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Editorial

Tourism in Saskatchewan

Margery Fee

Although I can't be completely sure, it was likely April 1978 that Michael Taft and I drove to Batoche in my trusty VW Rabbit. There was still snow on the ground, for sure. One vivid memory is of coming to an ice bridge across the South Saskatchewan River; pickup trucks were bombing across it in sprays of slush. Signs warned, "Use at your own risk." Michael wanted me to floor it across. I remember pointing out it was *my* car. I turned around and took another route with a *real* bridge. When we got to Batoche, there were no signs, only mailboxes along the road that bore the same names we saw in the graveyard. Six graves bearing the same Ukrainian last name were of children who had all died on the same day. The only other grave I remember was Gabriel Dumont's, on which rested a slightly open package of Drum pipe tobacco. We peered through the windows of the church where Louis Riel declared his second provisional government in 1885 and found the bullet holes in the priest's house. Then, after crunching around aimlessly in the snow for a while under a gray sky, we drove home.

While in Saskatoon for the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association (NAISA) conference in early June this year, I drove to Batoche again. Since 2000, the Batoche site has been run by a shared management board of six members, three appointed by the Minister of Canadian Heritage, and three by the Métis Nation of Saskatchewan (Parks Canada n. pag.). Recently, the main road was shifted in order to permit the building of an interpretive centre. The church is still consecrated, and mass is said at least once a year on July 19, during the "Back to Batoche" celebrations that have been held for over forty years. The original silver bell of the church was taken to Ontario as plunder after the defeat of the Métis. This year, it will ring in the church for the first time since 1885.

At the conference, I purchased James Daschuk's new book, *Clearing the Prairies: Disease, Politics of Starvation, and Loss of Aboriginal Life*, which points out that although Canada ranked fourth on the 2007-2008 UN Human Development Index, its Aboriginal peoples, if considered a single nation, would rank sixty-third, "the equivalent of Panama, Malaysia, or Belarus" (ix). When the numbered treaties were signed, starvation after the near-extinction of the buffalo had weakened people already devastated by smallpox. Tuberculosis and other infectious diseases raged through residential schools and reserves. Indigenous people were argued to be susceptible to disease because of their racial inferiority (Daschuk xxii). A long-standing trust in capitalist development and white civilization has left a great deal to do to repair the human and ecological damage of colonization.

The interpretive centre at Batoche now reflects a clear picture of how successive Canadian governments put incoming settlers ahead of those who had lived in the region for generations or for millennia. In 1869, Canadian government surveyors arrived in the Red River before the land had been transferred from the Hudson's Bay Company. To protest the incursion, Riel set up his first provisional government. In the hiatus, it became the legitimate authority (Gwyn 111-12). Thus, John A. Macdonald's government negotiated with Riel's government on the provisions of the Manitoba Act of 1870, which brought the territory around Red River into Confederation. However, the provisional government's execution of Thomas Scott, a member of the Protestant Orange Order, was regarded as murder in Protestant Ontario. Since a legitimate government carried out the execution, Riel was ultimately granted an amnesty, but only in 1875. By this time, he had been elected to the House of Commons three times, but was unable to take his seat because of the furor. The amnesty required him to go into exile for five years and to forego any future political activity. This history explains how a man often regarded as Canada's most notorious rebel became a Father of Confederation.

While Riel was in exile, the Canadian government did not fulfill the conditions of the Manitoba Act that his government had negotiated, which included bilingual services and a land grant of 1.4 million acres to the Métis (Stanley n. pag.). Macdonald, justly nicknamed "Old Tomorrow," replied evasively to petitions from the residents of the region for assistance during a period of recession, drought, and famine. The Indian agents withheld provisions, which rotted in the forts (Daschuk xxi). On his return in 1885 at the request of Gabriel Dumont, speaking for the Métis who had moved to Saskatchewan, Riel declared the government of Canada a "sham" government (535).

On another day trip before the conference, some friends and I drove to Wanuskewin, also a National Historic Site like Batoche. Archaeologists working there since the 1930s have unearthed evidence of human habitation dating back 6,000 years. The valley site, which offered shelter during the winter, contains the remains of a buffalo jump and a medicine wheel. We saw a muskrat in the river and encountered many hyperactive mosquitoes. One can imagine that in the spring, as the mosquitoes rose up to claim their prey, the people moved out of the valley onto the windier heights. We took refuge in the interpretive centre, where bison burgers are now on offer. Like Batoche, the site is co-managed, in this case by a board that includes members of local First Nations ("Corporate Information" n. pag.). When I lived in Saskatoon between 1977 and 1981, I had no idea Wanuskewin existed, even though it is only five kilometres from the city. Gradually, then, over the last few decades, these places have been moved into prominence in consultation with peoples who do not fit easily into Canada's nationalist narrative.

After the conference, I toured the Saskatoon Western Development Museum. According to a local friend who accompanied me, Indigenous presence in this museum is recent. After all, Indigenous people have long been seen as obstacles to development. Moving them off the land to make it available for "productive" use by farmers was the main goal of the treaty makers. Now, new exhibits in the museum describe how anyone who wanted to leave the reserve required a permit, as did any kind of off-reserve economic activity: the permit to sell a cow cost more than the likely profit from the sale. One exhibit also spells out how Indigenous farmers were not permitted to buy mechanized farming equipment, as this would arouse resentment from other farmers at unfair competition from the supposedly cosseted First Nations people. That being said, most settlers struggled to survive on poor land in southern Saskatchewan, in what was called "Palliser's Triangle." Although John Palliser, who explored this area in 1857-1858, felt the region would be unsuitable for agriculture, later the Canadian government would encourage settlers to homestead there. They engaged in disastrous farming practices that left the soil exposed to erosion by rain and wind. During the drought of the 1930s, their crops failed and their houses filled with dust, to the point where they had to leave their plates upside down on the table until it was time to eat.

The dominant worldview sees nature as something to be developed by humans; the Indigenous world-view, summed up in the phrase "all my relations," puts relationships first, including relationships to the environment. The near-catastrophic results of the settlement of the prairies are still obvious, but the Canadian government is now engaged in new and possibly even more disastrous development schemes. At the conference, the four women who started the Idle No More movement (Sheelah McLean, Nina Wilson, Sylvia McAdam, and Jessica Gordon) explained that as a result of recent bills passed in the House of Commons, including the infamous Omnibus Bill, the Saskatchewan River is now the largest unprotected river in the world. Environmental protection is being removed and Aboriginal rights ignored. However, they note that the potential harm of these bills is overshadowed by the Canada-China Foreign Investment Promotion and Protection Act (FIPPA), Canada's biggest foreign trade treaty since NAFTA. You might remember the Harpers meeting with the pandas instead of with the Indigenous youth who had walked 1,600 kilometres from northern Quebec to Ottawa in support of Idle No More.

The Act has been signed but not ratified because of protests that it hands over Canadian sovereignty to another nation. Although it was not debated in Parliament, "it would allow Chinese companies to sue Canadian governments—in front of a third-party arbitrator—if the government does anything that threatens the company's profits" (Radia n. pag.). If it is ratified, it will bind both the federal and provincial governments of Canada to its clauses until 2043. Opposing it in court is the Hupacasath First Nation, supported by the Serpent River First Nation and the Tsawwassen First Nation, along with the Union of BC Indian Chiefs and the Chiefs of Ontario ("Hupacasath First Nation" n. pag.). As the Idle No More women pointed out, this agreement ignores not only Aboriginal rights to consultation on development that affects their territories, but also the entire country's right to know what its elected government is doing. History seems to be repeating itself.

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Nathaniel G. Moore

Amazing Kong

Of my new job, oven burns, ointment and friendship found
at Easy Bake Pie factory, where my hourly pastry bake-off woes
dull and lull the shift. Of sweat and gears, I cannot dwell. I see
your advertisement everywhere; the gifted fragrance owes you more.
I climb these buildings; seek you out hairy beast because I would
like to tell you about the obscene amount of cheese my brother insists
on serving me with dark cheap olives, globs of sauces, crushed taco shells
all grossly added to salad already a colossal syrupy tower of malaise!
A post-mayonnaise caloric drip. Because even saying out loud "syrupy foods,"
well, that sounds disgusting. Let's meet on top of the CN Tower, roll a powder
keg down the stairs. *The Clockwork Orangutans are leading the Blue Jays 14-0.*
Let's fist fight in the bathroom and have a poutine throwing contest.
Let's wear the wrong shoes and enslave each other to carry each other drunk,
awful, down the right street and watch us fumble with our souvenir Bluejay Bong.

Sam McKegney

"pain, pleasure, shame. Shame."

Masculine Embodiment, Kinship, and Indigenous Reterritorialization

In October 2011, during a survivors' sharing circle at the Atlantic National Event of the Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission (IRS TRC), a Cree woman recalled in eloquent and shattering testimony her forced separation from the younger brother for whom she had cared prior to residential school incarceration. Seeing her brother alone and despondent on the boys' side of the playground, the survivor recounted waving to him in hopes of raising his spirits, if only for a moment. A nun in the courtyard, however, spied this forbidden gesture of empathy and kinship, and immediately hauled the young boy away. To punish him for having acknowledged his sister's love, the nun dressed the boy in girls' clothes and paraded him in front of the other boys, whom she encouraged to mock and deride his caricatured effeminacy.[1] In her testimony, the survivor recalled the hatred in her brother's eyes as he was thus shamed—hatred not for his punisher, but for her, his sister, whose affection had been deemed transgressive by the surveillance systems of residential school acculturation.

What became clear to me as I witnessed the woman's testimony was that this punishment performed intricate political work designed to instruct boys to despise both girls and "girly" boys and to disavow bonds of kinship. The punishment's dramatization of gender opposition, its construction of the feminine as shameful, and its performative severing of intergender sibling relationships informed the type of masculine subjects that those involved in administering residential school policies were invested in creating.

Furthermore, it became clear that these punitive pedagogies of gender cannot be disentangled from the years of rape the survivor went on to describe enduring from a priest at the same institution. Nor can the gender dynamics of these impositions be extricated from the survivor's expressed vexation that she still refers to the baby she birthed in the residential school at age twelve as "him," even though the child was torn from her before she could discern the biological sex. These acts of psychological, spiritual, and physical trauma constitute embroiled elements of the same genocidal program, one that has sought not only to denigrate and torment Indigenous women but to manufacture hatred toward Indigenous women in shamed and disempowered Indigenous men.[2]

This paper focuses on the coerced alienation of Indigenous men from their own bodies by colonial technologies such as residential schooling. I argue that the gender segregation and the derogation of both the feminine and the body that occurred systematically within residential schools were not merely by-products of Euro-Christian patriarchy; they were not just collateral damage from aggressive evangelization by decidedly patriarchal religious bodies. Rather, this nexus of coercive alienations lay at the very core of the Canadian nation-building project that motivated the residential school system. The systemic manufacturing of Indigenous disavowals of the body served—and serves—the goal of colonial dispossession by troubling lived experiences of ecosystemic territoriality and effacing kinship relations that constitute lived forms of governance.[3] Following Mark Rifkin, I understand the attack on "native social formations . . . conducted in the name of 'civilization'" as an "organized effort" to make Eurocentric notions of gender "compulsory as a key part of breaking up indigenous landholdings, 'detribalizing' native peoples, [and] translating native territoriality and governance into the terms of . . . liberalism and legal geography" (5-6). This process of translation serves to delegitimize Indigenous modes of territorial persistence and thereby to enable Indigenous deterritorialization—both in the sense of forcing Indigenous peoples to "become what [they are] not" (Colebrook xxii) and of removing Indigenous peoples from particular land bases in order to speed environmental exploitation, resource extraction, and non-Indigenous settlement. I contend that each of these objectives was at play in residential school policy and practice in Canada. This paper thus rehearses the preliminary steps of an inquiry into a crucial but heretofore unasked question in this era of supposed reconciliation in Canada: if the coordinated assaults on Indigenous bodies and on Indigenous cosmologies of gender are not just two among several interchangeable tools of colonial dispossession but are in fact integral to the Canadian colonial project, can embodied actions that self-consciously reintegrate gender complementarity be mobilized to pursue not simply "healing" but also the radical reterritorialization and sovereignty that will make meaningful reconciliation possible?

This paper proceeds by theorizing the technologies at play in residential school obfuscation of what Rifkin calls "indigenous forms of sex, gender, kinship . . . and eroticism" (5) through analysis of selected literary depictions by residential school survivors that focus on gender segregation and the shaming of the body.[4] I then assess the political fallout of such impositions through a reading of Cree poet Louise Bernice Halfe's "Nitotem." I argue that Halfe's poem depicts the disintegration of a young Cree man's sense of embodied personhood through shame, a process in which his body becomes instrumentalized as a weapon capable of assaulting both women and the very principles of kinship that hold his community together. The paper concludes by considering the potential for what Maoli scholar Ty P. Kāwika Tengan calls "embodied discursive action" (17) by Indigenous men in Canada to reaffirm bonds of kinship and enact cross-gender solidarities that might encourage Indigenous reterritorialization. A model of such action is offered by the Residential School Walkers, a group of predominantly young Cree men who walked 2,200 km from Cochrane, Ontario, to the Atlantic IRS TRC event in Halifax, Nova Scotia, in support of residential school survivors. The paper examines a variety of Indigenous contexts—including Gwich'in, Mi'kmaq, Inuvialuit, Maori, and Maoli—to demonstrate the widespread and systematic nature of colonial technologies of disembodiment; yet, having begun with the testimony of a Cree residential school survivor, the paper hinges on analysis of a poem by a Cree writer before culminating in discussion of the extra-literary, embodied actions of Cree men who, I argue, model what Cree scholar and poet Neal McLeod refers to as the "ideals of the *okihcitâwak* ('worthy men') from *kayâs* (long) ago" (*Gabriel's Beach* 10).[5]

Before I continue, I must explain that I choose to begin with a paraphrase of a survivor's testimony aware of the fraught ethics of witnessing. I was one of perhaps twenty witnesses encircling the intimate survivors' sharing circle in Halifax when this testimony was delivered directly across from where I was sitting. I took no notes at the time, but when I returned to my hotel room later that evening, I recorded recollections of the day: documentation, field notes, emotional debriefing. The testimony in question affected me a great deal—as it appeared visibly to affect others in the circle—and I have thought about it many times since October of 2011. It has also profoundly influenced the work on Indigenous masculinities in which I have been engaged since then. Thus, I feel it is necessary to acknowledge and honour that influence by engaging further with the words this survivor chose to share that day.

