity in each of us.

If what stays with me from *1996* are the gold fawns, what remains in the wake of Emily McGiffin's *Between Dusk and Night* are images of northern BC, its rains, woods, and waterways, even its parasites. Many of McGiffin's lines have a still-life quality, and she excels at haiku-like visual compositions: "A July / snow on the crowberries and a lone bleached antler." She is like Dioskrodies, the Greek botanist who "names each land for what grows there." Crowberry, stout spruce, karst, basaltic ridges, wild sage, scrub willow: this is the language that makes a place feel like a real place, even when—perhaps sometimes because—a reader may not know what crowberries are.

McGiffin's often precise language and eye for the myriad compositions of the natural world are sometimes dampened by clichés,

which tend to appear in the background as she builds toward her more central images, moments, and thoughts. November is twice described as "bleak." In another poem we find both "hazy distance" and "beating sun," and in yet another stars are "pricks of light." The clichés are so familiar that they may not register, may seem innocuous, but they dilute the power of her vision. But McGiffin can do original things with language: consider "the sacrum summer sky." The image is unusual and reveals a sky that is elemental, intimate, and tinged with death. It's also a highly musical phrase: the repeated "s" and "um" sounds hum against the hard "c" and "k."

Although many of McGiffin's poems evoke a BC wilderness, these are not the only poems in the book. But even the travel poems often turn an eye toward home, and the speaker is ever conscious of the danger of presuming to belong. Even in more familiar territory, the question of what a home is and how to inhabit it arises: "I wish you could see / the true weight of our presence here" says the speaker in one poem, and another says, "I want veins strong as rebar, / or at least lignin: rooted / in ground we could call home." The "could" is poignant, and speaks to the tension in McGiffin's work between a desire for home and a concern that to be too much at home is to disrespect the element of strangeness in the world. Although it is in many ways a quieter, less arresting book than *1996* and less formally challenging than *Cutting Room*, the questions in *Between Dusk and Night* are equally urgent.

Secret Lives

rob mclennan
Missing Persons. Mercury $17.95

Dan Vyleta
The Quiet Twin. HarperCollins $29.99

Steven Heighton
The Dead Are More Visible: Stories. Knopf $22.00

Reviewed by Gordon Bölling

Canadian prairie literature is alive and well. Recent years have seen the publication of a number of such well-received novels as Dianne Warren's *Cool Water* and Guy Vanderhaeghe's *A Good Man*. Warren's first novel won the 2010 Governor General's Award for fiction, while Vanderhaeghe's most recent novel rounds off his highly-acclaimed frontier trilogy. rob mclennan's *Missing Persons* has yet to receive the same degree of attention as the above-mentioned books. Nonetheless the poetic novel is a welcome addition to the body of Canadian prairie fiction. In comparison to both *Cool Water* and *A Good Man*, *Missing Persons* is a rather slim, fragmentary, and open-ended novel. This may be due to the fact that *Missing Persons* did not start out as a novel in its own right. In a blog post, mclennan states that he began *Missing Persons* as a kind of character's background story for another novel that he intended to write but never finished. Still, *Missing Persons* is far more than a mere by-product. mclennan's novel is anything but a linear and straightforward narrative. It comprises a three-page preface and a total of 55 chapters, some of which consist of a single paragraph, and some of which are merely half a page long: "The entire book is a novel in the form of variations. The individual parts follow each other like individual stretches of a journey leading toward a theme, a thought, a single situation, the sense of which fades into the distance." This quotation from Milan Kundera's 1979 novel *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* serves mclennan

as a first epigraph and alerts readers to what lies in store on the pages ahead. In one instance, an entire chapter consists of a single sentence: "Alberta was drowning in her own skin." Alberta is Alberta Jonas, the novel's teenage protagonist. Newly arrived immigrants from Eastern Europe, Alberta's parents name their first child after the Canadian province in which they intend to live: "Her parents were very old, born and married to that place before. The old country. A fiction to her, but a story told with every breath. […] Tales of Baba Yaga. Alberta, named for their destination, born en route. Her parents arriving on New World soil and giving her breath on a Montreal shore. Two weeks before they moved again." Ironically enough, the Jonas family never makes it as far west as Alberta and settles on the Saskatchewan prairies instead. *Missing Persons* chronicles Alberta's life from the age of fourteen to the age of sixteen. In the novel's first chapter, we encounter Alberta on the day of her father's funeral. A car accident leaves Alberta, her younger brother Paul, and her mother Emma without a father and husband. At the end of the novel a second death occurs which leads Alberta to abandon the Canadian prairie and seek her fortune elsewhere. The decision to leave ultimately provides Alberta with a larger perspective and a new sense of possibility: "Her map was larger, her geography patently new. She was no longer lost, the rest of the country flat ahead of her in all directions. She took a first step. She could begin." *Missing Persons* is a nuanced portrait of a vulnerable yet courageous teenage girl. It is also a study of life on the Canadian prairie: "Wind swirling dusty snow. A horizon without end." Images such as these are, of course, reminiscent of the writings of Sinclair Ross and other classic prairie authors. "This isn't much of a story," Mary, Alberta's best friend, at one point remarks. Readers of rob mclennan's *Missing Persons* will not interpret this observation as a self-reflexive comment.

The year 2013 marks the 75th anniversary of the Anschluss, Nazi Germany's annexation of Austria. On March 12th 1938, German troops marched unopposed into Austria and three days later Hitler addressed the masses that had assembled on Vienna's Heldenplatz. To this day, Austria, like Germany, struggles with the sins of its past. It is this darkest chapter of Austrian history that Dan Vyleta turns to in his second novel, *The Quiet Twin*. Vyleta holds a Ph.D. in History from the University of Cambridge and is the author of *Crime, Jews and News: Vienna 1895-1914* (Berghahn Books, 2007), a historical monograph that investigates the complex relationship between crime reporting and anti-Semitism in fin-de-siècle Vienna. In many ways, *The Quiet Twin* builds on Vyleta's work as a historian. For example, the novel is interspersed with a number of italicised sections, some of which provide brief portraits of historical serial killers. Other sections deal with the 1936 Nazi propaganda film *Erbkrank* or follow the careers of medical officers who orchestrated the killing of the mentally handicapped. These short pieces serve as points of entry to the novel's main narrative, which is set in Vienna in October and early November 1939. Throughout the novel, Vyleta skilfully captures the stifling and paralyzing atmosphere of life under Nazi rule: "The doorbell rang, startled him. He was right there, not a foot from door and bell, and it stung him like a slap: that shrill, angry ringing. He jumped and feared arrest, irrationally, implausibly expected a uniform, the waving of a truncheon, neighbours staring through the cracks of their doors." Four seemingly unconnected murders and the brutal slaughter of a dog trigger the novel's action. In the wake of these events, the police authorities seek out the expert advice of Doctor Anton Beer who is the author of several in-depth studies of notorious murder cases. Although

he fears for his own safety and the safety of one of his patients, Beer makes only half-hearted attempts to assist the corrupt Nazi police inspector Teuben. A psychiatrist by training, Beer recently resigned from his work at the local hospital for political reasons. In the narrative present, he works as an ordinary family practioner. This self-imposed obscurity also serves Beer as a cover for his secret private life. In the course of the narrative, Beer (and with him the reader of *The Quiet Twin*) is drawn into the lives of the various inhabitants of the Viennese apartment complex in which most of the novel is set. There is Professor Speckstein, who, now that he has fallen from grace, serves the Nazis as a simple *Zellenwart*. There is also Speckstein's enigmatic niece, Zuzka, who writes letters to her late twin sister. And there are Otto, the mime, and his paralyzed twin sister, Eva. Little is as it seems under totalitarian rule and all of these characters harbour their own secrets: "'Too many suspects in any case.' He caught her looking at him confused and consented to explain. 'If this was a detective yarn, I mean. A reader cannot remember more than two or three.'" Readers of *The Quiet Twin*, however, are not likely to forget any of the novel's cast of characters. Throughout the novel, Vyleta's writing is precise as well as profound. This is the case even when he devotes an entire chapter to the history of the trumpet: "It is a versatile instrument. The trumpet can ring of the whorehouse, or of God on high; can hail the King, or stand weeping at his infant's grave." What is more, *The Quiet Twin* is a morally complex novel. It raises a series of ethical questions that transcend the boundaries of the novel's immediate setting: How would we act under totalitarian rule? What is the responsibility of the individual? How to account for the great number of opportunists? With *The Quiet Twin*, Dan Vyleta has lived up to the promise of his first novel *Pavel & I*.

A versatile writer, Steven Heighton has published poetry, novels, essays, literary criticism, and short fiction. *The Dead Are More Visible* is his third collection of short stories, and the eleven stories gathered here display the exceptional range of Heighton's skills as a writer of short fiction. Several stories in *The Dead Are More Visible* make extensive use of humour. Entitled "Those Who Would Be More," the volume's opening story is a prime example of this vein in Heighton's writing. The story chronicles the attempts of a Canadian to learn Japanese while working in Tokyo as an English teacher. In his efforts to improve his language skills, Curtis relies on a paperback primer with the somewhat curious title *Japanese for the Beginners and Those Who Would Be More*. In its main focus on violent conflict and destruction, the book proves to be of little help: "I was now sure that the authors, consciously or not, were trying to discourage their students from pursuing further study. Perhaps they hoped we would leave the country altogether." It is only on his flight back home to Canada that the protagonist establishes a meaningful connection between the richness of the Japanese language and his own life: "I put my head back, closed my eyes and wondered—what else?—how I and billions of other non-Japanese speakers had ever gotten by without the word." A similar though different use of humour is evident in what is probably one of the best stories in the collection, "Shared Room on Union." In this story, the attempt to steal a Volvo goes disastrously wrong when the would-be car thief has to admit that he cannot drive a standard. Justin and Janna are locked into the trunk of their vehicle as the thief disappears into the Toronto night on foot. The tone gets notably darker as the lovers realize that they might be trapped in the trunk for quite some time. In later years, although they tend to dismiss the incident lightly whenever it crops up in their conversations

with friends, Justin and Janna are unable to come to terms with their experience: "But when the story was done and they left to drive home, or their guests did, a silence would settle between them—not a cold or embarrassed silence, but a pensive, accepting one—and they would say nothing more of that night or its latest rendition." From a technical point of view, "Noughts & Crosses" is a story that clearly deserves special mentioning. The story opens with the reprint of a short e-mail, in which Janet-Marie tells her lover Arnella that she is breaking up with her for good. In what follows, the rejected lover tears apart, reinterprets, and annotates each single feature and phrase of this e-mail: "a temporary severing / Whew! For a minute there I thought it was permanent! As if it was in the very *nature* of severings to be that way. . . . But a moment's reflection allows us to generate any number of counter-examples. In the fatal crash the victim's spinal cord was *temporarily* severed." Here as elsewhere in this collection, Heighton's short fiction explores the ways in which language is at once familiar and strange. *The Dead Are More Visible* is an impressive volume of short stories.