Although survivors are made aware that their "statement[s] will be audio and video recorded" and that all testimonies gathered in "Sharing Circles with the Survivor Committee" are therefore "public," such sessions are not available for streaming on the IRS TRC website, like testimonies offered before the "Commissioners' Sharing Panel[s]." For this reason, I could not return to and transcribe the testimony in the survivor's own words. I approached the IRS TRC media liaison to ask if a transcript of the testimony might be available and whether the IRS TRC had protocols through which researchers (or others) might contact specific survivors to seek permission to discuss their public testimonies in a respectful way. I was informed that there were no such protocols currently in place and that the testimony I sought was available in neither transcribed nor audio/visual format. If I wished to discuss this testimony, I thus needed to use my own words to express my memory of the survivor's statement, thereby risking misrepresenting her words and experiences or, worse, manipulating her testimony to forward the argument of this paper. As has been argued with relation to several international TRCs, the position of academic onlooker can be characterized by voyeurism, consumption, and lack of accountability—tensions amplified by my status as a settler scholar. I am aware, therefore, that the safest position ethically is to avoid discussing this testimony altogether.

However, I have been reminded in my discussions with Indigenous colleagues and friends that silence is not an apolitical stance and that ethical witnessing of trauma involves working toward the ideological and political changes that will create conditions in which justice becomes possible. At the close of the IRS TRC Regional Event in Victoria, Justice Murray Sinclair encouraged all of those present—Indigenous and non-Indigenous—to take their experiences of the event home to their families and communities and to share those memories in the service of change ("Closing Remarks" n. pag.). Because I feel the survivor testimony in question performs important work in understanding colonial impositions on Indigenous cosmologies of gender that will forward possibilities for politicized reconciliation, I include the paraphrase even as I know that doing so is ethically troublesome. As an anonymous survivor declares in *Breaking the Silence*, "My story is a gift. If I give you a gift and you accept that gift, then you don't go and throw that gift in the waste basket. You do something with it" (161). This paper is part of my effort to "do something" with this gift.

Breaking Bonds of Kinship

"It could be anytime in the 1920s or 1930s" (9), writes Gwich'in author Robert Arthur Alexie, announcing the representative nature of a young boy's arrival at residential school with his little sister in the 2002 novel *Porcupines and China Dolls*. The siblings are "herded into a building and separated: boys on one side, girls on the other. The young girl tries to go with her brother, but she's grabbed by a woman in a long black robe and pushed into another room. The last thing he hears is her cries followed by a slap, then silence" (10). "Sometime during his first month," Alexie continues, the young boy will "watch his sister speak the language and she will be hit, slapped or tweaked. He'll remember that moment for the rest of his life and will never forgive himself for not going to her rescue. It will haunt him" (12). The boy's feelings of powerlessness, guilt, and vicarious pain provide context for the dysfunctional gender dynamics in the novel's contemporary social terrain; they also resonate all too frequently with the testimonies of residential school survivors. Of the close to one hundred testimonies I have witnessed either in person or on the IRS TRC's podcasts,[6] the vast majority reference the pain of separation from siblings, also mentioned in testimonies found in several collections: *Resistance and Renewal* (1988) edited by Celia Haig-Brown, *Breaking the Silence* (1994) edited by the Assembly of First Nations, and *Finding My Talk* (2004) edited by Agnes Grant. Former Shubenacadie Indian Residential School survivor Isabelle Knockwood argues that traditionally, among the Mi'kmaq, "[o]lder brothers and sisters were absolutely required to look after their younger siblings. When they went to the Residential School, being unable to protect their younger brothers and sisters became a source of life-long pain" (60). At the Atlantic IRS TRC event, Keptin of the Mi'kmaq Grand Council Antle Denny elaborates, "We all come from a nation where family is the most important thing. As an older brother, you're taught to look after your younger brother and your sisters, and in these schools we could not even do that. When you look at the stories that I have heard, it makes me . . . quiver" (n. pag.).

In *The Circle Game*, Roland Chrisjohn and Sherri Young invoke Erving Goffman's term "permanent mortification" to theorize the lasting impact of the incapacity to protect loved ones from residential school violence.

Chrisjohn and Young demonstrate how the pain of witnessing "a physical assault upon someone to whom [one] has ties" can engender enduring shame or "the *permanent mortification* of having (and being known to have) taken no action" (Goffman qtd. in Chrisjohn and Young 93). The terminology is apt insofar as mortification is defined in *The Oxford English Dictionary* as both "humiliation" ("Mortification," def. II5) and "the action" of "bringing under control . . . one's appetites and passions" through "bodily pain or discomfort" ("Mortification," def. I1); it also evokes a sense of benumbing. Public displays of violence and humiliation were used in residential schools not only to produce a docile and obedient student population, but also, more insidiously, to damage empathy. The experience by which the young boy is "haunted" in Alexie's novel indeed begins as empathy—the vicarious torment of hearing his sister suffer. Yet shame becomes the cost of that empathy and ultimately works to condition its suppression. The initial pain at another's agony becomes contaminated by guilt and is thereby repositioned within the onlooker. Thus the burden of the perceived experience endures a forced migration from the primary victim to the onlooking loved one who is actively discouraged from future empathetic impulses by the trauma of the experience. While the act of suffering together has the potential to strengthen interpersonal connections—as Basil Johnston's celebration of the community forged among the boys at St. Peter Claver's Indian Residential School in *Indian School Days* attests—the institutional will was clearly to use such technologies to alienate the individual as completely as possible from social and familial ties and recreate her or him as a discrete, autonomous (albeit racially inferior and undereducated) individual within the Canadian settler state.

Within the rigidly patriarchal ideological space of the residential school, the corrosion of kinship bonds through permanent mortification undoubtedly bears gender implications. Inuvialuit writer Anthony Apakark Thrasher's autobiographical discussion of residential school social engineering instructively documents the ways that boys were taught to hate women and to view their own bodies as sinful. Thrasher writes:

> We were told not to play with the girls because it was a sin. I found this strange because I had played with girls before I came to school. At home I used to watch after my sisters Mona and Agnes. I even learned how to mix baby Agnes's milk. I loved them. But now I wasn't supposed to touch them and thinking about girls was supposed to be dirty…
>
> One day Sister Tebear from the girl's side of the school accused George, Charlie, Adam and me of sinning with the girls in the basement. We were all out

> at the playground at the time. But Sister Tebear pointed me out with the three other boys and we were brought in before Sister Gilbert and Father L'Holgouach. We were strapped to a bed and whipped with a three-foot watch chain made of silver. Sister did the whipping and Father okayed it. My back was bleeding, but something else burned more. Shame. It was branded in my mind. After this the silver chain never left me. Even to this day you can see the scar on my back. (23)

Thrasher depicts a series of assaults upon his youthful understandings of gender, embodiment, and propriety. His role as a responsible brother is made sinful and he is "protected" from the feminine by segregation. When he is actually able to engage in embodied acts of youthful play that are gender inclusive, such actions are disciplined in a manner that insists upon the inherent sinfulness of the flesh and reinforces hierarchical binaries of male over female and spirit over body. These teachings are, in effect, etched upon Thrasher's skin in scar tissue. The body is marked by punishment as a physical reminder of the supposed filthiness of desire, a conception of desire that denies the existence of a sensual that is not always already sexual. The shame Thrasher evokes here is layered: he is shamed for the supposed sin of sexual desire, which Sister Gilbert seeks to beat out of his body, *and* for his weakness (both physically and in relation to the biopolitics of Aklavik Roman Catholic Residential School) as a young male unable to fend off the wrath of a female overseer. And as Sister Coté demonstrates dramatically, the boys are taught to perceive women as inconsequential, inferior, and grotesque: "She lined us boys up against the wall and showed us what she thought of girls—'Winnie, Wilma, Rosie, Mary, Jean, Margie, Lucy, Annabelle. . . this is what I think of them!' And she spat on the floor and stamped her foot on it. 'That's what I think of them!'" (23).[7]

Survivor accounts from the IRS TRC and elsewhere indicate that Sister Coté's pedagogy of gender is far from uncommon. Knockwood, for instance, recalls the nuns at Shubenacadie providing

> their own version of sex education, which was that all bodily functions were dirty—dirty actions, dirty noises, dirty thoughts, dirty mouth, dirty, dirty, dirty girls. [Sister] took one girl who had just started her first period into the cloakroom and asked her if she did dirty actions. The little girl said, "I don't know what dirty actions are Sister. Do you mean playing in the mud?" [Sister] took the girl's hand and placed it between her legs and began moving it up and down and told her, "Now, you are doing dirty actions. Make sure you tell the priest when you go to confession." (52)

What makes Thrasher's depiction of the nuns' denigration of the feminine particularly troubling is its contextualization within a narrative that ultimately betrays some of the anti-woman views thrust upon its author as a boy. For example, later in his narrative, Thrasher glosses a sexual encounter involving six Inuit men and two female prostitutes with the comment, "These nice-looking women had less morality than the most primitive people you could ever find" (74-75). "Entirely absent from Thrasher's recollection," as I argue elsewhere, "is any self-reflexivity about the 'morality' of the men implicated in this sexual act" (*Magic Weapons* 97). Rather, Thrasher falls back upon chauvinistic teachings, like those of Sister Coté, that paint women as the source of all transgression. My point is that through the residential school's refusal to affirm familial bonds between siblings, its segregation of male students from female students, and its indoctrination of Indigenous youth with patriarchal Euro-Christian dogma, the Canadian government sought to alienate Indigenous men, like Thrasher, from nation-specific understandings of gender. In this way, the Canadian government worked to efface "traditions of residency and social formations that can be described as *kinship* [which] give shape to particular modes of governance and land tenure" (Rifkin 8). The violent inculcation of shame was the primary tool in this process of social engineering, and the conscription of Indigenous men into a Western regime of misogyny and related violence against women have been two of its most damaging and protracted effects.

The Manufacture of Gendered Violence

Halfe's inaugural collection *Bear Bones and Feathers* (1994) explores the legacies of colonial interventions in Cree cosmologies of gender. A former student of Blue Quills Residential School in St. Paul, Alberta, Halfe includes several poems that explicitly or implicitly locate residential schooling among these interventions, paying close attention to how the stigmatization of Indigenous bodies encourages intimate violence. Poems like "Ditch Bitch" and "Valentine Dialogue" track the internalization by Indigenous women of racist fantasies about the grotesque nature of their physicality—"My brown tits / day shame me / My brown spoon / fails me" ("Valentine Dialogue" lines 22-25)[8]—while poems like "Tribal Warfare" and "Stones" track the development in Indigenous men of anxiety and even panic about physical inadequacy:

Men day
hang dere balls
all over da place
. . . .
scream at dem
beg dem

> pray to dem
> g ah sh
> even
> swear at dem. ("Stones" 1-3, 11-16)

Each of these gendered corrosions of self-image works to compromise sensual intimacy and collaterally to endanger members of Indigenous communities; Halfe's poems are populated by several female figures whose corroded self-worth heightens their vulnerability to the violence that erupts out of male characters' feelings of inadequacy.

Halfe examines this dynamic most closely in the poem "Nitotem," which offers a chilling portrait of a young boy abused at residential school who returns to his home reserve where he rapes women. The poem begins with Halfe's speaker observing the intensification of the boy's isolation through residential school violence. Sister Superior "squeezed and slapped" the boy's ears until they "swelled, scabbed and scaled" and he could no longer "hear the sister shouting / and clapping her orders at him / or the rest of the little boys" (2, 4, 5-7). The assault on his ears—which is emphasized by the alliterative connection among the action, its perpetrator, and its effects—blocks both the boy's sensory experience of the world and his social connection with the other boys. Deafened to his environment, he becomes imprisoned within his own body and unable to participate in the homosocial community of boys, a separation stressed formally by the line break between "him" and "the rest of the little boys." His exile is then consummated at the poem's close when the boy-turned-young-man walks with "shoulder slightly stooped," never looking "directly at anyone. / When spoken to he mumble[s] into his chest. / His black hair cover[s] his eyes" (30-33).

The third and fourth stanzas provide the turn in the poem that locates a causal relationship between the shaming of the body, the derogation of the feminine, and the sexual abuse in residential schools, on one hand, and the eruption of misogynistic violence into Indigenous communities, on the other:

> He suffered in silence
> in the dark. A hand muffled his mouth
> while the other snaked his wiener. He had no
> other name, knew no other word. Soon it was no
> longer just the hand but the push, just a gentle
> push at first, pushing, pushing. Inside the
> blanket he sweated and felt the wings
> of pleasure, inside his chest the breath burst
> pain, pleasure, shame. Shame.
>
> * * *

> On the reserve he had already raped two
> women, the numbers didn't matter.
> Sister Superior was being punished. It was
> Father who said it was woman's fault
> and that he would go to hell. (16-29)

In one sense, the three symbols separating these stanzas represent a temporal shift that emphasizes the intergenerational legacies of residential school abuse, as the sexual violence endured by the young boy spills out into the community. Yet I argue there is more to it. The three symbols Halfe uses to formally fracture the poem hint at the three amputations that I am arguing were enacted at residential school to subdue empathy in the service of Indigenous deterritorialization—firstly, the severing of mind from body (and the concomitant derogation of the body); secondly, the severing of male from female (and the concomitant derogation of the feminine); and thirdly, the severing of the individual from communal and territorial roles and responsibilities (and the concomitant derogation of kinship and the land).