At Home and Abroad

Arley McNeney
The Time We All Went Marching.
Goose Lane $19.95

Gayla Reid
Come from Afar. Cormorant $32.00

Minnie Smith
Is it Just?: A Classic Feminist Novel.
U of Toronto P $24.95

Reviewed by Mark Diotte

Considering this review is for *Canadian Literature*, I (erroneously) expected Gayla Reid's *Come from Afar* to be set in Canada and peopled by characters with a deep attachment to Canada. Instead, Reid convincingly tells the story of Australian-raised Clancy Cox, who, as a nurse, functions as a lens through which the geography, politics, communities, and people of Spain are brought to life during the time of the Spanish Civil War. Reid's use of poetic prose and explicit detail is reminiscent of both Michael Ondaatje and Anne Michaels. Yet, as she describes the Spanish landscape, and her war-numbed characters face tumultuous experiences with seeming nonchalance, her narrative evokes Hemingway's Spain. Narrated by Cox's daughter, the thrust of the narrative follows Cox through her memories of Australia to England, where she becomes romantically entangled with brothers Alec and Marcus. The only Canadian character of note is the late-appearing Douglas Ross, Cox's eventual lover from British Columbia, and a soldier in the Mackenzie–Papineau Battalion (Mac-Paps) on the side of the Spanish Republican Government. Initially, I found the fragmented, non-linear structure of the book hard to engage with. Yet, upon reflection, I see this structure as one of Reid's strengths. It comes to productively represent the fragmented nature of war, Cox's conflicted relationships and state of mind, and, most powerfully, the way that her daughter struggles to narrate and fill in the blanks of her mother's story.

As with Gayla Reid, Arley McNeney tells a story rarely touched on in Canada; yet in McNeney's case, the story is that of 1930s Depression-era British Columbia. To my knowledge, McNeney's *The Time We All Went Marching* is the only novel, other than Irene Baird's *Waste Heritage*, to explicitly tackle the subject. The narrative is composed of multiple layers. One layer is the flight of Edie and her son Belly away from her husband Slim. Edie's journey is a breaking away from an oppressive life under Slim's alcoholism and life in mining camps. In some sense, the most compelling aspect of the novel is Edie's emergence from her stifling past life. A second layer is the story

of mining. Where classic labour novels of Canada's West Coast most often focus on forestry and fishing, McNeney expertly details the filthy, dangerous, and impoverished conditions of mining camps. The third layer skilfully follows Slim's memories of labour organizing and the On-to-Ottawa Trek. This multilayered narrative necessitates a fragmented structure broken up by brief subheadings, yet this does not impede the flow of the story. Indeed, McNeney's strength is her effortless ability to handle multiple stories at once.

The only unjust aspect of Minnie Smith's *Is it Just?: A Classic Feminist Novel* is its title. Instead of the expected dogmatic treatise on feminism, Smith writes an engaging narrative about Mary and Guy Pierce that, despite its overall tragic plot, is often humorous and hopeful. It is this combination that makes her novel so compelling. The narrative focuses on the new home of the Pierces in the fictional location of Ortgeard, the Old English term for Orchard, in the Okanagan region of British Columbia. Originally published in 1911, the novel is a product of its time. It reads like a novel of manners in some places and sometimes seems clichéd. Yet the story it tells of Mary Pierce's experiences on the family farm should be considered essential reading. Often, farm narratives, such as Frederick Philip Grove's *Settlers of the Marsh* or parts of Roderick Haig-Brown's *On the Highest Hill*, focus on the centrality of men on the family farm and thus locate men at the centre of family and nation building. Smith turns this premise upside down by positioning the slothful, adulterous, and somewhat unintelligent Guy Pierce aside his hard-working wife, her successful friend Miss Todd, and the sympathetic Philip Hastings. In telling her story, Smith uses the actions of Philip to foreground the vast injustice of the law in British Columbia that gave men exclusive authority and control over family wealth and property. Ultimately, the story of Mary Pierce is tragic as she works herself to sickness on the family farm. Yet it is in describing the strength and decline of Mary juxtaposed with both a sexist society and shifting attitudes that Smith excels.

L'Autre à partir de soi

Kenneth Meadwell
Narrativité et voix de l'altérité : figurations et configurations de l'altérité dans le roman canadien d'expression française. David 30,00 $

Compte rendu par Cassie Bérard

Dans un souci d'approcher la figure de l'Autre selon une perspective identitaire, Kenneth Meadwell s'intéresse aux stratégies narratives et discursives qui soutiennent les relations intersubjectives dans plusieurs romans marquants de la littérature canadienne d'expression française. Ainsi, de *Menaud, maître-draveur* (Félix-Antoine Savard) au *Soleil du lac qui se couche* (J.R. Léveillé), en passant par *Bonheur d'occasion* (Gabrielle Roy), *La Belle bête* (Marie-Claire Blais), *L'Avalée des avalés* (Réjean Ducharme), *Le Passager* (Gilbert La Rocque), *La Mémoire de l'eau* (Ying Chen), et *Cantique des plaines* (Nancy Huston), Meadwell offre une lecture de la complexité des figurations identitaires, en se questionnant sur les aspirations des personnages, tant en regard de leur individualité que dans une situation de collectivité. La diversité des romans étudiés et l'ordre chronologique dans lequel il les aborde entretiennent un effet d'évolution au sein de l'ouvrage; cela montre bien que les problématiques identitaires au cœur des romans reflètent les époques historiques dans lesquelles ils s'inscrivent.

Meadwell assoit ses analyses des œuvres sur deux concepts centraux — il parle même de typologie — empruntés à Paul Ricœur. Il s'agit de l'identité-mêmeté, « un concept de relation identique soutenu par la permanence dans le temps », et de

l'identité-ipséité, soit « l'identité du soi, de l'individu unique, à savoir de l'Autre ». Dans une démarche relevant volontiers de la sociocritique, Meadwell définit par exemple le désir de mêmeté dans *Menaud, maître-draveur* comme un projet qui « repose sur le fondement discursif de l'identité québécoise, rurale et isolée, catholique et conservatrice, épousant l'esthétique du roman de la terre, et constitue ainsi l'emblème d'une certaine identité originelle ». L'évolution de la réflexion, par ailleurs, amène Meadwell vers des figures plus près de l'ipséité, notamment dans *L'Avalée des avalés*, où « l'enfant se présente et se représente en tant que sujet désirant se sauvegarder de toute influence extérieure à sa propre volonté, le maintien de soi étant le principe qui dirige ses paroles et ses actes ». Le schéma se complexifie au fil des analyses et, avec l'identité migrante dans le roman de Ying Chen et celle, métisse, dans l'œuvre de Léveillé, Meadwell éclaire la structuration d'une subjectivité perméable, interculturelle.

Cet essai offre des analyses pertinentes des œuvres choisies, mais pèche parfois par un vocabulaire hermétique et par un excès de circonvolutions savantes. Ce qu'on pourrait expliquer par la rigueur attendue d'un travail universitaire semble achopper au moment de la démonstration des théories avancées. De fait, quelques citations chargées d'éclairer la réflexion reviennent à plus d'une reprise, de telle sorte que l'analyse tend à réduire la portée des œuvres à une petite quantité d'extraits trop souvent réutilisés. Enfin, à l'issue de chaque analyse, une synthèse manque qui aurait su dépasser l'énumération et le résumé. L'hypothèse de départ, forte et cohérente, ne sait être mise en danger ni même en valeur à la clôture de l'ouvrage.

Messages et bouteilles

Benoît Melançon
Écrire au pape et au Père Noël : cabinet de curiosités épistolaires. Del Russo 19,95 $

Compte rendu par Ben Huberman

Ayant consacré nombre de ses ouvrages savants à la littérature épistolaire française (surtout celle du dix-huitième siècle), Benoît Melançon, dans ce recueil contenant des pièces déjà publiées ainsi qu'inédites, tente de séduire un public plus divers (sinon le grand public) en l'invitant à considérer le monde à la fois mystérieux et banal, mais toujours fascinant, des accidents épistolaires. Il devrait y parvenir.

Rédigé avec un mélange bien équilibré d'érudition et d'éclectisme, ce *Cabinet de curiosités*, fidèle à son nom, offre aux lecteurs un panorama des formes multiples et hétéroclites sous lesquelles se présentent les correspondances. Les missives transmises par les pigeons et les hiboux, chantées par Jacques Brel et Elvis Costello, dessinées par Hergé et imaginées par Rétif et Jules Verne (parmi plusieurs autres), ont toutes leur place dans le riche tissu de « l'imaginaire épistolaire » défini par l'auteur.

Si la critique littéraire se borne traditionnellement aux seuls « messages », le regard plus large (et plus généreux) de ce recueil nous permet également d'explorer plusieurs supports et divers canaux de communication : lettres manuscrites et imprimées, naturellement, mais aussi télégrammes, courriels (et pourriels), chansons, bouteilles jetées dans l'océan. . . . L'impression que laisse cette profusion est celle d'une humanité toujours pressée à communiquer, toujours inventive (voire subversive) dans ses efforts pour combler ce désir : « en un objet, sentir un être (cher) ».

Un tel ouvrage décevra ceux qui voudraient y trouver des renseignements spécifiques sur tel ou tel système postal, telle ou telle production épistolaire : l'auteur,

en invitant de futures études à « se pencher sur l'imaginaire de la communication en sa dimension la plus concrète » en est bien conscient. Ceux qui, par contre, prisent la valeur pédagogique et intellectuelle de l'anecdotique (sans rien dire du plaisir de l'anecdote) en profiteront énormément.

Mottled Motherhood

Rosemary Nixon
Kalila. Goose Lane $19.95

Sue Sorensen
A Large Harmonium. Coteau $19.95

Claire Tacon
In the Field. Biblioasis $19.95

Reviewed by Micheline Besner

In "The Other F-Word: The Disappearance of Feminism from Our Fiction," Nicole Dixon states that "nothing else a woman does is as universally applauded as having a baby." Dixon laments what she terms the culture of compulsory motherhood in Canadian literature, and it is this culture, and the multifarious variations and disparities within this maternal genre, that Sue Sorensen, Claire Tacon, and Rosemary Nixon each treat in their fictions as they follow brief periods in the lives of three women who navigate the fragile balance between personal desires and societal expectations.