The separation of mind and body in "Nitotem" appears legible through psychoanalytic and trauma theories that view the suppression of bodily experience as a dissociative response to trauma.[9] Unlike the suppression of bodily sensation as a means of escaping cognitive recognition of acute violation, however, the fissure engendered between subjectivity and embodied experience in Halfe's poem is not momentary but chronic. The opening and closing lines of the poem map the suppression of the boy's sensory experience via assaults by Sister Superior that compromise his hearing while the weight of shame draws his face to his chest, delimiting his capacity to see. At the same time, his embodied subjectivity is further threatened by making private moments into a public spectacle: "Here everyone looked / and laughed at your private parts. / Soon they too were no longer private" (13-15). With his private parts no longer private, the boy is coaxed to perceive his body as distinct from his personhood.

The stanzas quoted above then metamorphose this crisis from the sensory to the sensual. The boy's conflicted experiences of "pain" and "pleasure" provoke confusion within the dogmatic ideological space of the residential school. Halfe's frantic language of "pushing, pushing" and "sweat[ing]," which leads to the "wings of pleasure," propels the stanza into the experiential chaos of the "breath burst[ing] / pain, pleasure, shame. Shame." The second "Shame" here comes down like a verdict, carving the poem in two, both formally and temporally. The last of three sets of alliterative pairs, this final term—repeated—stands alone, its own sentence (in both grammatical and judicial senses). "Shame" manifests as a tool of erasure cutting the boy off from the pleasures of the body, enacting a symbolic amputation—or one might even say a symbolic beheading—that denies integrated, embodied experience through the coercive imposition of a form of Cartesian dualism. The mind is forced to treat the body as that which is other than self, creating conditions in which, as the following stanza depicts, the body can become a weapon.

Disembodiment and Hypermasculinity

The coerced disembodiment of Indigenous men is further complicated in popular cultural representations by the semiotic treatment of Indigenous males primarily as bodies. As Brendan Hokowhitu argues in the context of Maori masculinities, the synecdochic stand-in of Indigenous male body for Indigenous male-embodied agentive subject demonstrates

> the link between enlightenment rationalism and colonization, where the enlightened reason of European man, in a Cartesian sense, was allegorically opposed to the physicality of the unenlightened, the savage. The process of colonization did not mean [Indigenous men] were to reach the echelons of enlightened reason, however: rather what was imperative to the colony was the domestication of their physicality, the suppression of their passions, the nobilization of their inherent violence. (2322)

Colonization has borne many of the same tenets in North America, collapsing Indigenous men with physicality while technologies of social engineering like residential schools seek to limit embodied experience and replace it with fear of and revulsion toward the body. Hence the absolute panic revealed in maniacal punishments of bedwetting, erections, and vomiting documented in the historical literature on residential schooling.[10] Brian Klopotek notes that "[f]or at least the last century, hypermasculinity has been one of the foremost attributes of the Indian world that whites have imagined" (251). Elizabeth Cromley adds, however, that although it has been conceived as "physically courageous and bold," the "manhood of the Indian" in popular cultural representations has remained tethered to "ruthless violence" (269). As Daniel Heath Justice argues in a recent interview, Indigenous male bodies have come to be viewed as "capable of and a source only of violence and harm. When that's the only model you have. . . . What a desolation, right? When your body, the only way your maleness is or should be rendered is through violence, through harm, through corrupted power . . . it's just tragic" (n. pag.). Justice adds that according to "the models of hyper-masculine maleness that we get—if the male body isn't giving harm, it's taking pleasure. It's always extractive. It's either assaultive or extractive.

One or the other, there's nothing else. And that is such a catastrophic failure of imagination, as well as a huge ethical breach" (n. pag.).

I argue that the ideological fallout of such colonial imaginings of Indigenous masculinity undergirds a paradox within assimilative social engineering in Canada: on the one hand, the inherent physicality and violence of those racialized and gendered as Indigenous males has been continually reinscribed through the media, literature, film, and art, while on the other hand, violence and shame have been wielded systematically through residential schooling, the Indian Act, and the legal system to discourage sensual, embodied experience. I contend that some of the legacies of trauma coming to light in the testimonies of residential school survivors during the IRS TRC can be understood, at least partially, as a consequence of treating those racialized and gendered as Indigenous males *only* as bodies (without "the advanced intellectual and moral capacity to master their masculine passions" [Bederman 85]), then systematically manufacturing disavowals of the body through shame. Among the effects of such pernicious pedagogies is the recasting of Indigenous male bodies as distinct from subjectivity and selfhood, as tools to be used and discarded. And this coerced *dis*integration—this state of disembodiment at the collision point among Cartesian dualism, imposed racial inferiority, and corporeal disgust—simultaneously works to sustain violence through the instrumentalization of the alienated body.

Indeed, the fracturing of mind and body, as depicted in Halfe's poem, is not strictly a consequence of individual experiences of abuse—although these are undoubtedly at play—nor is it merely a product of Judeo-Christian reverence for the soul over the body. Rather, it is a key weapon within the dispossessive arsenal of Canadian colonial policy, which seeks to deterritorialize Indigenous nations and corrode Indigenous sovereignties by compromising embodied connections to place and to kin. In residential school pedagogies of gender, shame is activated through the derogation of the body, coercing children's humiliation with their physical selves in order to produce docile subjects. At the same time, this shaming of the body constitutes a primary tactic for removing physical beings from ecosystemic relations with their environment. As the sensory capacity of the body is assaulted—as evidenced in the "scabbed" and "scal[ing]" ears of the title character in Halfe's poem—the potential for ongoing experiential connection to place is suppressed. Thus, it isn't just the physical removal of the child from ancestral territories and communal connections that facilitated the Canadian colonial agenda, but also the targeted attacks on the child's frameworks for interacting with the other-than-human. In much the same way that the body becomes instrumentalized as a tool of the alienated agentive subject (body ≠ self), so the land becomes coercively alienated as an exploitable resource. Rather than upholding an ethos of reciprocity in which "the tribal web of kinship rights and responsibilities . . . link[s] the People, the land, and the cosmos together in an ongoing and dynamic system of mutually affecting relationships" (Justice, "Go Away" 151), residential school technologies of social engineering were mobilized to isolate the individual student as discrete, disembodied, and deterritorialized. If one is a disembodied soul, one can be anywhere, but if one is an embodied individual indigenous to a specific territory and tribal community, one inhabits a series of relationships to that place along with the roles and responsibilities of ecosystemic persistence. To be clear, I contend that the bodies of Indigenous youth have been deliberately targeted for violence and humiliation within (and beyond) residential schools for the primary purpose of suppressing embodied experiences of the land and of kinship. And the denial of these embodied experiences was calculated to extinguish Indigenous modes of social formation and territoriality. To dispossess Indigenous youth of their capacity for integrated, embodied experience has been to dispossess Indigenous nations of land and sovereignty.

Both fictional and (auto)biographical depictions of residential school testify to the debilitating effects of alienation from lands and land-based practices. The title character in Maria Campbell's "Jacob" is described as "jus plain pitiful" upon his release from residential school, because "[h]e can['t] talk his own language" and "he don know how to live in da bush" (lines 107-10). Thrasher explains: "Every time I'd go home from school I saw older boys who . . . couldn't survive. . . . [I]n winter teenaged boys who should be able to trap and hunt had to rely on their parents. . . . Some also forgot how to speak Inuvialuktun" (84). In *Indian School Days*, Basil Johnston portrays the year of his release from residential school as being characterized by the struggle for "survival," recounting several abortive attempts to generate means of subsistence from selling chopped wood to hunting raccoons to skinning squirrels. In each case, his lack of territorial knowledge and his disconnection from the community ensure failure until he ultimately determines that it would simply "be better to go back to school" (178). In this way, Johnston's narrative tracks the perverse effectiveness of residential school technologies of deterritorialization. It is perhaps with similar struggles in mind that Campbell's speaker exclaims, "No matter how many stories we tell / we'll never be able to tell / what dem schools dey done to dah peoples / an dere relations" (103-06).

The title of Halfe's poem, "Nitotem," is translated as "my relative, could be anyone" (*Bear* 128). What's interesting about this translation is that terminology pertaining to Cree-specific systems of kinship that extend beyond the "reproductive notions of transmitted biological substance" (Rifkin 9) actually devolves through the conditions depicted in the poem into a marker of anonymity. I asked Cree poet and scholar Neal McLeod to elaborate on the meaning of the term, and he explained in a personal letter that in contemporary Cree, the stem "-tôtê" denotes "friend" and the "-m" ending denotes "something very dear or close to you," while in classical Cree, kinship terms that include "-tôtêm" are used to formally address one's relations within the kinship network—here the prefix "ni" indicates first person possession (n. pag.). Linda Goulet adds that "nitotem" carries with it a connotation of intimacy; it suggests "those to whom I am open" (n. pag.). Whereas the identifier "my relative" should affirm interpersonal connections and clarify the individual's roles and responsibilities within a kinship structure, here the term fails completely to identify the poem's focal character: he "could be anyone." The systematic assault on Indigenous cosmologies of gender and Indigenous kinship structures enacted through the separation of boys and girls, the shaming of the body, and the corrosion of empathy creates conditions in which the cyclical violence depicted in Halfe's poem can proliferate. The number of women raped "didn't matter" because the disembodied, alienated, and wounded title character fails to recognize their humanity—he fails to recognize them as kin. Having been robbed of the capacity for integrated spiritual, physical, emotional, and mental experiences, he no longer perceives himself as a participatory element of the world he inhabits; his empathy is destroyed. In this way, the violent suppression of embodied experience along with the manufacture of gender animosity fractures and disintegrates not only the individual victim of residential school violence, but also the community, the nation, and the expansive web of kinship relations—largely through shame. These are the legacies of over a century of residential schooling in Canada that need to be addressed if meaningful reconciliation is to become possible.

Embodied Discursive Action and Radical Reterritorialization

In his presentation at the Fall Convocation of the University of Winnipeg in 2011, Chair of the IRS TRC Justice Murray Sinclair indicated that for survivors of residential schooling, "the greatest damage from the schools is not the damaged relationship with non-Aboriginal people or Canadian society, or the government or the churches, but the damage done . . . to the relationships within their families" (n. pag.). Sinclair argued, therefore, that "[r]econciliation *within* the families of survivors is the cornerstone for all other discussions about reconciliation." To conclude, I posit that in their 2,200 km trek from Cochrane, Ontario, to Halifax, Nova Scotia, the Residential School Walkers performed three mutually formative reconciliatory acts that serve the vision Sinclair describes. The first involves honouring the body as integral to and indivisible from the agentive self. The second involves affirming responsibilities to and roles within the family—with "family" construed in accordance with Cree principles of kinship that extend beyond the limits of nuclear family biology. And the third involves (re)connecting with the land as an active principle of kinship.

Patrick Etherington Jr., a twenty-eight-year-old man from the Moose Cree First Nation, explained to reporters during the walk that when the generation preceding his "went to residential school, they became hard[;] they didn't know how to love and they passed this on to us" (qtd. in "Walkers" n. pag.). He added on a personal note, "My dad and me, for a while there, the love was always there but sometimes he's never showed it" (qtd. in Narine n. pag.). In an online testimonial posted on YouTube, Etherington Jr. elaborates:

> When they went to residential school, the survivors had to become tough. They had to become like robots . . . in order to survive. And when they left the residential schools, a lot of them didn't deal with it. . . . So by not dealing with it, they actually passed it down to us, the younger generation.
>
> And I see it in our communities all the time. . . . We're still like robots almost. We don't know how to feel. We don't know how to express ourselves. I see that all the time on my reserve. It's starting to show its ugly face now too, in my home community of Moose Factory, through suicide. . . .
>
> So that is the main reason I'm walking: the issue of suicide. We have to try to break this cycle. We have to learn to feel again. We've got to learn how to love. Because those survivors were deprived of it. They were deprived of love when they were at those schools. (qtd. in CSSSPNQL n. pag.)

By identifying the marathon walk as a strategy for addressing the emotional and sensory legacies of residential school experiences, Etherington Jr. affirms the capacity of embodied actions to self-consciously reintegrate minds and bodies and to foster emotional literacy—with learning to "feel again" maintaining both sensory and affective valences. In his welcoming address from the IRS TRC national event in Montreal, Mohawk elder John Cree drew upon the metaphor of the journey to express the need for emotional and physical (re)integration. He stated that the longest distance a man will ever travel is the distance required to bring together his head and his heart (n. pag.). Cree's words are particularly resonant with the Walkers' journey, which is both literal and symbolic, involving the physical movement of wilful bodies over territory while affirming struggles within agentive subjects toward integrated personhood that honours embodied persistence and feeling.

The Walkers' movement upon the land can therefore be usefully understood as what Tengan calls an "embodied discursive practice," in which "men come to perform and know themselves and their bodies in a new way" (151). For Tengan, "bodily experience, action, and movement [play] a fundamental role in the creation of new subjectivities of culture and gender" (87). The young men of the Residential School Walkers use the "bodily experience" of agentive (as opposed to forced) "movement" over territory to better "know themselves and their bodies"; in this way, they contest the fiction of Cartesian dualism and resist the colonial pressures of both coerced disembodiment and forced relocation. Through walking and speaking publicly, these men strive to enact, embody, and model non-dominative yet empowered subjectivities as Cree men, subjectivities that honour the capacity to "feel" and to "love" while exhibiting physical strength, stamina, and masculine solidarity.