In Sue Sorensen's novel *A Large Harmonium,* the reader is privy to a year of Janey Erlickson's life as an English literature professor, wife, and mother. Janey must plot a route through her anxieties about the advancement of her academic career, her relationship with her husband Hector (and her jealousy of the advanced state of his own academic career as well as his relationship with his teaching assistant Chantal), and her connection to her son Max (as she deals with feelings of culpability for not spending enough time with him and as she questions her role as a mother). Sorensen decidedly depicts Janey's struggles as culminating in moments where she feels most inadequate as a mother. Such a moment is exemplified when Janey is forced to leave a performance by her husband's university choir because Max has begun to scratch her face and kick her, and she bitterly recalls the hours spent "singing to a child who . . . was not worthy of any of the sweet sentiments [she] expended upon him." Although Hector is at times a less-than-serious father, particularly in the company of his longtime friend Jam, the focus of Sorensen's novel is not on the Erlickson's family life, but on Janey's intimate perceptions of what an academic, a wife, and a mother should be. The culmination of these societal expectations is best illustrated in a scene where Janey attends a Tupperware party at a neighbour's house. Comparing herself to the other neighbourhood mothers makes Janey view her degree as a useless and tacky display hung around her neck. "I took a course in Latin once," she muses, "but can I do origami or organize a successful party for sixteen rugrats?"

As with Sorensen's novel, although somewhat less satisfactorily, Claire Tacon's *In the Field* deals with the pressures of an academic career and the expectations of motherhood. Ellie Lucan, a professor of soil science at the University of Guelph who has just lost her position due to budget cuts, begins to weigh the benefits of her academic career against the reality of her family life. The action in Tacon's narrative centres on a homecoming as Ellie travels with her two sons back to her hometown of Canning, Nova Scotia. However, it seems that for Ellie, the anxiety lies not in the knowledge of the mother that she *should be*, but in a lack of knowledge about the woman that she could have been had she decided to remain a "town" rather than perusing her "gown." Tacon's representation of Ellie's journey is nonetheless a didactic one, as the protagonist's attempt to re-locate

a selfhood prior to her role as wife and mother becomes empty and ridiculous by the novel's culmination. In the end, Ellie is left equating her supposed position in her family to the position of a sandpiper in the synchronized flight patterns of its flock.

Rosemary Nixon's *Kalila* alternatively diverges from the trope of inadequate or confused motherhood in order to represent the space of the "unmother." Written in a carefully complex poetic prose, Nixon's work follows the voices of Maggie and Brodie, the parents of a very ill newly born daughter in neonatal ICU. While Maggie's pain regarding the extremely poor state of Kalila's health can be described as being quite technical in its linguistic delivery, there are key moments in the prose where we get a clear glimpse of the helplessness and lack of purpose associated with the impossibility of Maggie caring for her daughter at home. These moments are most evident when she refers to herself as "unmother" and "aberrant," and feels the profound need to assure Brodie's coworker that she has the afterbirth to prove that she has in fact had a baby.

Multifarious in their approaches, each of these novels works to complicate what might often be simplified as the Canadian motherhood narrative. These narratives conduct a type of ideological work that is worlds apart from any simple correlation between womanhood and motherhood.

Full Disclosure

Alan Pearson

Exploring Amazement: New and Selected Poems. White Mountain $11.95

Reviewed by Stephen Scobie

Full disclosure: in *Canadian Literature* #50 (Autumn 1971), I wrote a review of several books by Montreal poets, including Alan Pearson's *14 Poems*. It was his first book; it was my first review for this distinguished journal. Now, an unbelievable 42 years later, I have been asked to review *Exploring Amazement*, his New and Selected poems, which appears, sadly, posthumously.

I re-read my old review with amusement, and some amazement. With an authoritativeness far beyond my years, it is relentlessly judgmental. It's not so much a review as a report card. "Practically none of the poems comes off," I assert. "Poems which appear to be going places get lost in the middle; others arrive, but at no place in particular." Nevertheless, I generously conclude that Pearson is "really capable of writing," and I end by saying (in what I admitted was a cliché) that "I look forward with interest to his next book."

So here I am, with interest, reviewing not quite his next book, though it is the next for me. Forty years on, I expected to be much less censorious. Yet I found many of these old criticisms persisting through Pearson's subsequent volumes. I still think that his poems work better in individual touches (images, descriptions, metaphors) than they do as a whole. I still note a tendency for flat, weak endings, when quite decent poems stumble over a banal final line. (One striking exception, among the "New" poems, is the brilliant and entirely satisfying ending of "The Go-between," by far the best poem in the collection.)

But I now notice other things too. The poems have a strong attraction to the natural world, which is always presented as rich, exuberant, and dynamic. For a native of bleak northern England, Pearson has a remarkable affinity for the Mediterranean. He loves things (and people) which are exuberant, assertive, and proud. In this aspect, he reveals the continuing influence, as acknowledged in his Introduction, of his early mentor, Irving Layton. Perhaps only Layton, among all other Canadian poets, could not only have written a poem which celebrates (without, as far as I can tell, a trace of irony) the wounded and defiant

Conrad Black, but also have placed it, with equal defiance, as the first poem in the definitive collection of his life's work.

Or consider the poem "How to Look at a Painting," which begins "First you step boldly into the frame," and then does so itself, immersing the reader in a Mediterranean scene by Matisse, luxuriating in the colour and the light. Now, I happen to think that this is entirely the wrong way to "look at a painting"—for me, painting is all about the frame, and I disapprove of anything (like 3D in cinema) which dissolves the frame—but I can certainly respect this opposing view, and I see its attraction.

These are the moments when Pearson is at his strongest and most distinctive. He is much better when he steps boldly into the frame than when he falls back on pallid conclusions. This book stands as a worthy summation of a poetic life spent exploring what that bold step might mean.

Réussir sa mayonnaise

Éric Plamondon

Mayonnaise. Quartanier 22,95 $

Compte rendu par Joël Castonguay-Bélanger

Éric Plamondon avait déjà fait bonne impression avec *Hongrie-Hollywood Express*, remarquable ovni littéraire paru en 2011 chez Le Quartanier, cette maison d'édition qui accumule les belles trouvailles depuis quelques années. Consacré à Johnny Weissmuller, nageur olympique et interprète fameux de Tarzan au cinéma, ce roman était le premier opus de *1984*, une trilogie romanesque construite autour de trois figures américaines dont les destins se trouvent d'une façon ou d'une autre liés à celui du narrateur. Par son titre, par son style, de même que par sa forme fragmentée, l'ouvrage évoquait déjà beaucoup l'auteur de *Tokyo-Montana Express*, l'écrivain Richard Brautigan. Sans surprise, c'est d'ailleurs lui qu'on retrouve au centre de *Mayonnaise,* le second volet de la trilogie. Conçu comme une succession d'arrêts sur images tantôt graves, tantôt d'une futilité déconcertante, *Mayonnaise* est un roman qui mélange habilement les genres et les tons. Il tient à la fois de l'hommage, de la biographie, de l'exercice de style et de l'enquête introspective, mais ne saurait pourtant être réduit à aucune de ces étiquettes. S'il offre une plongée dans la contre-culture de la côte ouest américaine où vécut Richard Brautigan, il n'adopte pas pour autant la forme de la reconstitution historique. La figure de l'écrivain qu'on surnommait « le dernier des beatniks » se recompose par l'addition des petites touches impressionnistes, anecdotes insolites et rapprochements singuliers qui fournissent la matière à la centaine de courts chapitres qui forment l'ouvrage.

On trouve de tout dans cette *Mayonnaise* : des visages connus (Charlie Chaplin, John Lennon, Gregor Mendel et Ronald Reagan), des lieux plus ou moins familiers (Montréal, San Francisco, le Japon), des chapitres empruntant différentes formes (haïku, mode d'emploi, fait divers, revue de presse) et coiffés des titres les plus étonnants (Phytophtora, Sperme galactique, :-), Pourquoi t'as fait ça, Richard?). Comme on nous l'explique d'entrée de jeu, la réussite d'une mayonnaise tient autant à ses ingrédients qu'au geste qui les lie entre eux; à ce titre, l'émulsion d'Éric Plamondon prend parfaitement et de cette narration non linéaire et fragmentée se dégage néanmoins une forte impression de cohérence.

Multipliant les échos et les correspondances, les différents chapitres forment un kaléidoscope à travers lequel se devinent à la fois le portrait de Brautigan et celui du narrateur, celui-ci trouvant dans certains épisodes biographiques de celui-là le reflet de ses propres pensées souvent douces-amères. Fidèle à la manière de celui dont Philippe Djian disait qu'il possédait le don de faire « tenir une tragédie grecque dans

un dé à coudre », Plamondon parvient à aborder les sujets les plus sérieux avec une sensibilité qui se dissimule souvent dans les détails d'une prose en apparence ludique. Ainsi, le récit du suicide de Brautigan en 1984 devient le prétexte à un discours réflexif qui mime la désinvolture pour mieux nous surprendre avec un point final qui a l'effet d'une balle de fusil.

Il faut enfin souligner les qualités d'une écriture à la fois économe et inventive qui possède la double qualité de donner envie de se replonger dans l'œuvre de Brautigan et de lire le troisième volume de la trilogie. Prévu pour 2013, celui-ci devrait mettre en scène Steve Jobs.

A Diary's Promise, Extended

Mary Henley Rubio and Elizabeth Hillman Waterston eds.
The Complete Journals of L. M. Montgomery: The P. E. I. Years (1889-1900). Oxford UP $39.95

Reviewed by Emily Aoife Somers

The publication of the *Selected Journals* in the 1980s showed that those who had hastily applied *the death of the author* as a critical axiom may have done so prematurely. Lucy Maud Montgomery who, through a reception history had been both lionized and lampooned, was reconsidered through these autobiographical materials and their authorial self-reflections that so vehemently conflicted with status quo interpretations of her work that were often trite, cloying, and superficial.

Much of her readership, through the forces of market popularization and iconic status, had frequently held rather beatific opinions of this saint of the romantic island. But this initial effort at offering selections from Montgomery's private writings instigated popular and scholarly revision because of its widened revelation of Montgomery's own sense of herself, her literature, and her position as a beloved author. As this multi-volume series will further show, the imaginative appetites and emotional makeup of Montgomery were far more intricate and catalytic than either postage stamps or porcelain dolls could allow.

As striking as many of those passages were from the *Selected Journals*—particularly their earnest documentation of mental illness and the struggles of a woman author in a patriarchal publishing machine—apparently all had not been revealed. The introduction to this current volume now under review—the *Complete Journals*—makes clear that a massive amount of publishing interference from the highest ranks of editorial intervention entailed censorship and silencing of Montgomery's posthumous voice. *Selection* involved censoring. As the press release to the *Complete Journals* even concedes, "The editors were instructed to excise anything that was not upbeat or did not 'move the story along' [of] . . . . a fun loving, simple country girl. The unabridged, journal, however, reveals something quite different." Who had instructed and why?

So this current project—the publication of the entirety of her journals—seeks to make amends for the previously intrusive reduction of her voice by various powers who wanted a pure, parsimonious version of Montgomery's mental makeup. And the current results are striking.

Rubio and Waterston, aided with advances in digital page design, have sought as faithfully as possible to produce an accurate facsimile of Montgomery's text. The most noteworthy feature of this effort is the visual dimension: Montgomery had an intensely photographic sensibility, as well as a collage approach to compiling her personal notes. Previously, the *Selected Journals* followed the custom of the time by including a brief number of selections of these as plate inserts. However, the *Complete*

volumes restore all of the visual material to their specific contexts amidst the setting of the diary's layout. Now restored, image and text coincide in precisely the way that Montgomery had arranged them. The configurations are impressively informative, with a satisfyingly intimate effect that, I add cheekily, preludes the look and feel of Facebook. Montgomery places captions, images, cutouts, and other found material not as accessories to her written considerations but as reciprocal media that interacts directly with her personal descriptions, in a way becoming part of her lived experience. One can sense how much personal investment she put into the archive of her impressions that became foundational material for her novels.

This first volume of her earliest years already exhibited some of the tremendous mental strain that would be a challenge for her entire life. She constantly writes of being tired, overwhelmed, and fatigued by various demands. As she notes, "If, as is said, the way to hell is paved with good intentions, then I fear me I have contributed not a little of late to the paving."

What were those flagstones on the path of consequences? As the forthcoming volumes are published, no longer excised by pruning hands, scholars can hope that biographical questions left unresolved by the *Selected Journals* will be explored more fully in her own words. For example, since it was already clear when the *Selected Journals* were published in the mid-1980s, what was Montgomery›s rationale for marrying Ewan? She accepted his proposal after writing *AGG*, although she does not mention the book until 1907, when she had no options as far as building a home for herself. But even after the success of her novel she still went through with the arrangement, even though she could easily have afforded to buy a house of her own and to keep writing, rather than become a minister's wife. Why did she still leave Cavendish, then? Why didn't she buy the Macneill homestead from her uncle and stay there on her own? Such questions intersect directly with issues of female authorship, fame, and the collision between domestic duties and a woman's self-determination during the era of First Wave feminism. Thus, we can eagerly look forward, as appreciators of Montgomery, to the promised revelations that our editors have respectfully sought to bring to us through their intensive research.

Memoir of Manitoba

Niigaanwewidam James Sinclair and Warren Cariou eds.
Manitowapow: Aboriginal Writings from the Land of Water. Highwater $35

Reviewed by Heather Macfarlane

Reading *Manitowapow: Aboriginal Writings from the Land of Water*, observes Métis writer Beatrice Mosionier in her Foreword, is like reading a memoir of the territory. This is testament to the breadth of the contributions editors Niigaanwewidam James Sinclair (Anishinaabe) and Warren Cariou (Métis) have collected. A tribute to the land and its peoples, the anthology combines writing by Cree, Anishinaabe, Métis, Sioux, Saulteaux, Haudenosaunee, Inuit, Dene, Innu, Salish, and Assiniboine peoples all living within the borders of Manitoba.

In spite of the political strand that celebrates Indigenous identity and unites the pieces in the anthology, the editors' decision to use Canadian provincial boundaries to define the parameters of the collection is distinctly conciliatory. The book's title *Manitowapow* combines the Cree words for Great Spirit and sacred water and is a deliberate recognition of Indigenous belonging on the lands. However, the map of the province of Manitoba adorning the first two pages of the text tells another story—that of colonial domination of the territory. The editors acknowledge the contradiction

in their introduction, but never entirely explain their motives. The result is therefore a collection that celebrates both Manitowapow *and* Manitoba and recognizes both Indigenous and Canadian sovereignties.

Also key to understanding the text is the collection's subtitle, which refers not to "literatures," but to "writings." The choice of words is deliberate here because the collection places the work of literary stars such as Tomson Highway next to the political writing of leaders such as Ovide Mercredi, and the work of national heroes like Louis Riel next to that of emerging adolescent writers. The collection in no way attempts to create a canon, but rather assembles what the editors refer to as "responses to this place, Manitowapow, in its many incarnations," which alludes once again to the idea of memoir and, more importantly, *collective* memoir. The collection combines stories, poetry, song, oratory, plays, letters, and recollections, and even includes reproductions of pictographs, clothing and rugs: all forms in themselves of traditional writing. This inclusion of cultural objects is one of the more revolutionary elements of the text, and one I would have liked to have seen more of, because it illustrates the long and significant history of the land and its peoples before contact.

Belonging to the land is central to the collection and the assertion of belonging is political for peoples whose rights to the land are continually under fire. Love of land gives people strength, just as the stories and points of view presented give the land voice. As Salish contributor Columpa Bobb points out in an excerpt from her play, "[i]f you can fall in love with the country you live in, you'll never be lonely." The multitude of voices presented in the collection demonstrates the community that develops between people and place and the strength of that bond.

Because I read the work from a literary perspective, the creative works are what stood out; however, those that privilege history offer valuable context. While I appreciated the inclusion of well-known writers such as Tomson Highway, Gregory Scofield, Marie Annharte Baker, Beatrice Mosionier and Marvin Francis, I also appreciated the work previously unknown to me. Important personal discoveries included early letters by Anishinaabe Chief Peguis, an essay by Warren Cariou, and work by Cree poet Rosanna Deerchild. Writing this review introduced me to authors I would otherwise not have sought out and resulted in precisely what the editors intended: a broader understanding of Indigenous experiences of Manitowapow and Manitoba.

"Fragments on my Apple": Carol Shields' Unfinished Novel

Nora Foster Stovel

Carol Shields' fifty-six short stories—collected in *Various Miracles* (1985), *The Orange Fish* (1989), and *Dressing Up for the Carnival* (2000)—are distinctly quirky, but "Segue," the first story in her *Collected Stories* (2004), seems problematic because it does not appear to be a self-sufficient story at all. In fact, it was not intended as an independent text. Rather, it was meant to be the opening chapter of a final novel that Shields' terminal cancer left her unable to complete—tragically, as "Segue" would have been her crowning achievement in narrative structure.

Shields, despite her reputation for sunniness, was a bit of a rebel—at least in relation to the form of the novel. "I don't know how I came to be so rebellious, because I'm not at all in my daily life," she told me in a May 2003 interview shortly before her death.[1] Her rebelliousness regarding fiction is revealed primarily in her rejection of plot. She acknowledged that *The Box Garden* (1977), possibly her only novel containing a conventional plot, is also the only novel that she would like to rewrite. Her publisher persuaded her to insert a mystery—the kidnapping of the narrator/protagonist's son—with the result that this, her second published novel, is arguably the least successful of the ten.

In place of plot, Shields favours structure: "I use my structure as narrative bones, and partially to replace plot—which I more and more distrust," she explains in "Framing the Structure of a Novel" (4). In a 1998 interview for The Academy of Achievement, she said, "I develop a novel as I go. I have a structure in mind, though. I always see the structure before I know what's going to be in the structure, and it's a very physical image that I can call up. For each novel I've had rather a different structure" (qtd. in Giardini, "Square Root" n. pag.).[2] Several Shields novels pivot on a central structure. Her first published novel, *Small Ceremonies* (1976), is composed as a journal covering the nine months of the academic calendar, from September to May.[3] Shields explains how she wrote a novel while raising five children: "I could see how it could be done in little units. I thought of it like boxcars. I had nine boxcars, and each chapter had a title starting with September, and then October, November, December, so it was a very easy structure for someone writing a first novel to follow" (Interview with Terry Gross n. pag.).[4] *Swann* (1987), the watershed novel that taught her the novel can accommodate many forms, is composed of four sections focusing on a literary critic, biographer, librarian, and editor, followed by a screenplay. "I had a wonderful sense in this book that I could be more daring, braver. It is my favorite book," she told me, "my little darling." She also realized that "the novel is a big commodious bag. It gave me a sense of freedom."[5] Her next novels—*A Celibate*

Season (1991), co-authored with Blanche Howard, and *The Republic of Love* (1992)—are structured antiphonally: chapters alternate between female and male protagonists in these narratives of courtship and separation. *The Stone Diaries* (1993), which won the Governor General's Award in Canada in 1993 and the Pulitzer Prize in the United States in 1995, and *Larry's Party* (1997) both follow biographical structure: *The Stone Diaries* was like "end[ing] up your life with a boxful of snapshots," she recalled (Interview n. pag.).[6] With *The Stone Diaries*, she also had a structural image of Chinese boxes in mind: "I was making the outside box, Daisy was making the inside box—and inside her box was nothing" ("Foreword" xx), she explained in her foreword to Vintage Canada's publication of the novel, dated December 2001. "Segue," however, was to display Shields' most innovative structure yet.

Shields described to me her plan for her novel-in-process, "Moment's Moment," which, she told me, was "in fragments on my Apple." This was her return to poetry, as her protagonist/narrator, Jane Sexton, was a poet like herself. Admirers of Shields' fiction may not think of her as a poet, but she published over 150 poems in three collections—*Others* (1972), *Intersect* (1974), and *Coming to Canada* (1992)—the first two before she ever published a novel. "I loved being a poet. I've lost my way into writing poems," she reminisced to me. Since her first unpublished novel, *The Vortex*, focused on a modernist poetry journal called *The Vortex*—echoing Ezra Pound's 1914-1915 magazine *Blast*, which launched the "Vorticism" movement—"Moment's Moment" would have brought her fictional *oeuvre* full circle.[7]

Structure is the operative principle in this draft novel: Jane Sexton is a sonneteer, "or sonnet-maker as we prefer to be called nowadays" ("Segue" 11), who composes a line each day and a sonnet each fortnight.[8] Shields' planned narrative was to include fourteen chapters, reflecting the sonnet's structure, with a line composed for each chapter. She said in May 2003 that she was currently attempting to compose a sonnet for her novel. Thus, "Moment's Moment" would have carried Shields' innovative fictional structure to new heights and linked her poetry to her prose fiction once again.