By sharing the walk with his father, Patrick Etherington Sr., and his father's wife, Frances R. Whiskeychan, Etherington Jr. engaged in locatable actions designed to reclaim the intimacy and familial connection residential school policy functioned to suppress. However, the vision of family that the Walkers trekked to "reconcile" exceeds the biologically determinate (and patriarchal) conceptions of family imposed on Indigenous nations by the Indian Act.[11] At the Atlantic IRS TRC national event, the Etheringtons and Whiskeychan addressed Robert Hunter, James Kioke, and Samuel Koosees Jr.—the other young men from their community who accompanied them on the journey—by familial pronouns as sons and brothers, thereby evoking Cree ethics of kinship. Etherington Jr. traced the intergenerational contours of such ethics, proclaiming, "I'm doing it for the Survivors—but more for the youth. There is a big problem with suicide in my community. The youth are lost" (qtd. in "Walkers" n. pag.). Reaching out to the generations preceding and following his own, Etherington Jr. signalled inclusive notions of communal solidarity. He added in Halifax, "I walked for my buddies who did it and for those that have attempted it" (qtd. in Sison n. pag.). Constructing their embodied actions in a narrative of communal purpose, the Walkers exercised responsibilities embedded in Cree ethics of kinship to enable Cree (and Indigenous) continuance. In this way, this group of young Cree men, whose bonds were cemented along stretches of open road between Cochrane and Halifax, served what McLeod identifies as the "ideals of the *okihcitâwak* ('worthy men')" who "measured their lives by ideas of bravery, courage, and selflessness" (*Gabriel's Beach* 10, 105). The connection to Indigenous warrior societies was certainly not lost on the men themselves, who were photographed throughout their journey in T-shirts depicting images of nineteenth-century Indigenous warriors, displaying the word "Warrior" in bold letters, or bearing the Mohawk warrior flag.

The community of worthy young men forged on the journey appears to embody principles of kinship, and, as Rifkin argues, the affirmation of Indigenous "social formations that can be described as *kinship*" simultaneously serves Indigenous modes of territoriality to which kinship roles "give shape" (8). To affirm Cree kinship is to affirm Cree relations to the land. That is why the particular form taken by the Walkers' public action is so significant. The 2,200 km journey is not merely symbolic. It is a testament to embodied relations with the landscape; it is an assertion of ongoing Indigenous presence, an expression of resilience, and an affirmation of belonging. In short, this journey constitutes an act of radical reterritorialization that honours and reclaims the land through embodied discursive actions that simultaneously honour and reclaim the body. And, of course, both land and body are essential elements of personhood from which residential schooling sought to alienate Indigenous youth. Ironically, the opportunities created at IRS TRC events for the Walkers to discuss the experiences of their journey are often characterized by a peculiar stillness that masks the physicality of the endeavour. For example, in Halifax, an ad hoc session was organized to honour the Walkers at the close of the survivors' sharing circle where the testimony that begins this paper was offered. In this windowless testimonial space, each of the Walkers was encouraged to translate his or her experiences of the monumental trek into words. Although the testimonies proved eloquent and powerful, the disjuncture between the physicality and motion of their content and the stillness of their form proved somewhat unsettling.[12] As a useful supplement to these testimonies, Samuel Koosees Jr. has since posted a video of photographs from the journey that emphasizes the solidarity among the Walkers, the beauty of the territories through which they travelled, and the joy, laughter, and feeling engendered through their embodied discursive actions.[13] Of particular interest here are photographs in which the men lampoon the touristic monuments of colonially imposed provincial borders.

In one case, the four men are shown in subsequent images leaping towards then hanging from the "Welcome to New Brunswick" sign (5:07-5:16). In another, tricks of perspective are employed to portray Etherington Jr. crouched and apparently holding the miniature bodies of Samuel Koosees Jr. and James Kioke in either hand in front of the "Welcome to Nova Scotia" sign (6:17-6:28). Each of these photos is preceded immediately by images that evoke masculine strength. In the first case, the four young men are shown in a self-portrait, walking together in solidarity and purpose with the leading Walker holding a ceremonial staff. In the second case, the comic photo at the Nova Scotia border is preceded directly by images of each of the four men shooting arrows at a target. Juxtaposing images that evoke spectres of Indigenous warriorhood with images that humorously exploit perspectival shifts to trouble the solidity of Canadian colonial borders, Koosees' video engages in a creative remapping that honours the strength, humour, and agency of the Residential School Walkers along their reterritorializing trek.

At the Atlantic IRS TRC event, Etherington Jr. described long stretches of silence as the group travelled the edge of the highway. As they walked and walked, he noted that each of his companions' head was bowed to the earth. Only upon reflection did he realize that he too had his head down, much like the figure in Halfe's poem who "walk[s], shoulders slightly stooped / and never look[s] directly at anyone" ("Nitotem" 30-31). "What are we doing?" Etherington Jr. recalled asking himself before commanding his gaze upward to survey the world around him. "And it was beautiful," he concluded (n. pag.). Etherington Jr.'s words, it seems to me, offer a visual image that resonates with survivor testimonies that document the debilitating imposition of shame as well as the struggle to regain senses of self-worth. Walking in solidarity with his kin and raising his eyes to honour the landscape, Etherington Jr. rehearses an embodied cultural pride that colonial history has sought to deny him. The action itself is a physical expression of selfhood and cultural integrity, and its public avowal at the IRS TRC heightens its resistant force while extending its pedagogical shadow. The model of non-dominative Cree manhood enacted and articulated by Etherington Jr. and his companions offers both "survivors" and "the youth" a prototype for the reformation of what Tengan calls "masculinities defined through violence" (151), in a manner that refuses to disavow masculine strength, physicality, and agency. To borrow the words of Justice, "That's a warrior's act, as well, to know what's needed to be done and to do it boldly and without need of response. To fight against shame through love" (Personal interview n. pag.).

Etherington Jr. saved his final comments in the sharing circle at the Halifax event for residential school survivors—those targeted most directly by the colonial technologies of dis-integration, dis-embodiment, and deterritorialization discussed in this paper. "This is what I've done for you," he said. "This is what I've *chosen* to do for you." With the insertion of the word "chosen," Etherington Jr. affirms ongoing individual agency even as he declares himself accountable to others in an expression of kinship responsibilities. This choice, this willed performance of embodied discursive action, attests to the ultimate failure of residential school social engineering. Like the words of the anonymous survivor whose testimony began this article, Etherington Jr.'s words and actions are a gift to be honoured. Etherington Jr. refuses the identity of inevitable victimry, self-defining not as a second-generation product of residential school violence, of the denigration of the body, and of the obfuscation of gender complementarity, but as one voice among many that would call the elements of peoplehood back to balance.

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NOTES

1 See Assembly of First Nations (42) for a parallel example.

2 This system is connected to class as well as race. The same system that works to empower "pure" women—like nuns and middle and upper class girls and women—renders other women impure and sexually available to men.

3 For the purposes of this paper, ecosystemic territoriality refers to an abiding relationship of reciprocal knowing with(in) a specific constellation of geographic places; such relationships are enacted and affirmed through embodied practices and rendered meaningful through the embedding of personal experiences and stories within narratives of intergenerational inhabitation. By appending the term ecosystemic, I seek to affirm the interdependency of the human and the other-than-human in specific geographical spaces (while acknowledging human propensities to traverse ecosystems). See also Claire Colebrook's *Understanding Deleuze* and Paul Liffman's "Indigenous Territorialities."

4 Robert Arthur Alexie, Anthony Apakark Thrasher, and Louise Bernice Halfe are all residential school survivors.

5 The focus of this paper is on Indigenous men specifically—with full recognition that all genders are mutually affecting and affected in a relational manner. For critical discussions of targeted colonial disruptions of Indigenous women's roles and responsibilities, see Andrea Smith's *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide*, Mishuana Goeman's *Mark My Words: Native Women Mapping Our Nations*, and Kim Anderson's *A Recognition of Being: Reconstructing Native Womanhood*.

6 IRS TRC podcasts are found at www.livestream.com/trc_cvr?folder as well as through the IRS TRC national event pages at www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=92.

7 The nuns were themselves, of course, subject to patriarchal discipline within the hierarchical power structure of the Catholic Church and the Western sex/gender system more broadly. The behaviours reported by Thrasher, Knockwood, and Alexie were complexly informed and circumscribed by a Western sex/gender system that has treated the body as both symbolically female and the source of sin. In accordance with this causal structure, the female is configured as the source of evil and purity becomes contingent on the disavowal of the female. Thus, within the gendered theological structure in which the nuns functioned daily, the female is perceived as responsible for sin and is hated for arousing sinful thoughts in men who have vowed to remain pure—ideological conditions that undoubtedly affect the anxious and violent actions of the nuns depicted above.

8 In a recent interview, Halfe explains that Indigenous women in Saskatchewan have "reclaimed the word 'brown spoon'"—which has been used historically to denigrate Indigenous women's sexuality—as a way of talking about and affirming the vagina. By discussing "not only the power of spoon but the community of spoon where people are nurtured from it, where we give feast to the people, they lick it, they nurture themselves with it, and they give birth from it," these women celebrate the agentive power of Indigenous women's sexuality and work toward conditions in which Indigenous women's sensual desire will be naturalized and honoured; they reposition Indigenous women as desiring subjects rather than mere objects of male sexual desire. "The healthy men," Halfe concludes, "know that what is between our legs will devour them" (Personal interview n. pag.).

9 In the Oxford *Dictionary of Psychology*, Andrew M. Colman defines "dissociation" as the "partial or total disconnection between memories of the past, awareness of identity and of immediate sensations, and control of bodily movements, often resulting from traumatic experiences, intolerable problems, or disturbed relationships" (n. pag.). Evidence of trauma's causal role in the instigation of "disconnection" between cognitive registry and "immediate sensations" is amply supplied by a number of articles found in *The Journal of Trauma & Dissociation*. See also "Dissociation and Trauma" by Peter Fonagy and Mary Target and "The Causal Relationship between Dissociation and Trauma: A Critical Review" by T. Giesbrecht and H. Merckelbach.

10 Such coerced disavowals of the body occurred among female students as well, as evidenced by performative shaming around menses and similarly maniacal punishments of bedwetting and vomiting. See, for example, Knockwood's discussion of "sex education" for the female students at Shubenacadie, quoted in the "Breaking Bonds of Kinship" section of this paper. My effort here is not to suggest a fundamental difference in colonial attitudes toward Indigenous female and male bodies, but rather to focus critical attention on the particular ramifications of such treatment on male-identified populations who have endured residential schooling.

11 See Bonita Lawrence's "Gender, Race, and the Regulation of Native Identity in Canada and the United States: An Overview" for a more thorough account of just how wide-reaching and multiple these incursions were.

12 Having witnessed the preceding survivors' sharing circle, I stayed in the room to attend the Residential School Walkers special session of the IRS TRC in Halifax. When I say that the tension between stasis and motion proved "unsettling," I'm describing my own experience of the session along with my reflections on it after the fact.

13 The video can be found on YouTube at www.youtube.com/watch?v=PrVK1wsraow.

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Laisha Rosnau

That feeling

Run your body through the lake—
morning, afternoon or evening, make it
once a day, at least once. Then tremble, stain
the dock like the last minutes of a fish, open
your mouth, gaping, tongue agog, drink
sky like berry-filled birds that wheel in air
and then drop, drunk into bushes
again; they want more.

Garden tools and knives can look the same
colour as the ground until it rains
at the same moment the sun shines,
and then they glint like stars. The tricks
light can play before the sun gives in
to the smooth pillows of hilltop.
A boat tears a strip down the lake,
sears us with sound, and we feel lonely

because we were made this way, made
for ourselves, for each other, and for clouds
that muster enough oomph to push up off the lake
into dark sky, half-heartedly cover constellations.
I guess that this taut gullet, the way we shudder
when we swallow and swallow again
anchors us to something, a sense
of somewhere inside of both of us, a
sense of something else. That feeling, I mean.

(last line is from Simon Armitage's "It Ain't What You Do,
It's What It Does To You")

Ryan Melsom

A (Queer) Souvenir of Canada

Douglas Coupland's Transformative National Symbols

While Douglas Coupland is famous for labelling the post-Boomers "Generation X" in his eponymous 1991 novel, he has written prolifically ever since. Described by some as a zeitgeist writer—one whose writing is "saturated with precise period detail" (Tate 16)—he has recently turned his attention to a clichéd Canadian question that has been around as long as the country itself: what does it mean to be Canadian? Although he is clearly alert to the extensive scholarly debate on the matter, as a visual artist and creative writer, he has chosen to explore the question by writing on iconic figures and objects—people and objects that for him signify Canadianness. Though he has recently delved into some fascinating biographies of Canadian icons, I would like to focus specifically on his obsession with souvenirs—the trinkets, knickknacks, and gewgaws that at once structure and clutter a national imagination. Some have argued that Coupland's souvenirs provide a reductive view of the nation. I argue that they actually embody complex attempts to negotiate the writer's own sense of self in the context of what he envisions to be truly Canadian and that this complexity poses a challenge to a conservative nationalism. In particular, the film adaptation of his two books titled *Souvenir of Canada* reveals Coupland's unease when it comes to situating his own biography within the nation. This in turn highlights the awkwardness, indeed queerness, of the idea of nation itself. I define "queerness" loosely as a destabilization of categories of the traditional/non-traditional through tropes of irony, parody, appropriation, ambiguity, and revision.

The *Souvenir of Canada* books and film[1] analyze Canadian identity as it emerges through objects, practices, and events—what Coupland loosely and ironically calls "souvenirs." From the near-obsolete stubby beer bottle to the beloved male winter pastime of peeing one's name in the snow, Coupland picks out images that, when combined, begin to form a comical and sometimes profound picture of what makes Canadians tick. He calls these the nation's "secret insider-only handshakes" (*Souvenir* film). His temporary art installation "Canada House" is specifically designed to be "an environment that only Canadians will understand" (*Souvenir* film). Canada House forms a central part of both the film and the second *Souvenir* book, transforming a supposedly average Canadian home into a parodic visual playground. Notably, his playful tongue-in-cheek nationalism is no stranger to criticism.