Jane Sexton is president of the American Sonnet Society, renamed the Sonnet Revival in 1988. The society meets, naturally, once a fortnight on alternate Mondays, and every member writes a sonnet for each meeting. Jane has attempted for thirty years to write one sonnet each fortnight, beginning Monday morning. The first chapter of Shields' typescript of her unfinished novel, the basis for her published story "Segue," is headed "The First Day. Monday" (1).[9] Jane begins by deciding on the form: Italian, Shakespearean, or contemporary, which she terms *essentialist* (5). Shields believes that poetry teaches a love of form—subtle half rhymes, language, imagery—"like knitting a pair of socks," she said to me: "[Y]ou want to get it right." For Jane, too, form precedes content. The sonnet is a vessel: "We can do what we want with a sonnet. It is a container ever reusable, ever willing to be refurbished, retouched, regilded and reobjectified" (15).[10]

Jane turns over the presidency of the Sonnet Revival to Victor Glantz, who vows "to bring the sonnet into greater and greater public usage" (15), much to the amusement of Jane and her novelist husband Max Sexton. Jane comments, with a brief flick of Shields' satirical tongue, "I sometimes wish we had fewer loonies among us, and not quite so much enthusiastic mediocrity" (15).[11] Jane presents Victor with a violet, which she sees as "symbolically useful, though I'm not sure the others understood the subtleties [as] African violets must be watered from the bottom, not the top, and this, I believe, is analogous to the writing of sonnets in the twenty-first century" (15).[12]

Jane describes her method of composition: writing in ink on paper, with her dictionary,

thesaurus, and list of subjects at hand, she begins at the beginning, with the first word and first line, and works her way through to the end. She revises, filling her script with arrows and scribbling marginalia, such as "'saccharine' or 'derivative'" (11). Shields termed the process of revision "etching on glass." She always asked herself the question, "Is this what I really mean?" (Wachtel 37).[13]

Shields believed every poem should have an idea, not just soft, unfocused feelings, and Jane Sexton appears to agree: "A sonnet is not really about an object or thing, but about the skeins of feeling that surround the object or thing" (60). She does not believe in muses; instead, "My pen is my muse" (59), she asserts. Jane is strict with her sonnets:

> Making too much of things is an illness poets are particularly prone to. Over ascription of meaning is halfway to preciosity, and we need to keep our imprint light on the world. Discarding is best done early in the day in order to keep the junk level down. The thousand fibres that conspire to cushion the day can be combed smooth. A clean quarter of an hour with the newspaper guarantees a clear head. No background radio yammer. (51)

Structure is paramount: Jane reflects, "Sonnets are taken so strenuously, so literally . . . and the definition—fourteen lines of rhymed iambic pentameter—hardens and ends up gesturing toward an artifact, an object one might construct from a kit" (7). Like a carpenter or architect, Jane constructs the "scaffolding" for the sonnet, although several sections remain "unnailed" because "I want space for strangeness to enter—not obscurities or avoidances, but the idiosyncrasies of grammar or lexicon, so that the sound is harsh, even hurtful" (17). This intent reflects not only Shields' love of language, but also her rebelliousness and her impulse to subvert literary conventions.[14]

Of her over 150 collected poems, none is a sonnet, formally speaking, although she recalls, "I was the class poet and right through high school I loved to write sonnets. They were an attempt to use the sort of language I now despise in poetry—for example, pretty language. I do hate pretty language. One of these sonnets started out, 'Satin slippered April, you glide through time and lubricate spring days'" (Wachtel 29), a line that she quotes in *Unless* (2).[15] But Shields did write a mature sonnet, a love poem to her husband Don Shields, which was published in *Thoughts*—the literary magazine of her *alma mater* Hanover College—in 1957, the year they married:[16]

> I guess it just depends on what you mean
> By love. To Milton it was duty first,
> But that was dull and dry. But if I lean
> Towards Byron's fiery love my heart
> would burst.
> And then there's Mrs. Browning. I must say
> She overdid it just a bit. I will
> Not take her all-consuming loving way.
> Such sentiment would surely make me ill.
> If none will satisfy to whom then may
> I turn? Dare I trust myself? I fear
> That when they ask me what love is I'll say
> That feeling that you give me when
> you're near.
> You are my definition. You alone
> Can tell me what the poets have not
> known.

Shields' literary allusions suggest an intellectual woman's love poem, and her repeated use of enjambment and caesura gives her poem a conversational, unconventional tone. Titled simply "Sonnet," it was collected in *Early Voices* in 2001.

Regarding subject matter, Jane believes that the sonnet, like the novel, can be about anything. No longer confined to courtly love, the sonnet can embrace the whole of life. She keeps a notebook in her drawer with numerous possible subjects, from Picasso to Styrofoam, which she copies with whatever comes to hand, from pencil to lip-liner.

Sound is just as important as sense to Jane. Noting that the word *sonnet* means "little sound," Jane reflects: "[I]f you picture the sonnet, instead, as a little sound, a ping

in the great wide silent world, you make visible a sudden fluidity to the form, a splash of noise, but a carefully measured splash that's saved from preciosity by the fact that it comes from within the body's own borders; one voice, one small note extended, and then bent" (6-7). After the bend, or *volta*, "the 'little sound' sparks and then forms itself out of the dramatic contrasts of private light and darkness" (7). When Shields composed this draft novel, she was, although appearing truly luminous, approaching the darkness of death.

Jane's sonnets contrast with her husband Max's novels. Max Sexton, "Chicago's most famous novelist" (54), whose writing is not going well, believes that every novel is about death, whatever its genre or subject (6), but Jane believes that the novel or the sonnet can be about anything. Max's latest novel, *Flat Planet*, published on 10 September 2001, the day before the attack on the World Trade Center, naturally sank without a trace. Jane's artist friend Marianne says *Flat Planet* "deserved the oblivion it's earned" (44). Jane wonders how American Thanksgiving can proceed in its traditional form after "the now-world . . . has seen the end of Fortress America and the notion of giving thanks from the 'olden days'" (8). Max loves "the Thanksgiving of the old, weird America that lived in the woods or behind sets of green hills. He wanted so much for the book to sum up all that the word *thanksgiving* illuminates in America" (7-8). But, Jane wonders, "what does the idea of thanks mean when a spectacularly fortunate country has been smacked in the chin? Has been flattened. Thanks to whom and for what?" (8). As chapter 1 is set on 7 October 2002, "one year and one month after the September 11 tragedy" (2), "Moment's Moment" was clearly intended as a millennial novel, mourning 9/11 and the end of "Fortress America."

Chapter 3, titled "The Third Day. Wednesday," a second fragment collected in the Shields Archives,[17] appears to be set in 2003 on the sixth day after the American invasion of Iraq in search of weapons of mass destruction. Jane sees Saddam Hussein's photo in *The Chicago Tribune* and witnesses on television scenes of looting in Iraq. A woman carrying three lamps is interviewed, happy to have "nicked an armload of decorating accessories," but Jane realizes "the account of Lamp Lady won't do for Max—wrong genre, wrong gender" (51). Like her daughter Lucy, who lives in Oak Park with her husband Ivan and who loathes George W. Bush, Jane is negative about Bush and the "axis of evil" (45), comparing him to Hitler. She recalls that when she asked her Sunday school teacher if God loved Hitler, since God and Jesus were supposed to love everyone, she replied that God "was probably 'disappointed' in Hitler" (46), implying He is also disappointed in President Bush.

Although the surface of this draft novel concerns the sonnet, it has a personal as well as a political subtext, with several gestures towards autobiography: the action is set in Shields' own birthplace of Oak Park, Illinois, Jane is Shields' own age of sixty-seven at the time of composition, Jane and Max Sexton's wedding date of 1957 is the year that Carol and Don Shields married, and Max Sexton has twice been nominated for the Pulitzer Prize (2), an award that Shields herself won for *The Stone Diaries*.[18] Although Shields does not specify an illness to account for Jane's sudden sense of aging, her own diagnosis of terminal cancer in 1998 haunts this story like a shadow text. On a sheet of holograph manuscript titled "Sonnet," Shields has Jane refer to her "diagnosis" at sixty-three, the age Shields was when she received her terminal cancer diagnosis. Jane comments, "Until my diagnosis at 63 I was perfectly happy to chair the fortnightly meetings [of the Sonnet Revival Society] at Monday lunch" ("Sonnet" 1). Disoriented on a recent Monday, however,

perhaps distraught by her diagnosis, Jane gets lost on her way home from the meeting, unsettling her deeply. Her health crisis unhinges her sense of self, her sense of her place in the world:

> The notion of meaningful roots becomes unacceptable, when I think how one minute of every hour is given over to the unrootedness of the self, or else one hour in the slender thinness of a single night. For these brief instances, it seems to me, we are unplugged from the universe, separated from any icon of suburb or Chicago or home or Max's yellow briefcase or Lucy's fixation on the hatefulness of George Bush. Whether through detachment or despair—God knows which—I feel—from nowhere it comes—the rustling, dizzying stale air of disconnection—those unreliable roots—and that's enough to wither my faith. If my sonnets are to leave any echo of me it will be a testimony to the visionary company of loss. I am lost. We lose our way, just as I did coming from the Sonnet Revival meeting on Monday: we are creatures of doubt and rootlessness. (49)

Shields' emphasis on Ground Zero and the threat to America (8) parallels the break down of "Fortress America" (8) with the threat to Jane's own body—the aging body on which she plans to focus her next sonnet, because she feels increasingly "like a walking ossuary" (13).[19] Her sonnet is "supposed to be about my body, my pathetic, decaying, sallow and sagging body. But for some reason I keep writing about the war instead" (46). The American invasion of Iraq parallels the cancerous invasion of Jane's body, and her preoccupation with the war parallels her body's battle with cancer. Since Shields was in the habit of reading the obituary column for narratives for fiction, she must have read many times about a person succumbing after a valiant battle with cancer. She herself battled the insidious enemy for five years before succumbing, far longer than predicted.[20]

Jane parallels sonnet construction with her own being: "My brain stem is ready, the iambic grasp of knit/purl engaged, and is so close to matching the rhythm of my breath that I don't even think of it. Its motor hums in the joints of my shoulders and wrists, knit/purl, knit/purl, ten items arranged on each clean glass shelf" (18). Similarly, as noted, she views the "little sound" of the sonnet as a voice emerging "from within the body's own borders; one voice, one small note extended" (7)—like a cry for help.

Shields employs the sonnet to represent life itself, as the constrictions of its form symbolize the brevity of human life. Leonardo da Vinci's maxim, "Art breathes from containment and suffocates from freedom" (11), is taped on Jane's desk. Shields emphasizes the concept of composing within restraints by including an Oulipian Society that meets on alternate Mondays in the same chamber as the Sonnet Revival. "Oulipo" is an acronym formed from the French words "*Ouvroir de littérature potentielle*," meaning "a workshop of potential literature," founded in France in 1960 by François Le Lionnais and Raymond Queneau, wherein poets create artificial constraints for composing poetry ("Oulipo" n. pag.). Oulipians, Jane explains, "resemble the sonnet revivalists in that they set up constrictive forms for their literary production" (14). Confusing Mondays, Jane arrives accidentally at a meeting of the Oulipian Society. The Chair, Doug Pome,[21] invites her to participate in their "combinatorial stratagems" (14).[22]

Jane also has a framed poster of Rainer Maria Rilke's sonnet to Orpheus on the wall:

> Always we move among flowers, vine-leaves, fruit.
> They don't just speak a language of seasons.
> Out of the darkness comes a motley declaration
> With maybe a glimmer of jealousy in it
>
> From the earth-nourishing dead. Do we know
> What part they play in all this? Consider
> Just how long it has been their nature

To fiddle the loam with loose bone-marrow.

The question, then: do they enjoy it?
Is fruit heaved up to us, clenched with the effort
Of clumsy slaves, and we their masters?