Liam Lacey, a reviewer for the *Globe and Mail*, lambasted Coupland when the *Souvenir of Canada* film came out in 2006. While Lacey acknowledges the film as a "slight, and slightly amusing, take on . . . national culture," the reviewer claims that Coupland makes "certain coercive generalizations" about Canadians and "offers his family stories as proof of the generalizations" (n. pag.). Numerous references to "the average Canadian," "all Canadians," and "most Canadians" serve as evidence in Lacey's case that Coupland is obsessed with pinning down a specifically Anglocentric, even implicitly racist, version of Canadian identity. Ultimately, the film's reductive nationalism is supposed to reflect the core belief "that Canadians' souls are tied to an identification with encounters with 'the wild'" (Lacey n. pag.). This assessment lumps Coupland in with Canadian critics from the fifties, sixties, and seventies, who imagined one's relationship to wilderness as the quintessential Canadian producer of meaning. Most of Coupland's writing is solidly set in urban environments, but it is worth reflecting on the peculiar way Coupland constructs "encounters with the wild."

At a glance, everywhere in the *Souvenir of Canada* books and film, Coupland does indeed seem obsessed with images of essentialized Canadianness, and this, as Lacey notes, appears to be inextricably linked to the wilderness and the land itself. The most obvious expression of this version of Canadianness is in the dedication in the first *Souvenir* book to Coupland's father: "a more Canadian man is harder to imagine, and to follow in his footsteps is the deepest of honours" (3). As represented by the film and books, Coupland's father is a masculine hero of sorts, who hunts moose, flies planes into the wilderness, and even faces a waterspout head-on while buckled by a belt to a tree. Put simply, he is represented as the embodied heroic stereotype of masculinity, and this in turn becomes the ultimate expression of Canada.

However, while the mention of an essential "Canadian man" suggests a desire for a stable, coherent category, the exact means by which Coupland seeks to follow in his father's footsteps are not nearly as clear. In one passage from the first *Souvenir* book, Coupland reflects on the relationship between Canadian myths and consumption of Canada as a brand, arriving at the conclusion that

> [w]e have to watch out, because our reservoir of myths is far smaller and far more fragile than those of some other nations. Once the supplies dry up, they dry up. What happens then is that you start recycling myths, which turn into clichés; and before you know it, history has turned into nothing more than clip art. (7)

If the nation's reservoir of myths is so small and fragile, then a key set of questions rests at the core of the *Souvenir*: why do the film and books resort so consistently to stereotypes of Canadianness? If he is supposedly aware of the way that clichés reduce identity to "clip art," then how can he be so oblivious to the reductions he himself appears to be producing? If he is resisting the country and its history being "processed and sold back to us as a product" (7), then why does he seem to swoon with unabashed joy over trivial consumer objects like Kraft Dinner, Eaton's catalogues, and hockey-fight videos? Beyond this, how can he be so insincere as to place these trivial commentaries alongside comments on more serious nation-shaping topics such as the FLQ crisis and the racist histories of Aboriginal affairs?

To find some answers to these questions, it helps to begin with Coupland's own vision for his project. If, as he suggests, "Canada's composed of thousands of secret, insider-only handshakes" (*Souvenir* film), the question that I think resists the kind of critique put forward by Lacey is what it means to be an "insider" in Canada. Does anyone know? Coupland says he wants to find these shared symbols and signs of Canadianness, but does he? Can he? Is there an experience that, independent of all context, could be said to be truly Canadian? While the book may be useful for those seeking to navigate the unique cultural landscape of Canada for the first time, much as one does with a regular souvenir (Smith and Olson 27-30), it also seems more squarely directed at Canadians and questions they might ask about themselves. It is not so much a souvenir for those who are recently arrived or passing through as it is for all those who have spent their lives immersed in the culture.

Before tackling the question of what it then means for Coupland to be Canadian, it is worth pausing to reflect on the nature of souvenirs for a moment. What do souvenirs actually do or mean? Why would a writer use such a medium to reflect on the utterly complex and irreducible experiences one has with family and country? Perhaps this irreducibility has something to do with the way that souvenirs are mnemonic signposts for emotional connections. Critics have spent time divvying up various classes of souvenirs,[2] from the tacky tourist treasures to the enchanting found object (Digby 170), to account for varying degrees of authenticity in reflecting experiences. Still, the majority of critics agree that souvenirs—bought, found, or stolen—share one thing in common: they are far more interesting when considered for what is not present, rather than what is. When people buy souvenirs, it is to ensure that they remember that they have witnessed something that has—or should have—elicited an emotional response.[3] The moment of souvenir consumption reflects an effort to translate one's personal, ephemeral experiences into something more permanent by manipulating the highly elaborated system of consumable signs[4] that everywhere surrounds us. On some level, the purchase of souvenirs reflects an effort to "make do" within the impoverished vocabulary of consumer culture. If, as Michel de Certeau states, "[m]arginality has become universal" under the organizing mechanisms of a "productivist economy" (xi), then all that seems left to do is shop for a sense of belonging.

Still, while such purchases may embody complex emotional and experiential negotiations, the notoriously reckless aesthetics of souvenirs also draws attention to the inexactitude (and often total failure) of this negotiation. Like the aesthetic and emotional alienation caused by another person's vacation slide show, souvenirs efface the sensory plenitude of direct perception and experience. Indeed, vacation photos are almost completely about what is not visible (Hutnyk 79). Good art, on the other hand, generally includes frameworks designed to elicit reflection beyond the immediacy of the object at hand; indeed, this is precisely how Coupland's work differs from standard souvenirs.

While a souvenir or slide show often fails to signify anything but a very personal response, a closer examination of the souvenir's perennial tackiness points to another key issue. Simply put, in the majority of cases, the consumer object obscures the experience of viewing the original. Even when souvenirs such as mini Eiffel Towers or tiny pewter Empire State Buildings emulate the shape of their referent, they capture nothing of the object's aura—its unique "presence in time and space" (Benjamin 239). According to Walter Benjamin, the work of art is absorbing when contemplated, whereas mass-produced souvenirs vanish among their countless clones (241). A close reading of Coupland's work indicates that he is completely aware of this effacing action of the souvenir. In fact, I will argue that he appropriates such effacements as one of his core strategies for disrupting the marginalization enacted by consumer culture. Mass-produced souvenirs are remarkable in their almost total lack of uniqueness; they represent the fragile fringe of consumer culture, nearly exposing the very process of commodity fetishization.

When it comes to Coupland's souvenirs of Canada, then, if we keep in mind the emotional and sensory supplements that people regularly provide for their gift shop and roadside finds, we can begin to see how his undertaking is unique. He says of the objects in his books that "these are souvenirs that you won't find in any gift shop" (*Souvenir* film). At the outset, he seeks to disrupt the absorption of the souvenir into a system of economic exchange, as symbolized by the gift shop. He instead foregrounds the emotional production involved with what would otherwise appear to be bland consumables, ascribing them a more open-ended value by situating them within a textual mesh of his own interweaving family stories and relationships. Souvenirs become the artistic tools by which a destabilizing version of Canadianness begins to be organized and imagined—a kind of Trojan-souvenir. Throughout the books, he uses this formal appropriation to resist the transformation of the nation into clip-art—easily consumed, generic images. He overtly questions beer-commercial-style nationalism's ability to sustain anything beyond its own commercial aims (*Souvenir 1* 6-7), and it becomes apparent that one of his primary concerns is gesturing at presently unspeakable alternatives to the homogenizing economic flows embodied by souvenirs.

One could legitimately ask here, "Why package the book as a souvenir at all?" Why risk reproducing precisely the thing you are trying to oppose? Why not do something to radically oppose mass culture? Coupland's biography as a writer consistently elicits this question, but as Andrew Tate notes, the writer's corpus actually suggests a strategy where the "bombardment of advertising images that saturate our everyday experience" serves to highlight "the potentially destructive delusions of capitulating to a virtual life" (48). In the *Souvenir* series, as in almost all of his other work,[5] Coupland first takes commonplace cultural artifacts and then transforms them into artistic materials. This transformation of popular artifacts into artistic materials is made explicit in the *Souvenir* film, where Coupland acquires a site for Canada House and immediately starts poking holes in the walls so that he can "treat it like an art supply instead of being really precious about it."

The reason for this initial transformation is clear: it re-opens all of the relationships and labour obscured by the fetishized objects of consumption.

The souvenir (in this case) becomes a re-production. In *Second-Hand Cultures*, Nicky Gregson and Louise Crewe comment on the "rituals of transformation"—things like cleaning, reshaping, narrating, etc. (144)—that people regularly perform when taking possession of previously owned items. These often laborious rituals allow buyers to participate actively in the production of the object, adding their own labour to the value of the object, rather than passively accepting its status as an isolated, complete object. In Gregson and Crewe's exploration of second-hand practices, they make an important comment that gets at the heart of Coupland's artistic strategy: "Through such rituals it becomes possible to transfer, obscure, lose or restore the meaning of goods when they change hands" (144).

While Coupland has occasionally been accused of a romanticized or even reactionary view of the past,[6] it is important to note that a ritual of transformation is not necessarily a romantic rehashing of the good old days. Rather than the meaning of the past being simply restored when objects undergo rituals of transformation, which by itself may suggest a conservative impulse, just as much of the past is obscured and lost, even consciously. Such rituals could be read as a way of trying to revise or heal past traumas, and this is certainly the case in Coupland's *Souvenir*. By borrowing from popular culture, Coupland does not just use material that mass audiences will immediately be able to comprehend; he uses this material to transform the expectations for Canada's self-image. By disrupting the boundaries of the original and the replica, Coupland produces a more fluid, anti-foundational vision of Canada. As I note below, he frequently expresses outright disdain for tradition and the past. His narration of the past may be marked with a degree of sadness and loss, but it hardly qualifies as coercive nostalgia.

In this regard, there is a second and vitally important phase of Coupland's transformations of popular culture. Not only does he make popular artifacts—like his souvenirs and brands—his own by transforming them into "art supplies," but he also transforms his works, via publication and mass distribution, back *into* popular artifacts once they have been altered. This second transformation is crucial, because it suggests that he is not just concerned with finding a place for himself in the world or producing art entirely for an elite audience; he also wants to slip his transformed objects back into the world of mass consumption, presumably to expand and add ambiguity to the field of what is possible. G. P. Lainsbury argues that Coupland consistently puts "emphasis on the liberation of individuals within the private sphere allowed them within late capitalist reality" (230), but notably this personal action is always returned to the public sphere by virtue of publication itself. In the following pages, I provide a more detailed reading of this public/private action in the *Souvenir of Canada* series, suggesting that Coupland appropriates select items of Canadiana to challenge and revise received versions of the Canadian nation and family.

As I hinted earlier, in order to occupy and jam the boundaries of the Canadian nation in the *Souvenir* books, Coupland introduces numerous autobiographical elements directly into his account. This move is not surprising, given the mnemonic function of souvenirs. The entry on the Group of Seven from the first book, for instance, features two paragraphs on the painters and four on an experience Coupland has when thinking about them (48-49). Experiencing something he calls a "visitation," the section involves him, his cousin, and his mother, all being connected through a series of phone calls that trigger his own personal epiphany on the distances involved when thinking about Canada as a whole: "in my head I was racing across Canada at a thousand kilometres a second. . . . I was unable to move and I saw a lucid flashing sequence of my life in this country: the weather, the soil, the plant life and animals" (48). He inserts his personal stories into larger ones about artistic production and expansionist histories in Canada, and indeed throughout his books, he refuses to see the country as something independent from the personal experiences of it.

As a result, engaging with his work does feel a little like watching a stranger's slide show at times, though he uses a couple of aesthetic strategies to consistently push the texts outside of the realm of an uncritical, slide-show sentimentality. The first *Souvenir* book features a series of still-life images, which Coupland describes as a "nearly extinct visual mode" (1). These consist mainly of items like air-hockey tables dripping with corn syrup and inuksuit surrounded by shining dead fish and tattered fishing buoys; the images are cast in shadows, suggesting an inviting incompleteness. His aesthetic choices formally mirror his stated fears of "how difficult it can be trying to cobble together a national identity with things like canola and, say, the discovery of insulin or basketball" (*Souvenir 2* 15). In the *Souvenir* series, he leaves gaps among these objects so that new possibilities have room to emerge.

To bolster the project and push its content beyond the realm of elite art objects, the staged still-life photos are also interspersed with more aesthetically ordinary images of Canadian towns, homes, and natural settings. Additionally, Coupland adds still-life images from photographer Karin Bubaš' *Leon's Palace* series, which features pictures of addicts' homes containing many objects similar to those Coupland identifies as distinctly Canadian. In other words, the souvenirs in the book do not belong only to middle-class or wealthy Canadians; uncomfortable symmetries and incongruities are central to the national picture Coupland presents. With numerous gaps and silences created by a series of riveting, bizarre, and cheeky juxtapositions, readers are given the opportunity to pause and enact their own transformations on received symbols of the nation.

In the film, perhaps as the result of the directorial team's intervention, the extent to which familial and national narratives intertwine for Coupland becomes clearer. Although in the film he is still concerned with Canada becoming "something processed and sold back to us as a product," his uneasy position in relation to a Canadian "us" becomes clearer than in the books. Director Robin Neinstein focuses more openly on Coupland's complicated relationship with his family, foregrounding the potential problems involved with trying to describe personal experience using received national symbols. One illustrative scene begins with Coupland stating, "Nothing puts a smile on my brother's face faster than a tape of *Best Hockey Fights #7.*" In a slightly dingy-looking family room, shot in warm, grainy film, he sits down on the couch to watch the video on TV with his brother. This is staged as a perfectly Canadian activity, but gradually the extent to which the scene is less-than-comfortable becomes apparent. As hockey toughs duke it out on the screen, his brother Tim prattles on in stereotypical sports-guy lingo about how "back in those days it [fighting] was a critical component of winning a Stanley Cup." Coupland, as if originally skeptical and unaware of the nature of the video, says, "This actually is pretty good," and then punctuates his brother's commentary with a characteristically dainty, "Ooh, okay" (*Souvenir* film).

While the whole scene smacks of a certain uneasiness, the tension comes to a head when Coupland awkwardly links the video to more pressing contemporary issues—presumably ones more suited to his own interests. Following his brother's comment that the sport is fine "as long as they stick to the hockey and there's a couple scraps, you know," Coupland chimes in with a comment of his own: "The internet will pick up the slack. Like, it's hard for this stuff to compete with beheadings on Al Jazeera." In a fraction of a second, Tim's facial expression changes from a comfortable laughter, to confusion, and then profound unease. His eyes shift to the camera, as if searching for help, and then the scene cuts to the next part of the film. Rather than nationalistic coercion, to me this scene illustrates Coupland's failure to achieve a seamless and reductive national "us"—even with his own brother, even watching hockey. This failure marks his inability to fully participate in the national symbols he identifies. This reaction does not support the comfortable, universalized "we" that Robert McGill sees as a characteristic of Coupland's earlier work (253). The souvenir here becomes not an "insider-only handshake," but a moment or memento emphasizing the distance and difference that separates Canadians in even the most intimate settings. It draws attention to the way the consumable signs of nationalism cannot always assimilate or capture specific people's experiences.

Distances pervade his other familial relationships, including those with his parents. Sitting with his mother on what appears to be a back patio straight out of an old Canadian Tire ad, Coupland envisions the scenario of finishing a book and awkwardly handing it off to his parents. He expresses his reluctance to share the work, and his mother chimes in, "I don't want it all that much either." He thanks her "for saying it out loud." Obviously, this kind of exchange can be attributed to the kinds of complicated emotions that characterize many family relationships, but Coupland's unease with his family's reception of his work is called into question later, when he openly laments his parents' absence at the opening of Canada House. Commenting on his books in a one-on-one interview later in the film, his mother Janet says reading them is "almost like an invasion of privacy, or his own personal space." On the surface, Coupland seems to agree with this assessment, and yet the film also suggests in numerous ways that he struggles regularly to feel more comfortable within his family and their supposed embodiment of true Canadianness. He is a Canadian, after all: why is the fit so difficult?

The emotional and artistic labour involved with Coupland's souvenir may represent an effort to use objects to mediate his upbringing with his adult identity. Although the reasons for the family's distancing have occurred off camera and are thus a matter of speculation, several times it becomes apparent that in fact Canada House represents something other than a bland, clichéd reiteration of national symbols for their own sake. Coupland says, for instance, that his "parents' place would make a great Canada House house," and indeed, one begins to wonder if Canada House is not really just an attempt to somehow revisit or refurbish his own personal experience of growing up at home. When his parents do not show up to the house's opening, he is visibly overcome with grief. He describes it as a feeling of "pre-nostalgia" where "you know you're going to miss it when it's gone. And that's kind of like this house, my family, people in my life" (*Souvenir* film). His comment here renders explicit the connection between Canada House and his own family. The transformations he has enacted using a supposedly objectified and depersonalized series of souvenirs reflect an attempt to construct an entirely revised way of being Canadian.

Canada and all of Coupland's claims about true Canadianness amalgamate with personal experience, and the results are not always blissful and cheeky; the souvenir is not just a trinket, but a symbol of loss. One visitor astutely observes that "Doug has really poured his heart into it" and suggests that he has a "genuine emotional connection" to the "fragments of Canadiana" he has assembled (*Souvenir* film). The house of souvenirs becomes more than a memory of a time and a place; it becomes an attempt to form space in such a way that the artist can finally fit into it, a unique effort to reorganize a traditional house "whose structure is the patriarchal relationship founded on tradition and authority, and whose heart is the complex affective relationship that binds all the family members together" (Baudrillard 16). While Canada House is successful in terms of generating discussion and interest among its visitors and friends, it is not quite accepted by those with whom Coupland wishes to be closest. At its core, the revision of popular Canadiana trades one type of absence for another.

Insofar as the exploration of souvenirs is a way of negotiating his way into his family and Canada, in many ways it is characterized by loss and obscurity rather than restoration. When asked to describe Coupland's art, his mother's response suggests the crux of the *Souvenir* projects. Her eyes go wide, then she repeats the question back to the interviewer, thinks, sighs, and then with a laugh exclaims, "Bewildering!" Perhaps all of the artist's efforts to locate himself within the Canadian family amount only to a sense of increased distance from loved ones. When he asks his mother to photograph her cupboards for his book, she says to him, "A professional photographer to shoot my cupboards . . . have you lost your mind?" (*Souvenir* film). Her tone remains jokingly loving, but there is an awkwardness at the very core of Coupland's efforts to simply express himself within what he sees as a traditional Canadian family. He also reflects on an incident where he has his car stolen and left in a tree hollow while he is in Europe, and his mother calls inquiring about it, saying, "With you I'm never quite sure. . . . Did you leave it there on purpose, or maybe it's stolen?" Coupland mulls this over: "And I realized just how totally my lifestyle alienates my family, 'cause they weren't even sure, like I go to Europe and park my car in the hollow tree" (*Souvenir* film).

Familial alienation from Coupland's lifestyle is not limited to his mother, Janet Coupland. She describes how his father disdained him for dropping out of McGill's physics program to pursue art: "My husband would tease him and call him Toulouse for the first couple of months."[7] She then emphasizes, "My husband is *not* artistic" (*Souvenir* film). As mentioned, the initial *Souvenir* book is dedicated to Coupland's father, and in the film, he is introduced by Coupland as "my father: a doctor, an outdoorsman, a pilot, and the most Canadian man I know." While Coupland expresses a desire to follow in his father's footsteps, he also mentions several stories that suggest that he has not been able to do this in any direct way. He says at one point, "In my family, the wilderness was a playground for my father and brothers who were champion marksmen. I, on the other hand, have never fired a gun in my life. By the time I was a teenager, I just wanted to be back at the mall, smoking" (*Souvenir* film). Again, a picture of distance and difference emerges, and it gets even more exaggerated when he notes, "I guess it was a real drag for my father having someone along who was more interested in hanging out with the animals" (*Souvenir* film). Coupland essentially identifies more with anything other than the men of his family; the supposed nationalistic coercions are in fact enacted against him, and it is through the circulation of art and writing that he seeks to rebalance this trauma. He explains that when he was finally old enough, "I stopped going on all those hunting trips, and I'm not even very sure if my father noticed that I stopped" (*Souvenir* film). The lack of being noticed, of really being an integral part of the family structure, echoes the fact that his parents essentially ignore the ultimate souvenir—Canada House—yet its mass recirculation in the form of a film does ultimately constitute a transformation in the sense of what it means to be Canadian.

The question of what exactly constitutes his "alienating lifestyle" is an interesting one in the film, marked by a queer kind of silence. Many of his conversations occur at very jarring angles, such as when he learns that his father has read his books and comments that "it's so awkward. I almost don't want to know that" (*Souvenir* film). He *almost* doesn't want to, and yet he clearly does desire to be some part of what he positions repeatedly as the ideal Canadian family. In the process, inadvertently or not, the film taken in its totality becomes a new queer version of the Canadian family, of Canada—one characterized not simply by hunting, hockey, and maple syrup, but also by the son who does not quite fit in. This son would rather be at the mall, surrounded by the system of consumer signs that would later enable his reimagining of his family. Moments emphasizing the family's distance function as a kind of uncanny presence, an open secret that nearly breaks to the surface—indeed out of the closet—at many points. As an adult and an artist, Coupland has found a milieu more accepting of his personal experience of Canadianness. Interestingly, at the Canada House opening, a close friend identified throughout the film as "Doug's buddy Judd" is the only person who walks around the house in his socks rather than the obligatory booties. Indeed, he feels right at home with Coupland's artistic re-envisioning of the nation.

Coupland's attempts to negotiate his way into traditional family structures via ironic inversions of supposedly Canadian souvenirs also highlight the challenges facing any attempt to queer the idea of nation. Indeed, the fact that Coupland's lifestyle is represented in the film as merely conducive to awkward silences suggests the provisional ways a family negotiates each member's identity. Following the night of the art show, the filmmakers shoot a scene where they project ghostly old films of the Coupland family onto the inside surfaces of Canada House, and in the next scene it is being torn down. This is a particularly melancholic sequence, in that it represents the laying to rest of a moment where people did not find the way across the distances that divide them. The loss and its obscurity seem complete. Families do not have simply the artistic son, or the awkward son, or the gay son; they have a son, a word that represents, much like a souvenir, all manner of complex, invisible, and sometimes indescribable relationships and experiences. Despite all the difficulties with his family, he comments—as the documentary flashes through some images of pot and gay marriage—that Canadians now "like the freedom to be genuinely different from others." Promisingly, he claims that that "it's a good time to be Canadian" (*Souvenir* film). This positive note towards the film's end suggests some perceived success in the transformations of an old Canada into a new one.

While it is tempting to reduce Coupland's creative process entirely to the complicated family dynamics that play out in the film, it is also interesting to note that he has had similar difficulties in his relationship with Canadian letters and institutions at large, particularly in "his perceived status as a 'half-American' writer" (Tate 29). He says at one point in the documentary that "in Canada, I was perceived as not a Canadian writer," and so he eventually started setting his books in Canada to remedy the situation. Despite his efforts, he notes, the critics continued to say "still not Canadian," so he began to write books on Canada, specifically; that is where the *Souvenir* project comes in. These too, at least at first, were met with choruses like Liam Lacey's, of "nope, still not Canadian." It seems his efforts to work his way into the nation extend beyond the struggles with his family, but interestingly, while still hinting at a note of loss, he is a little more relaxed and jovial about it. He has no qualms about crushing Canadian icons underfoot, and his central reflection on Canadian critics in the film is followed by a scene where he busts up hockey sticks and tosses them in the Canada House fireplace. When the souvenirs fail to match your experience, you try to transform them. Notably, when it comes to negotiating deep symbols from the past such as national traditions, the rituals of transformation are never completed; the illustration of the process itself is what is ground-breaking about Coupland's work—the fact that the *Souvenir* series shows that Canada is open to renegotiations.

The result of Coupland's *Souvenir* project is a revised Canadianness, one embodied by the totality of the *Souvenir* works. Notably, to pinpoint Coupland's unique negotiation of Canada and its signs to this or that aspect of his personal life would be to objectify and reduce the subtle and complex way he has negotiated his own identity within the Canadian mainstream and his perception of the Canadian family. Regardless of his biography, the *Souvenir* works reflect a uniquely clandestine and anti-revelatory approach to questions of identity in a historical moment where everything—even one's own identity—is being classified in the name of more effective branding. Coupland resists the effacements of consumer culture across his work; he seeks to transform it from within. On Canadian multiculturalism, for example, he expresses his annoyance with self-congratulatory, pro-mosaic hoorahs, claiming that the world is going to become a much scarier, more brutal place in the following century, and "[w]e have to prepare" (*Souvenir 1* 68). Though his art and writing may appear at first to provide a reductive picture of things, as I have illustrated throughout this piece, the simplicity of his work is deceptive.

Coupland's most recent novel, *Player One*, which is based on the Massey Lectures he gave in five major Canadian cities in 2010, illustrates the unique and complicated relationship of this author with institutions of this nation. These well-known lectures were started in 1961 as a response to the 1949 Massey Commission, which was tasked with promoting and stabilizing Canadian culture. They have become a forum for the most accomplished and recognized of contemporary thinkers. Interestingly, Coupland is one of the few to have delivered them in an experimental, non-traditional mode, jamming the lecture structure with the novel form. His novel in five parts involves five characters stranded in a Toronto airport cocktail lounge while an oil-shortage apocalypse threatens to destroy the world outside. Taken as a symbol of the Canadian nation, the novel suggests a place that is at once isolated and cosmopolitan, abundant and situated in a world of scarcity. It is a thoroughly ambiguous and unstable vision of the nation from beginning to end, much like his *Souvenir* accounts.

Going beyond its arguments at the level of content, *Player One* also reflects an attempt by the author to both inhabit and transform a national institution, the Massey Lectures. Given the accusations of nostalgia and coercion that Coupland has received about his work on Canada, it is, I think, telling that he would chose to reform such a central nationalist tradition. He at once recognizes the received influence of the institution by giving the lectures, but he also completely reshapes it to suit his own purposes, again indicating a note of alienation or even hostility when it comes to tradition. He refuses the cliché while employing its structure, which is precisely his approach to souvenirs. Throughout his work, Coupland demonstrates an effort to "follow in the footsteps" of his predecessors, but only in the most unexpected and self-defined of ways. In truth, for Coupland, being Canadian has nothing to do with the material objects of one's affection; it has nothing to do with the souvenirs of Canada, the material markers of Canadian culture. Instead, it involves the freedom to express oneself as one sees fit whenever the structures of the past create dissatisfaction with the present.

NOTES

1 Throughout, I have cited the original *Souvenir of Canada* book, *Souvenir of Canada 2*, and the *Souvenir of Canada* documentary respectively as *Souvenir 1*, *Souvenir 2*, and *Souvenir* film.

2 Hashimoto and Telfer provide useful schemes for classifying souvenirs (193-95).

3 The most cogent expression of this perspective is Jane Bennett's. She claims that "the affective force of those moments might be deployed to propel ethical generosity," rather than simply signifying the obscuring of social relations (4). Nissa Ramsay tempers Bennett's arguments about material objects, commenting that while enchantment plays an important role, just as often the relationship of consumers with objects is characterized by "uncertainty, awkwardness and ambiguity" (198).