Are *they* the masters, asleep among roots,
And grudging us from their surpluses
This crossbred thing of speechless strength and kisses? (Rilke 34)

Although Shields does not actually quote Rilke's sonnet, certain elements of the poem—from the mention of the seasons to the allusion to darkness—are reflected in her prose in her references to "the chilly calendar" (16) and to Jane's "Sunday self-consciousness," as "the little mid-morning circle around Max and me was bisected by light and dark" (2). Most important, of course, is Rilke's sonnet's concern with the afterlife of the poet. Orpheus was the legendary poet and singer of Greek myth. After twice failing to rescue his wife Eurydice from Hades, Orpheus is torn apart by Dionysian Maenads, and his head floats downriver to the isle of Lesbos, where it continues singing. The reference to Rilke's sonnet reflects Shields' situation, as she continued to compose while anticipating death.

Jane appears preoccupied with death, and condensing experience into the strict structure of the sonnet seems to serve as an antidote to death, as Shields explains in the typescript, "The Third Day. Wednesday": "If I could get it down to fourteen lines and turn it into a patterned meditation, then there would be no real cups and saucers to worry me in the world. It would be easy to be the busy dust the little broom went after so industriously. Busy dust was living dust. We were made of dust, and of dust we would remain. Dust to dust" (54). Jane employs the housewifely image of a broom: "I must sweep my head clean with a queer little broom, and that broom . . . is my sonnet, an imperium, as I have already announced, about a woman who is growing old . . . during a time of war. I didn't want to include the lines on the war, but the broom refused to dislodge it. A brave little brush, it is willing to whap itself against primordial dust, dust from the creation" (52). Shields' metaphor of the sonnet as a broom combines the housewifely and the cosmic, deftly connecting the image of dust under the carpet with the dust to which all life must return.

Shields employs the sonnet to symbolize the self: "Plain Jane" (2), Jane says, "*c'est moi*" (3). Jane is preoccupied with her self: "Me, always me. My inescapable self with its slightly off-balanced packaging, benignly decentred by an altered view" (12). Unlike Max, Jane believes that "the mystery of being is as deeply manifest in women as in men" (3). But recently, her perspective has changed: "Lately everything to do with my essence has become transparent, neutral" (3). She draws the parallel between the sonnet and the self by describing the sense of completing a sonnet as "that feeling every poet knows of arrival home, the self returned to its self" (5).[23] "Here I am," she repeats to herself (16), trying to reinforce her sense of being. She wonders of her marriage to Max, "Are we to share the future or no?" (19). Jane has reached the *volta*, or critical turning point, in her life: "The physical substance of my resolute will has taken a rather sudden turn" (58). She feels "[m]ore and more a bit player in my own life" (58). Jane fears the approaching moment "when my faith in my miniature art collapses" (17), paralleling her poetry with her body.

The sonnet form parallels "the shape of a human life" (12): the division of the sonnet at the *volta* represents the "dramatic argument" (11) of "[s]pring and counter-spring" (16) that symbolizes both the before-and-after 9/11 terrorist attack of the political perspective and the before-and-after terminal cancer diagnosis of the personal perspective. Jane says, "[T]he bending is everything, the *volta*, the turn, and also important is where it occurs within the sonnet's 'scanty plot of

ground,' to quote old Wordsworth" (7). Although Jane says, "I am not thinking, at this early stage, of octave-sestet divisions" (16), Shields clearly was.

The original title, "Moment's Moment," is crossed out on the typescript of chapter 1, with "Segue" written by hand and circled underneath it (1). That moment of being is featured in "Segue," as the narrator observes herself and her husband performing their Sunday morning ritual of buying bread and flowers at the market to take to their daughter's home in Oak Park, where they will enjoy brunch together—a small ceremony: "I felt a longing to register the contained, isolated instant we had manufactured and entered . . . this was what I wanted to preserve" (1). Many of Shields' poems, stories, and novels strive to recreate a transcendent moment, a "moment of grace," as she puts it in *Unless* (44), that realizes the extraordinary in the ordinary—"numinous moments," "moments of transcendence," or "random illuminations," as she explains it to Eleanor Wachtel (17).

Shields' habit of portraying her protagonist viewing herself from both within and without, as she does in her early poem "I/Myself," is employed in "Segue," as Jane self-consciously analyzes the moment: "[A]n intrusive overview camera (completely imaginary, needless to say) bumped against me, so that . . . I found myself watching the two of us . . . making a performance of paying for their rounded and finite loaf of bread and then the burst of chrysanthemums" (1-2)—a flower frequently associated with death and funerals. Here, the author of stage and screen plays imagines the "performance" of her characters caught on camera—like the woman in Shields' play *Departures and Arrivals* who, meeting her husband at the airport, imagines a retake of that meeting, complete with a film director and cameraman (117): the stage directions explain, "*This is not a 'real' filming, but an extension of the characters' self-consciousness as they indulge in the self-conscious drama of an airport reunion*" (117) in a dramatic extroversion of a character's thoughts.

After Shields' death, her youngest daughter, poet Sara Cassidy, revised her mother's first "fragment" for publishing as the story "Segue" that introduces her *Collected Stories*.[24] The title "Segue" is an appropriate, if ironic, title for her last story, because Shields was convinced before her death that she had more novels to write. "I'd love to write the sonnet novel but I don't seem to have the energy," Shields lamented to Wachtel (13). "Segue"—which *The Oxford English Dictionary* identifies as a term derived from music, signifying "an uninterrupted transition from one song or melody to another" ("Segue, n." n. pag.)—suggests continuation, something denied to Shields herself, but not to her publications, which continue to be read and enjoyed. While composing "Segue," Shields was absorbed by the war in Iraq and the idea that life goes on, despite the war. Therefore, "Segue" is about "goingonness," she said to me.

Shields concludes "Segue" much as Margaret Laurence ends *The Fire-Dwellers*—with the protagonist drifting off to sleep, asking the existential questions, "What am I now? What is my position in the universe, in the fen and bog of my arrangements?" (20).[25] In *The Staircase Letters*, a collection of electronic messages between Shields and her friend Elma Gerwin, who was also dying of cancer, editor Arthur Motyer explains how Shields would put herself to sleep: "She would continue down the staircase of her years, the journey of her life, until she found herself regressing into young adulthood by stair thirty-one, then childhood by stair twelve, but losing track of whatever number it was in infancy, where sleep never failed to arrive" (34)—hence the book's title, *The Staircase Letters*. Shields' vision of layered structures, stairs in this case, reflects her metaphor of glass shelves for the lines of a sonnet or boxcars for the chapters of a novel. Shields wrote to Motyer, "I love the state of

being nearly at the end, when I have the sense of darning a sock. It's almost like flying." Ever the self-conscious artist, she added, "I believe that metaphor needs some work" (qtd. in Motyer 149). Shields viewed her life as a series of chapters: "Most of us end up seeing our lives not as an ascending line of achievement but as a series of highly interesting chapters," she said in her convocation address at the University of British Columbia in 1996.[26] "Segue" concludes with a sentence reflecting the final chapter of Shields' life: "[I]f it weren't for my particular situation, I would be happy" (20), echoing the opening sentence of her last published novel, *Unless*: "It happens that I am going through a period of great unhappiness and loss just now" (1). Chapter 3 of "Moment's Moment" ends with a haunting line of poetry, presumably line three of Jane Sexton's sonnet: "Some perilous intersection between faith and dread" (61).

Shields' editor Anne Collins quoted the following passage from *The Stone Diaries* as epigraph to Shields' *Collected Stories*, published posthumously in 2004:

> Something has occurred to her—something transparently simple, something she's always known, it seems, but never articulated. Which is that the moment of death occurs while we are still alive. Life marches right up to the wall of that final darkness, one extreme state of being butting against the other. Not even a breath separates them. Not even a blink of the eye. A person can go on and on tuned in to the daily music of food and work and weather and speech right up to the last minute, so that not a single thing gets lost. (*The Stone Diaries* 342)

Nothing is lost in "Segue"—not even a moment's moment.

NOTES

1 I interviewed Shields in her Victoria home, 7-9 May 2003. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations from Shields' interviews will be from this unpublished interview. Shields comments in an interview with Eleanor Wachtel, "I love the idea —I don't know why, because I think, in everyday life, I've been quite conventional—of novels that take an unconventional turn, that in fact invert the process of the novel or introduce some huge digression or have a sense of living tissue to them" (167-68).

2 I wish to thank Anne Giardini for sharing "The Square Root of a Clock Tick: Time and Timing in Carol Shields' Poetry and Prose" with me, to be published in David Staines' forthcoming collection on Carol Shields.

3 Robert Lecker titled his review of *Small Ceremonies* "All Plot, Little Thought," but I contend that structure, not plot, is emphasized in this novel.

4 In her essay "Thoughts on Writing, Advice, Freight Cars and Clotheslines," Carol Shields' daughter, novelist Anne Giardini, recalls, "[M]y mother always had a structure in her mind before she began to write a book. She referred to this structure as 'a very physical image that I can call up, just the way you would call up an image on your screen'" (n. pag.). Giardini describes Shields' boxcar image for *Small Ceremonies*: "[I]n my mind, those chapters looked like the cars of a freight train, and I just lined them up, nine of them, and I knew I would have to fill those freight cars, and that was the image, and it helped me keep things together a little bit" (n. pag.).

5 Shields may have been echoing Jane Austen, whom she admired and wrote about, who called *Pride and Prejudice* "my own darling Child" in a 29 January 1813 letter to her sister Cassandra (qtd. in Le Faye 201). Shields told Wachtel that "[n]ovels are enormously expansive, capacious. They'll hold everything. I had this sense years ago, when I was writing *Swann*, that the novel would hold everything I could put into it" (qtd. in Wachtel 167-68).

6 Shields continues, "They may not be the best ones, but they're the ones you have. All the other pictures are in an album somewhere" (Interview n. pag.). This conversation with an anonymous interviewer can be found in the Penguin Reading Group Guide accompanying the Penguin publication of *The Stone Diaries*. The interview can also be found online at www.us.penguingroup.com/static/rguides/us/stone_diaries.html.

7 *The Vortex* (1973) is in the First Accession of the Carol Shields Archives at the National Library of Canada in Ottawa, in Box 23, Files 1-14. Shields started writing poetry, often in rhyming couplets, in her youth and published poems in school and college literary magazines that can be viewed in the Carol Shields Archives. At thirty, Shields started writing poetry again for a 1965 CBC

competition that had a maximum age of thirty; she won the competition.

8 "Segue" offers, as Alex Ramon observes, "a tantalizing glimpse of a work-in-progress" (178). He adds, "As Shields poignantly states of Austen's unfinished *Sanditon*: 'the fragment does not read like the work of a dying woman'" (178). He notes, "An edited extract of *Segue* was published in the 'Review' section of *The Guardian* on 27th December 2003" (179).