4 Jean Baudrillard describes consumerism as "*an activity consisting of the systematic manipulation of signs*" (200; italics in original).

5 Brands from popular culture such as Microsoft, 7-11, and Staples become the vocabulary that characters in *Microserfs*, *Generation X*, and *The Gum Thief*, for instance, use to tell stories.

6 See Veronica Hollinger's "Apocalypse Coma."

7 Toulouse refers to the nineteenth-century French artist Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, who, because of his numerous health issues and resultant halted growth, suffered ridicule and alienation at the hands of others. The subjects of his paintings were often given a sinister or foreboding aspect, created by heavy lines and jarring shadows.

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andrea bennett

You can put your fingers on the feelings

like you can put your fingers into the cake or the peanut butter, when no one is looking. Or like when the light's on in your kitchen at night, so you can't see anyone looking if, in fact, they are.

Once your fingers are on the feelings, you may not be able to scoop them like ice cream. Instead you may ask yourself, *Why have I put these here?* If you can get at the feeling, it might taste like over-salted olives, or a cereal past its due date.

Press a feeling and the lid of the garbage can may click open as if its foot had been depressed. Press a feeling and there may be two mouths lidded open, each spined and stubborn. Each mawing for something remembered, something anticipated.

Shaun Hanna

"I diverge / you diverge / we diverge"

Scale, Occupation, and an Introduction to Stephen Collis' *The Barricades Project*

Stephen Collis' *The Barricades Project* branches off from what I might tentatively call "a tradition" of Canadian poetry that has taken root within Vancouver's influential Kootenay School of Writing (KSW). Most recently, the poetry of the KSW seems to have focused on the field of architecture (its language, critical theories, and ideas) in order enact a political critique that scrutinizes certain culturally dominant ideologies—including those of neoliberalism and of cultural nationalism—at play within the public, urban realm. I might point out works like Lisa Robertson's *Occasional Work and Seven Walks* or Jeff Derksen's *Transnational Muscle Cars* as examples of poetry that have attested recently to such an architectural sensibility. I might even go so far as to suggest that, for these West Coast poets, the interest in the public, urban domain points toward a current moment in Canadian art when poetry has begun to examine the role of Canadian culture within the urban space of globalized capitalism. For its part, the materiality of language has proffered a complex of differentiated, disparate, and fiercely heterogeneous elements that have, in Steve McCaffery's words, "provided an abundance of architectural possibilities" for poetry—possibilities that continue to emerge from within contemporary, innovative writing ("Parapoetics" 98). Or, to be more accurate, these architectural ideas have become a critical response to contemporary urban exigencies placed *on* such writing, because modernity is urban by definition. However, as Collis himself has argued, "poetry's relationship to architecture must not be limited to discussions of form and structure as ends in themselves," but rather this relationship "points toward the ways in which form and structure have become political and have possible (utopian) social implications" ("Frayed Trope" 144).[1] While architectural ideas in poetry have become an efficient means for poets to articulate their social, ideological, or literary contexts within a modern, urban setting, the politics enacted therein provide these poets with a critical paradigm through which they might turn the language of global capital against itself—a language that frequently imprisons notions of identity and subjectivity within a structure of domination. In this paradigm, the city itself has become a kind of experimental surface on which the poet might not only elucidate the quotidian demands placed upon language by collectivity, community, and urban interaction, but also write out the tensions that such a context creates between politics and art.

Stephen Collis' *The Barricades Project* follows in a manner similar to works like Ronald Johnson's *ARK* or Lyn Hejinian's *My Life* in its lifelong poetic scope. Struck by what Collis describes as contemporary poetry's "singular unambitiousness" ("Life-Long" 6), the poet hopes to create a work that tests the spatial mobility of language taken over the course of his entire lifetime. This paper explores *The Barricades Project*'s first two sections, *Anarchive* (2005) and *The Commons* (2008). In doing so, this paper asks the uncomfortable question: does poetry "do" anything? To whatever extent poetry does participate in the service of the public realm, I might argue that *The Barricades Project* reflects the poet's own inquiry, expressing his endless frustration and his unwavering hope that poetry might once again rescale its utopian ambitions to a position of former cultural prominence. *The Barricades Project* has been cut into three volumes (with more to follow). Collis sets his first volume, *Anarchive* (2005), in 1936 revolutionary Spain. He continues in the Wordsworthian landscapes of the English Lake District in *The Commons* (2008), and he follows up with his most recent work *To the Barricades* (2013), which takes place in Paris amidst the recognizable occupations and protests of the nineteenth and twenty-first centuries. Given the recent contexts of the Arab Spring, the global economic recession, and the subsequent Occupy movement, I might easily suggest how Collis' "life-long" project might itself become occupied, having already found its home among the revolutions of the past.[2] These recent events undoubtedly open up new, speculative avenues for *The Barricades Project* to explore, just as they have underscored how *The Barricades Project* already examines the volumes of our shared, cultural histories and common spaces. Collis' treatment of the project ties back to what he argues is "*the* contemporary problem: the globalization of capital" ("Life-Long" 6; emphasis added)—a problem that he feels ultimately reduces to a matter of scale. Thus, he feels, the project itself must reflect this problem both in terms of its politics and in terms of its poetic form. Collis thematizes public space as a kind of "volume" in which poetry's radical impulses materialize. He suggests a kind of "poetry of scale," which demands that the questioning of institutional, privatized systems of genre, grammar, and language be taken together within the context of the globalization of capital.[3]

Wherever possible, *The Barricades Project* asserts a resistance to ideological superstructures, and, in doing so, the project represents the poet's desire to seek alternatives to such established hegemonies. *The Barricades Project* plays out this aim in two ways. In *Anarchive*, for example, the poet questions whether such a resistance might find its home within the discourses of poetry. In this text, Collis uses the Spanish Civil War as a springboard into his own contemporary investigations. On the back cover of his later text, *The Commons*, Collis expresses his desire to find a kind of literary commons "outside [of] property's exclusive and excluding domain" (n. pag.). In this way, Collis constructs a poetry "commons" that speaks "towards or for 'the boundless'" ("Life-Long" 5). Such a commons, as Alfred Noyes explains, represents "not so much an alternative to the system of private property as it is the *absence* of the private" (139; emphasis added). Each text registers a distinct tone. The first book, *Anarchive*, activates an aggressive rhetoric of revolution and declamatory public address; the second book, *The Commons,* meditates upon poetry's pastoral and lyrical past in order to undermine this rural history. Despite their differences, Collis treats each text as "parts of the same" albeit "discontinuous long poem" that asks "where the relationship between part and whole resides—socially, linguistically—in terms of the poem, the serial, the book, [and] the *oeuvre*" (Interview n. pag.). Indeed, the texts are structurally quite similar (although *The Commons* is undoubtedly the denser of the two). Collis divides each text, for example, into three sections: the first section contextualizes the individual work historically; the second section locates the plot geographically; and, finally, the third section returns us to *The Barricades Project* spatially, thereby rescaling a segmented poetics (of parts) in terms of a complete, if unfinished, oeuvre (a whole). This constant rescaling of poetry's historical modes and literary institutions helps to form what Noyes has called a "borderless structure" within the volumes of both poetry and culture, a structure that is "thoroughly of nowhere," and whose particularities "can be permitted to speak of the 'Barricades Project,' without having a sense of its limits, origins, or ultimate ends" (137). This open-ended tactic empowers the poet to navigate tensions arising between a politics of form and a poetics of resistance.

David Harvey reminds us that the "imaginative free play" of utopian idealism defines alternatives "not in terms of some static form or even some perfected emancipatory process," but rather such ideals define alternatives "rooted in our present possibilities at the same time as [such a dialectical utopianism] points towards different trajectories for human uneven geographical development" (*Spaces* 163, 196). Collis' poetry of scale investigates how poetry's elastic imaginary often recalibrates the social and political cartography of culture in order to reveal certain assumptions about the use and reuse of language.[4] Noyes notes, for example, that Collis collaborates with poetry's revolutionary past in order to assert a poetics at the nexus of social reformation. As Noyes explains, the past of interest to Collis here "is the past of change, a history of willed futures, a history of movements for change" (138). Indeed, *Anarchive* takes place in "the midst of a recognizable revolution," and *The Commons* takes place at the moment when the "English common lands were taken, by force and parliamentary decree, out of the hands of local, collective use" (138-39). Revisiting the past, either through reference and citation or through stylistic devices, reminds the reader that language is itself a communal activity, a "common" event within culture. As Collis himself has argued about poets such as Robert Duncan, Lisa Robertson, and Ronald Johnson, each of whom have themselves participated in a similar kind of literary retooling, "[w]hen poets reconfigure the works of others . . . it may appear that the social there enacted is not a community of citizens but one of citations. However in turning the mixture of past poetries into the architecture of future poetry, these writers envision an impossible poetic space where the community of poets . . . meet and exchange languages" ("Frayed Trope" 160).[5] A combination of citation and reference not only mobilizes a text to create a highly pluralistic, even eclectic, language "commons," but also engages the text's thematic and critical trespass into these "common" institutions of language. Take *The Commons*, in which the poet demands that both the reader and the work move intertextually across the increasingly privatized English countryside of the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. Such movement opens up a privatized past to a contemporary re-examination. Here, an imagined past cannot be consigned to the private annals of history, shelved away from public access; rather, the past becomes a site designed specifically for public use, reformation, and reinterpretation. As Noyes explains, "[i]n so far as a literature takes on a practice of quotation, collage, allusion and intertextuality, it holds out a sort of commons—a page on which any may write with the common resources of the poetic past" (139). In doing so, the poet binds his larger political critique to the activities of urban, communal reconstruction through metaphor, allusion, and intertextuality, forming a poetry that "choruses out of context" (Noyes 137). To this end, Collis attempts to defeat—or, at the very least, question—potential privatizing boundary markers—either real or poetic—of genre, locality, or historical periodization. Ultimately, the recombinant use of these historical modes of expression allows Collis to test not only the boundaries of these poetic institutions, but also their assumed stabilities, both of which have been carried over from modernism into postmodernism and beyond.

"Common" Spaces and Other Barricades

The Barricades Project aims to erect a "barricade in language" in order to "(temporarily) obstruct a passage in Capital or, alternatively, [cast down] a fence put in place by the language of capital" (Noyes 137). Take, for example, how Collis threads his poem "Dear Common" throughout *The Barricades Project*. This segmentation permits the poet to take up multiple residencies across the breadth of both volumes as well as to maintain common sites throughout each individual text. As a result, the reader must move in and among the text's multiple, common spaces in order to read the poem. Thus, Collis takes advantage of the reader's impulse to accumulate meaning by sending the reader constantly away to discover the poem elsewhere. This textual stoppage acts as a kind of language barricade: the reader never gains access to the whole poem since it is still being written. Collis claims that his purpose here is to "produce what is past / again and again" in the hope that "the violence of forgetting / will be remembered / with indignation" (*Anarchive* 10). Such a provocation questions the role that contemporary poetry plays within culture. In particular, "Dear Common" asks whether today's poetry can affect social change at all, or whether poetry has itself become an outmoded form of expression. In other words, can poetry "do" rather than simply "be"? Is the poem leading the charge? Or is poetry merely the material detritus from which we form these barricades? Between each text, Collis' mode of inquiry differs. *Anarchive*, for example, voices an anxiety of ethics through its rhetoric of declamation. In this volume, Collis' "Dear Common" calls for the dismantlement of our public space. Only through such dismantlement, he seems to argue, can this space be rebuilt from the grammatical detritus left behind in *Anarchive*'s revolutionary wake. *The Commons*, however, takes a more erosive approach. In this text, Collis mixes contemporary twenty-first-century modes of expression, events, and languages anachronistically with nineteenth-century poetic sensibilities, locations, and genres. Throughout *The Commons*, Collis slowly undermines the Romantic's claim upon the public commons of the English Lake District. In both texts, Collis combines the material detritus of the past with a poetics of the present in a radically eclectic way that, when taken together, moves his poetry toward an examination of how the hierarchical institutions of tradition and history might themselves be restructured.

Anarchive's "Dear Common" pledges, for example, "to name you futures / that have not been / written down" (9-10), and the poem considers "the heart of the future / repetition" (10). We might take the antecedent of "you" here to refer back to the "common" space of language itself—the subject of the poem's proper addressee, "Dear Common." In this way, Collis names the "Common" to be the "futures / that have not been / written down." Within poetry, language alone presents itself as *the* "common" element shared between both text and reader alike. The poem takes itself to be its own subject; "Dear Common" pledges itself, therefore, to be a kind of textual future, thereby telegraphing its recurrence in correspondence with the external reader. Indeed, Collis' disintegration of the poem seems to make good on its promise of return, even though individual textual fragments might not always be of the same scale as previous or even future segments. The poem invests itself, in other words, as language capital, and it speculates upon its own textual and semantic delivery. Collis then spreads these textual "futures" among "the ruins of / imagined communities" (15), whose own radical dismantlement had urged their "soft walls to remain / a whisper outside / the institutions / of palaver" (14). Here, I might argue that *Anarchive* constructs a kind of imagined cityscape that attempts to gather its community of anarchists together within a socio-political space of language. As Collis has argued elsewhere, poetry shares a primary and ambitious social concern with architecture, in that both practices—architecture and poetry—posit themselves as a "nexus of an imagined community" ("Frayed Trope" 147). By allowing not only his project, but also his poem to inhabit multiple historical periods, geographical locations, and textual volumes, Collis underscores poetry's desire to take up residency within our built world, where language often becomes reduced to a form of capital, and poetry itself functions as a capital project.[6]

Just as the city organizes our multiple cultures into imagined utopian communities, so too does language attempt to organize our multiple dialects into an imagined (perhaps utopian) common space. In *Anarchive*, the poet claims that these "daily approximation[s] / of utopia" (16) attempt to form "spontaneous links" (15) between the multiple, fractured elements of culture—elements that are themselves unstable and in flux. As such, *Anarchive*'s occupied and revolutionary cityscape becomes an example of what Calgary-based architect Marc Boutin has referred to as "a verb": "a process, a continually shifting landscape based on activity, accessibility and imprintability," all of which draw our attention back to the concerns of the urban (n. pag.). For Collis, what happens to poetry when the concerns of policy—the organizing principles of a culture's constituent parts—meet the urgencies of aesthetics is at issue here. Inasmuch as *The Barricades Project* interrogates the dual issues of openness and enclosure, the project challenges not only how politics open up poetry to the wider, public discourses, but also how such political discourse simultaneously threatens to enclose poetry within a structure of ideology. Note how "Dear Common" urges the reader to "break off" from the whole: "I diverge / you diverge / we diverge . . . so in this way one / may become isolated," until "we the anarchists / are everywhere and nowhere / nowhere at once" (*Anarchive* 14-15). The poem atomizes, transforming itself into a formless structure that undermines the notion of a stable and "ubiquitous utopia" (31). Just as Phyllis Webb's poem "Performance" (the source of this passage) demands that the reader consider "[w]ho is the *I* infesting my poems" (352), so also does Collis demand that the reader contemplate how the individual comes to identify with the whole—whether as part of the collective city or as part of the collective anarchy—and how such identification might lead the reader ultimately to conflate or equate notions of collectivity with those of stability.