9 I wish to thank Shields' editor, Anne Collins of Random House Canada, whom I interviewed in her Toronto office on 20 May 2012, for giving me a photocopy of "The First Day. Monday," the first chapter of the unpublished "Moment's Moment" (1-23), which was revised as the short story "Segue." Collins recalls that Shields completed "Segue" and that Collins edited it with Shields' youngest daughter, poet Sara Cassidy. A comparison between the typescript and the published version reveals minor alterations and omissions. For example, following the sentence, "Instead he, and his book *Flat Planet*, have been swept into a cave of unfashionable hush" (8), the participial phrase "becoming part of the condition of the passed over, then steered into a state of serial avoidance" is omitted, and the rest of the sentence changed to "then dismissed and somehow made to feel ashamed in its hopefulness about what must now be considered a triviality" (9). Perhaps this alludes to Shields' own reactions to reviews of her early work. The typescript includes three pages labeled "for Christopher Potter," her editor for Fourth Estate.

10 Jane also notes, "A sonnet . . . comes with its coat of varnish. As Flaubert says, the words are like hair; they shine with combing" (15). On a holograph manuscript sheet in the Shields Archives, Shields writes, "A sonnet comes with its coat of varnish. We can do what we want with it, but it is a form ever reusable, ever willing to be refurbished, retouched, regilded and revealed" (2).

11 Anne Collins believes Shields' distinctive voice was fully formed from the start. Shields' tongue could be "wicked, too," she said, with a propensity for "zingers" (Personal interview n. pag.).

12 When I visited Carol Shields in May 2003, I purchased a luxuriant African violet—I thought she might enjoy its literary associations—in a floral shop on the way to her house. She had her daughter Sara place it on a table in her bedroom, where we conversed. Later, her daughter Anne wrote me a thank-you note, explaining that her mother was becoming too weak to write. The way Shields weaves the violet into her story illustrates the creative writer's ability to interweave external with internal realities. It also demonstrates that Shields was still working on "Moment's Moment" at that time.

13 Novelist Anne Giardini also relays her mother's writing process in "Thoughts on Writing, Advice, Freight Cars and Clotheslines," recalling that Shields would ask herself at the end of each poem, "Is this what I really mean?" (n. pag.).

14 For example, Shields takes delight in "undermining the novel form a little bit," as she confessed to Wachtel (165-66).

15 In an interview with Wachtel, Shields referred to "precocious sonnet writing" (10).

16 Eighty-nine of Shields' poems are collected in *Coming to Canada*. Six of her early poems, not in *Coming to Canada*, are collected in *Early Voices*.

17 The Carol Shields Archives at the National Library includes "Moment's Moment: Chapter 3 The Third Day. Wednesday," Shields' typescript draft. I wish to thank Archivist Catherine Hobbs for bringing this second fragment to my attention.

18 Although Shields made Reta Winters, the narrator/protagonist of her last published novel *Unless* (2002), middle-aged (succumbing to the prejudice that older women cannot be interesting and judging that forty-three was the oldest point at which a woman could still exude sexual allure, as she told me), she bravely decided to make the protagonist of "Moment's Moment," or "Segue," her own age of sixty-seven because she wanted to write about the aging process.

19 By 2003, Shields' stage-four breast cancer had metastasized and spread to her bones.

20 Anne Giardini reports in a 23 June 2013 e-mail message that her mother hated the references to battling cancer in obituaries: "She didn't like the martial tone, or the implication that those who died did not fight valiantly enough. She told me several times not to include embattled language in the obituary we wrote for her" (Personal interview n. pag.).

21 In *The Vortex*, one character refers disparagingly to "the pome people."

22 One of the two pages of Shields' holograph manuscript also refers to Victor Glantz and the Oulipian Society.

23 In the unpublished chapter 3, she refers to the creation of the "last two lines [as] the sense of arrival at home, like being given back to yourself" (58).

24 Sara Cassidy wrote to me, "With Don as consultant, I prepared Segue for submission as a short story. Extremely little was done beyond

copy-editing. It was very much 'of a piece' as much of Carol's work-in-progress would be; since she would, as you know, every day edit the writing from the previous day. As for its ability to stand as a short story, I don't think it can—it lacks a roundness of plot—but it certainly holds as 'a chapter published as a short story'" (n. pag.).

25 Laurence concludes *The Fire-Dwellers* with this passage, as her protagonist Stacey Cameron MacAindra drifts into sleep: "She feels the city receding as she slides into sleep. Will it return tomorrow?" (281).

26 This unpublished address is collected in the University of Manitoba Archives.

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The Dead Witness (1872), Rosanna Mullins Leprohon's Final Novel

Andrea Cabajsky

Since the centenary period, literary critics have been divided in their assessments of Rosanna Mullins Leprohon (1829-1879) with her place in the Canadian canon varying according to their responses to the romance conventions she deploys throughout her fictional *oeuvre*. Critics who have aligned the maturation of Canadian fiction with the advent of social realism, for example, have condemned the sentimentally driven plots of Leprohon's well-known romances, including *The Manor House of de Villerai* (1859-1860) and *Antoinette de Mirecourt* (1864), as little more than symptoms of English-Canadian nostalgia, itself the product of a regrettable colonial mentality. According to T. D. MacLulich (1988), Leprohon's persistent focus on "upper-class females" is anachronistic, recalling "eighteenth-century" British fiction while failing sufficiently to anticipate twentieth-century "democratic" realism (48; 7). John C. Stockdale's well-known entry on Leprohon in the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*—which was first published forty years ago yet remains to be updated—famously complains of the "tearful partings, broken engagements, timely and untimely deaths, chance meetings, and happy reconciliations" that pervade Leprohon's fiction but which remain "[un]appeal[ing]" to modern readers unless understood "for what they were," merely "amusement for women readers of early Canada" (n. pag.). Even patient readers, including Carl F. Klinck (1965) and John R. Sorfleet (1985), have complained of Leprohon's indulgence in "[m]elodrama and tugging heartstrings" (Klinck 157), her plots "over-romanticized," her characters "too idealized" to be believable (Sorfleet, Introduction 10). More recently, Elaine Kalman Naves (1993) has concluded that Leprohon's "stilted" melodrama significantly diminishes the impact of her "sophisticated themes" (36). For critics who have sought a more teleological, socially realist, or implicitly masculine development of fiction-writing in Canada, then, Leprohon's technique has read as only partly successful, her overdetermined romantic plots at odds with her earnest didacticism, her idealized characters undermining her intentions to achieve psychological complexity.

Inspired variously by feminist theories and methodologies, another group of critics has defended the social and ideological significance of the romance conventions Leprohon deploys, focusing in particular on female characterization within the larger rubric of heterosexual politics. Glenn Willmott (2001), for instance, has explicitly read *Antoinette*'s title character through the lens of eighteenth-century sentimentality, arguing that Antoinette de Mirecourt deploys her "moral authority" as a woman to transform her actual subordination to men into an appearance of gender equality (146). Misao Dean (1998), in turn, has implicitly acknowledged Leprohon's debt to novels of sensibility by proposing that Antoinette deploys "the moral authority of

the oppressed" "to limit and control" her oppressors (56). Carole Gerson (1989), in turn, has compared *Antoinette* to Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* (1748) and *The Manor House of de Villerai* to his *Pamela* (1740), underscoring that both of Leprohon's novels depict a "virtu[ous]" heroine "in distress" in order to envision the triumph of "virtue rewarded" (*Purer* 139). Finally, Heather Murray (2000) has highlighted the extent to which Leprohon's novels, particularly *Antoinette*, owe their distinctiveness and narrative texture to the structure of mutual interdependence they establish among constituent sentimental and gothic conventions (see esp. 267-68). In their responses to *Antoinette*, these revisionary critics, among others,[1] have rejected the assumption that standards of aesthetic judgment are either universal or unbiased, providing instead a formally resonant perspective from which to deepen our understanding of Leprohon's familiar debt to eighteenth-century British romance genres.

The recovery of a lost short novel by Leprohon thus represents an unanticipated opportunity to extend the implications of recent revisionary scholarship. Entitled *The Dead Witness; or, Lillian's Peril*, and published in *The Hearthstone* (Montreal, 1870-1872) from 3 August to 5 October, 1872, Leprohon's lost novel is also one of her darkest in the ways it treats such familiar themes as feminine virtue and female conduct. As she does elsewhere, in *The Dead Witness*, Leprohon presents a young heroine, in this case an Englishwoman named Lillian Tremaine, on the verge of adulthood. As with Leprohon's other fictional heroines, such as Blanche de Villerai and Antoinette, Lillian is emotionally complex and psychologically convincing. By contrast to Antoinette and to another well-known heroine, Alice Sydenham,[2] Lillian is unwaveringly self-confident and unflinchingly aware of her moral authority. *The Dead Witness* represents the culmination of Leprohon's extensive formal debts to gothic romances and novels of sensibility, her fictional heroine the repository of interconnected ideals of virtue, feminine authority, and social order. Like most of Leprohon's earlier novels, *The Dead Witness* closes with a marriage between two characters, Lillian and her neighbour, Colonel Neville Atherton, which the narrative imbues with the material and symbolic power to resolve contradictions. By contrast to those earlier novels, however, in which the marriage plot often enjoys narrative priority, *The Dead Witness* subordinates its marriage plot to a horrific contest between two women, Lillian and her housekeeper, Mrs. Stokely, which centres on their competition to become matriarch of Tremaine Court. In *The Dead Witness*, conflict resolution, the restoration of social order, and narrative closure rely equally on "stubborn pride" and "vindictiveness" (3.31: 1), that is, on the characteristic features that the narrative ascribes to Lillian.

The literary historical significance of Leprohon's lost novel lies not only in the opportunity it offers literary scholars to fill a gap in the bibliographical record, but also in the light it sheds on Leprohon's changing treatment, over time, of such familiar themes as feminine virtue and female conduct. While *The Dead Witness* is characteristic of Leprohon's fiction in the conduct lesson it offers female readers—namely, that parents are obliged "to bring up their daughters properly" while daughters are themselves obliged "to obey their parents [and] marry wisely" (Gerson, "Three Writers" 236)—it is, in many ways, a more pessimistic novel than its predecessors. By contrast to *The Manor House of de Villerai*, *Antoinette de Mirecourt*, and *Armand Durand* (1868), wherein female initiative helps to bolster unstable patriarchal structures, *The Dead Witness* takes for its starting point the notion that the patriarchal structure in place has outlasted its effectiveness.

Prior to further examining *The Dead Witness*' plot, conventions, and literary historical significance, I will describe briefly how I came across it. In their introduction to the Broadview edition (2007) of Isabella Valancy Crawford's *Winona; or, the Foster Sisters* (1873), Leonard Early and Michael Peterman refer to novels by British and Canadian writers that, together with *Winona*, were serialized from 1872 to 1874 in the sister-papers *The Favorite* and *The Hearthstone*, both published in Montreal by G. E. Desbarats (21).[3] These novels include *The Water Babies* by Charles Kingsley, *To the Bitter End* by Mary Elizabeth Braddon, and *The Dead Witness* by Leprohon (Early and Peterman 23). Figuring nowhere in the bibliographical data gathered on Leprohon since the nineteenth century,[4] but available today in Quebec's provincial library and archives,[5] *The Dead Witness* represents an important discovery: it supplants *Ada Dunmore* (1869-1870) as Leprohon's last known novel while correcting a misconception about Leprohon's productivity, which purportedly "dwindled" in the 1870s to a trickle of "short stories and poems" prior to her death in 1879 (McMullen and Waterston, Introduction xii).[6] Remarkable as it may seem that an entire short novel by Leprohon has gone unnoticed for a century and a half, it is also not surprising given that *The Dead Witness* was published in a "story-paper," an unusual venue for a writer better known for contributing to respectable middle-class periodicals like *The Literary Garland* (Montreal, 1838-1851). It is telling that Leprohon's biographer, Henri Deneau (1948), rejects *The Hearthstone* as a possible source of lost material, insisting that he "reviewed" it and found it "d[id] not contain contributions by Mrs. Leprohon" (132). Had he studied the contents of this short-lived, six-page weekly, Deneau would not have missed *The Dead Witness*, for it was published in ten instalments of twenty-two chapters, featuring prominently on pages one and two, and was accompanied by a woodcut illustration headlining each new instalment. Unfortunately, as Early and Peterman note, *The Hearthstone* only survives in a "badly broken run" (23), meaning that three instalments of *The Dead Witness* are missing between the end of August and the first half of September.[7] Nevertheless, because serializations are by their nature repetitive, the remaining instalments contain sufficient repetition of events, along with sufficient original material, to make up for the lost contents and to merit meaningful investigation of the whole.

As its title and subtitle suggest, *The Dead Witness; or, Lillian's Peril* promises readers a narrative that will meet their expectations for what literary critic Luke Gibbons (2004) describes as the "familiar stage-props of the Gothic *mise-en-scene*": these include "ruined castles, predatory aristocrats . . . endless, hidden vaults and torture chambers" (11), and other features that, by the Confederation period, had become standard conventions of a gothic fiction already a century old. Leprohon satisfies readers' expectations with her title character, a seventeen-year-old "patrician beauty" (Leprohon 3.31: 2) who inhabits, with her older sister Margaret, an English manor house at once "eloquently" historic (3.31: 1) and ruinous beyond repair. The Tremaine manor house, with its "[w]eed-grown walks, gates broken off their hinges, [and] fences and outbuildings deplorably out of repair" (3.31: 1), stands in for the typical ruined castle of gothic fiction. The manor's remote east wing, whose doors and windows are "closely nailed and boarded up" (3.31: 1), represents the epicentre of activity. Its dark, serpentine passageways and hidden vaults hide from public view the scenes of imprisonment and torture to which Lillian and, unbeknownst to her, her mother—the "dead witness" of the title—are subjected nearly twenty years apart and that, of the two, only Lillian will survive. Set

in England, the plot begins when Lillian, a young adult, accidentally stumbles upon her dead mother's remains and begins to suspect her father of murder. This accident deploys the interconnected themes of "ill-mated marriage" (Leprohon 3.32: 1) (should naive Margaret O'Halloran have married Roger Tremaine, a handsome libertine she met while travelling on the European Continent?) and parent-child conduct (are the Tremaine daughters bound to obey their treacherous father, as well as his housekeeper who usurps their mother's place?).

On the surface, *The Dead Witness* admittedly resembles a typical Victorian-period serial, the "light fiction" (363) that Richard D. Altick describes as having proliferated "in the last quarter of the [nineteenth] century" as the "formula for popular periodicals . . . developed" (363). Nevertheless, beneath *The Dead Witness*' formulaic "lightness," to adapt Altick's term to my purposes, lays a serious message about the restorative power of female self-sufficiency. Above all, *The Dead Witness* is remarkable for showing readers a Leprohon who is sceptical that women are well-served in their work to replenish an undeserving patriarchy. In this respect, it picks up where novels like *de Villerai*, *Antoinette*, and *Armand* leave off, building its gothic storyline on the ruins of an ancient patriarchy whose scion has found little place for himself in modernity, and leaving the women who depend on him to deal with the material and moral outcomes of his despondency.

By the end of *The Dead Witness*, Roger Tremaine lies dead, having apologized to Lillian prior to dying,[8] while Tremaine Court lies in total ruin, its demolition having been ordered by Atherton and sister Margaret. Mrs. Stokely too lies dead, having drunk a fatal concoction for fear that Lillian would expose the secret of her murder of Margaret Tremaine (3.40: 1). The narrative allots to its title character the most rewarding fate. Upon her marriage to her neighbour, Colonel Neville Atherton, Lillian, whom the narrator now describes as "regal," moves with spinster Margaret to Atherton Park, where Lillian effectively reigns as queen, her husband "lavish[ing] devoted affection" on her. More importantly, Lillian refuses to be presented at Court, a distinction to which her marriage to Atherton would have entitled her. Choosing instead to follow her mother-in-law's advice to "dwell" among her "own tenantry," Lillian rectifies the error of absentee and negligent landlordism committed by generations of Tremaines before her. As readers learn at the novel's close, both Lillian and Margaret, "by their pure, womanly virtues, spotless lives, and active, unwearying benevolence, finally [succeed] in wiping out the species of odium that had, through so many generations, attached itself to the name of the Tremaines of Tremaine Court" (3.40: 2). As with much of Leprohon's earlier fiction, *The Dead Witness* remains motivated by a larger didacticism, that is, a lesson in feminine virtue. As such, it enacts a gesture that, while not uncommon to novels of sensibility, also remains underappreciated for its revisionary potential. For Leprohon envisions virtue in a way that resembles what April Alliston has described, in the context of British novels of sensibility, as the potential to compensate "for the legal exclusions of women from passing on patriline inheritances of family name and real property" (136). In positing virtue as a kind of compensatory inheritance, *The Dead Witness* empowers Lillian and Margaret to correct the mistakes of the Tremaine patriarchy sufficiently, replacing those mistakes with their own anticipated legacy of benevolence and goodwill.

Not only does *The Hearthstone* contain an entire short novel by Leprohon, but it also features a poem by her, titled "Ocean Beach on a Stormy Evening" (3.40: 1). This poem was previously published in *The Journal of Education for Lower Canada* (according

to an editorial note), though it is omitted from the posthumous *Poetical Works of Mrs. Leprohon* (1881). Having studied the contents of *The Hearthstone*, I am also prepared to assert that it contains at least one anonymous piece by Leprohon, a short article titled "Home Courtesy," whose diction and syntax strongly resemble that of Leprohon, and whose didacticism is equally recognizable. "Home Courtesy" centres on two sets of advice: first, to "husbands," whom the anonymous author advises to "hearken to conscience" and extend "courteous conduct" to their wives; second, to brides-to-be, whom it warns, "[e]re [they] finally decide" to marry, to "look well" at their future husbands to see how they "esteem" their "own female relations" (3.33: 3). According to Confederation-period literary historians and biographers, such as Edmond Lareau (1874) and Henry J. Morgan (1862), Leprohon was "on the staff" (Morgan 746; see also Lareau 306) of Canadian and American newspapers, presumably the *Family Herald*, and the Boston *Pilot*, among others known to have published her work. Nevertheless, it seems promising to revisit the contents of Confederation-era periodicals, including *The Hearthstone*, with the aim of uncovering more lost pieces than *The Dead Witness*, Leprohon's last known novel to date.

NOTES

1 See Blacklock (1993); Cuder-Domínguez (1998); and McMullen and Waterston (1992, 1994). Also relevant is Edwards (1972).

2 Alice Sydenham is the title character of Leprohon's first published short story, "Alice Sydenham's First Ball" (1849).

3 A prominent Montrealer, George-Édouard Desbarats (1838-1893) also published the *Canadian Illustrated News* (1869-1883). *The Favorite* (1872-1874) and its predecessor, *The Hearthstone* (1870-1872) were, as Early and Peterman observe, launched "to meet the needs of an expanding reading public created by increased population, literacy, and leisure time, advances in printing technology, and the mass market made possible by railway distribution" (21).

4 *The Dead Witness* is not mentioned by Morgan (1862); Lareau (1874); MacMechan (1924); Logan and French (1924); Deneau (1948); Klinck (1965); Gerson (1983); Edwards (1983); Sorfleet ("Leprohon" 1985); McMullen and Waterston (1992); and many others.

5 Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec (BAnQ) microfilms: MIC/A1801 #3, nos 1-52; 6 Jan.-28 Dec. 1872; ISSN: 0845-3586.

6 Prior to the recovery of *The Dead Witness*, Leprohon's final prose publications were thought to have included the following: her last known novel, *Ada Dunmore; or, A Memorable Christmas Eve* (1869-1870); and her last four stories, "My Visit to Fairview Villa" (1870), "Clive Weston's Wedding Anniversary" (1872), "Who Stole the Diamonds?" (1875), and "A School-Girl Friendship" (1877).

7 The missing issues comprise the following: 31 August 1872; 7 September 1872; and 14 September 1872.

8 Unfortunately, Roger's expression of regret and subsequent death form part of the missing instalments to which I refer in note 7.

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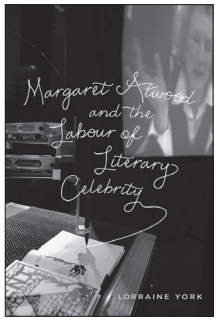

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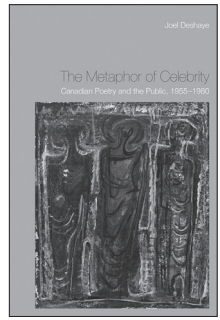

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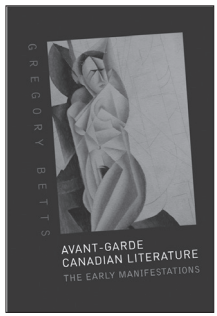

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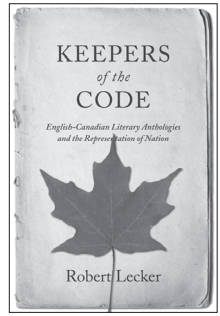

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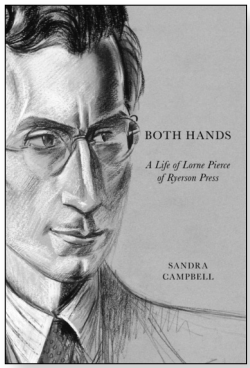

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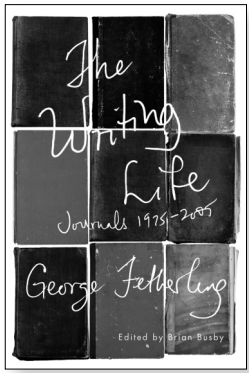

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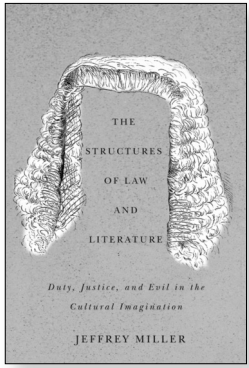

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