Yet the poem never escapes being a poem. The poem must remain part of its own imagined community, a resident located within the institution of a poetic tradition. While Collis seeks a poetry that occupies a space of resistance, he also questions if the "utopian" can assert an effective critique of the socio-political order of global capital culture. For its part, *The Barricades Project* asks us to consider why poetry might be "the revolutionary act *par excellence*"—or not (cf. Guy Debord's *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle)*. "Dear Common" reminds us that in the "abyss of history . . . rebellion was in [poetry's] blood" (*Anarchive* 31). This rebellion was continuously "looking for / a space for hope" from which it might campaign "against / what history is / in the mind" (33). Here, Collis points out the gap between the expected results of revolutions past and the actual outcomes of these rebellions. While one might hope that radical ideology might alter the social world, failure always remains a possible, even common, result of any revolutionary movement. As Collis remarks, "[p]oetry demands / the impossible . . . we have not won / our political battles" (32). The poet suggests that even when poetry attempts to dismantle traditional institutional hierarchies, poetry often fails to remove the perceived hierarchy between, for example, the poet who communicates textual meaning and the reader who passively receives this meaning. Collis writes in yet another iteration of the poem:

> Tell me
> Theodore Adorno
> if you know
> is art a logic
> that makes reason ridiculous?
> Or if it isn't
> tell me why the singing ended
> . . . .
> are these means really appropriate
> to our appropriated ends?
> . . . .
> thinking about politics lacked poetry
> when it was poetry
> lost its politics
> and set off for a world of *its* own. ("Life-Long" 21)

Rather than collapsing the barrier between poet and reader, poetry's radicalism often inverts the author-reader relationship, relying instead on the reader to construct meaning. In doing so, poetry merely trades one "Franco" for another. "[I]n real revolutions," Collis notes, "every ideology shatters / thrown down by the throng" (*Anarchive* 15). Moreover, "Dear Common" desires to "campaign against . . . what the poem is" (33). Note how his tone shifts, disclosing poetry's past failures to the public. "Dear Common take / these letters as / confessions," writes Collis, "as I wait for the / fuse to burn the / fascists to strike so / we can strike and throw / the state down just / throw it down and / begin without boundary / bound" (72-73). As Collis further reminds us, "you cannot / commit acts for / liberty that counter / the essence of liberty" (71-72). Nor can one liberate a commons within language in order to privatize that language. Purge language of its privileging hierarchies, demands the text, but do so without simply replacing those structures. Such a move would only block the passage of language's shared progress.

The Barricades Project rescales the events of history, fitting them within a contemporary poetic landscape. *Anarchive* comments, for example, on how the general often envelops the specific by rescaling it to fit within a contemporary political, cultural, or linguistic milieu. As Collis' portmanteau title suggests, the poet wishes to create both "an archive" designed to preserve literature's historical modes of representation, and "an anarchy" designed to destroy these modes of representation. On the one hand, "an archive" preserves the volumes and artifacts that a culture deems significant by shelving these artifacts away from the public's reach; on the other hand, "an anarchy" suggests that these documents have already been seized by public unrest and that they now belong to the larger discourses of the public space. By embracing the plurality of existing cultural remains, the poet is able to subject these remains to recombination and reformation. As a further example, *The Commons* uses England's privatized countryside as a metaphor for how literary tradition often lays a proprietary claim to landscape, style, genre, historical period, and subjectivity, all of which Collis suggests that contemporary poetry might reform in order to combat these privatizing impulses. *The Commons* invades the spaces of the past in order to seize the consignment of representation from a privatized history. In both texts, Collis implements an aesthetic that retools the past in order to reform the present—a praxis of poetry that relies on using resources already at hand in order to erect a barricade in language. Poetry, like revolution, longs for blockade and stoppage. These "dead ends," Noyes explains, "force us to circle back to other streets—streets not yet blocked, streets that might be in need of blockading—streets of possibility, streets of trespass and occupation" (138). I might even go so far as to suggest that if contemporary, innovative poetry "does" anything, then *The Barricades Project* showcases the extent to which such poetry reroutes our own exploration of previously uncharted avenues of cultural representation, avenues that have been missing from a history rife with exclusivity and exclusion. *The Barricades Project* enjoins the reader, in other words, to refuse literary history's proprietary claims, so that this history might become more fully "in the present." To this end, Collis constructs a diachronically fluid poetry that permits the reader to trespass freely among the spatial, temporal, and textual volumes of history, and, in doing so, he is able to launch his poetics—and by extension, our literary culture—into a shared and radical, public space of protest.

"Clear" and Common Volumes

The narrative of *The Commons* follows the so-called mad poet John Clare as he escapes from his asylum in Essex and travels to his home in Helpston.

Clare is a thoroughly quixotic character who—rather than tilting at antagonistic windmills—"vanquish[es] fences" in order to "forcefully [open] enclosures" in language (44). We first meet John Clare in the opening sequence of *The Commons*' second section. Collis titles this sequence, ironically, "Clear as Clare," punning on the French adjective *clair,* meaning "clear." However, Collis' protagonist is anything but clear; his personal language often borders on nonsensical ravings that, like fences cutting through the English countryside, obstruct the passage of meaning to the reader. Take, for example, his description of a quarry that he passes on his journey home: "old quarry / swordy well / lip tipped and vetted / pilfering hedgerows / sheep and dale / roly poly scriptor est / botanized and abetted / rough grass / to trim lawn / remains disinhabited" (35). On the one hand, Clare describes a typical English country landscape. This landscape contains an abandoned stone quarry surrounded by valleys that have been divided by stone fences. On the other hand, Clare's deliberate "un-clarity" critiques this landscape as it describes it. Not only do the "pilfering hedgerows," for example, rob the landscape of its "common" ground by delineating the bounds of private property, but these walls also owe their existence to the "pilfering" of stones from the surrounding quarries—the literalized robbing of the "common ground" itself. Here, even nature turns against itself: "rough grass" and "sheep" aid and "abet" the accumulation of property. Clare's remark that this landscape "remains disinhabited"—rather than "uninhabited"—suggests that privatization prevents settlement. Moreover, Clare's rejection of normative grammar and syntax also cuts away at our shared language. Instead, Clare creates his own, personal dialect of English from an assemblage of personal remembrances and rhetorics.

Clare slips repeatedly into this personal idiolect throughout the text—a kind of "real language of men" beyond what Wordsworth conceives.[7] Visually, Clare's utterance "as ey in meyne and theyne" (115), for example, appears almost nonsensical; however, when taken aurally the text gains a new synthesis of meaning. The phrase might in fact sound something like "as *I* in m*i*ne and th*i*ne"—literally placing the lyrical "I" (rescaled to "ey") into the second person possessive. Clare implies that his "language" belongs equally to both himself and the public. This "rescaling" of the first person recurs throughout the text, and, once again, the reader is forced to ask, "Who is this *I* infesting this poem?" Compare this previous line to a later excerpt from "Dear Common" in which Collis writes: "Ordinary things / 'doves' and 'stones' / other bodies / exteriority *in me* / movements posing / the world"

(*Commons* 123; emphasis added), or, similarly, to an earlier line: "[T]hat *me* / was *we* in my private version" (108; emphasis added). This repetitive situating of the lyrical subject into the collective whole suggests the extent to which the personal in fact belongs to the liberated public domain. Collis compels the reader to find common ground within the cultural volumes of language. He even goes so far as to place Clare's personal language firmly within our own shared literary tradition. For example, Clare's observation that "aapral es cruddle moot" (115)—which I take to mean, "April is the cruelest month"—is perhaps a brief, anachronistic dig at T. S. Eliot and his high Modernist cohorts (Eliot 1). This short but radical encounter with Eliot aligns Collis' text with the Modernist avant-garde, in addition to the text's already established link to Wordsworth's formal experimentation. Taken together, however, these references draw our attention to the "present-ness" of this text, since the text belongs to neither historical period nor formal experimentation.

In "Words' Worth," Collis tells us that the "words' value is in the words' freedom" (*Commons* 111). For Clare, this freedom entails that the word be liberated from grammatical and semantic signification.[8] By destroying the position of the word within normative grammar, the poet destroys the status of the word in language. In "Words' Worth," we read that Clare now inhabits "that Poetic Region"—the landscape of Wordsworth's Lake District. Just as soon as the poet takes up his residency here, the very characteristics of these lakes begin to take on new significance. These lakes become the "swimming language lakes" of literature, lakes that now dot the poetic landscape of tradition (111). Collis writes "*lake* a flock of sheep" or "more *lake* a man / *lake* clouds sound" (109; emphasis added). Notice here his use of the word "lake" to operate like a corrupted simile. I might even go so far as to suggest that, since Collis wishes to undermine Wordsworth's claim on these lakes, we must also perform our own renovation of this passage by replacing those errant "lakes" with "likes"—as in "more *like* a man / *like* clouds sound." As Clare remarks, "this land is your [Wordsworth's] land but / I've bought it now" (108). This transfer of ownership seems to entitle Clare to do with the land as he pleases; however, Clare soon recognizes the danger of this assumption, and he reminds the reader that "that me / was we in my private version," and that any subsequent "colonized description" of the land would only "guide to death" (108). Clare claims, therefore, that any further act of privatization would only serve to undermine his efforts to create a language commons to be used for our public well-being. As he notes, "the poem [is] not a / nation's property   but a commons all can share," (108)—a (perhaps utopian) space liberated from literary privatization.

Out of the Poems and into the Streets

In the 1950s, members of the Lettrist International Movement in Paris had declared that poetry is written in the "form of cities," further cementing the practice of poetry within the civic realm of the public space ("Potlatch #5" n. pag.). By May 1968, the Situationist-inspired revolution had reconfigured the city's architecture "with decidedly *poetic* ends" (Dworkin 11; emphasis added). Graffiti covered the streets with slogans promising utopia: *Sous les pavé, la plage* ("Under the pavement, the beach"). In spite of the promise to deliver radical social change, which had excited an entire generation of architects and poets to revolutionary ends, this action had brought with it an equal measure of disappointment at the reluctance of the world to go along with these ambitions. One of the aims of this paper has been to imply the extent to which poetry critiques the public urban domain as a mechanism in which excess capital simultaneously flows and becomes fixed. If architecture is the material form of our cultural ambitions, then poetry is the articulation of those ambitions. In the face of globalized capitalism, the poet might find it increasingly difficult to oppose forces that otherwise drive the private accumulation of both material goods and linguistic meaning. However, when the poet articulates our cultural aspirations as a utopian gesture of language, the poet scales poetry to a level situated between the social and the political. In doing so, the poet constructs a kind of "architecture of poetry," built within the public space of language.

By participating in the civic realm, Collis constructs a poetry that not only finds itself occupying a space of resistance within culture, but also, in his exploration of how a utopian revolutionary poetics might counter the dispersal of global capital culture, Collis constructs a poetry that hopes to inspire peaceful socio-political change: a "space of hope" built for poetry's imagined future as well as its imagined past.[9] And although we might easily debunk the fantasy of utopia, dismissing its viability as a means to organize our daily lives, such a fantasy in poetry nevertheless proposes possible futures that this profession might construct. As innovative Canadian poetry now enters into the second decade of the new millennium, poetry will no doubt continue to forge ahead along already well-established intellectual and aesthetic trajectories, just as poetry will no doubt find new, untapped avenues of potential to explore, prying up new cobblestones from which to erect new barricades. Noyes writes, "[A]ll time's peasants pin a hope" (140). In spite of—or, perhaps, because of—poetry's anxiety about its power to enact social change, poets continue to test the limits of such a proposal. By throwing down walls that prevent progress and by erecting other barriers that promote radical movement, Collis proposes an alternate image for the world, an image unfettered by the imprisoning regimes of dominant ideologies, an image that might yet pin such a hope to the future of poetry.

NOTES

1 Collis' argument follows Charles Bernstein's central thesis in *The Politics of Poetic Form* to a certain point. Bernstein argues that "radically innovative styles [of poetics] can have political meanings" (vii) that allow for "a more comprehensive understanding of the formulation of public space: *of polis*" (236; emphasis added). Although Collis agrees with Bernstein's assertion, he also adds that "the architectural gives expression to poetry's social and utopian desires, and furthermore . . . the architectural paradigm is crucial to the understanding of twentieth-century avant-garde poetics"—a notion which Bernstein falls short of enunciating ("Frayed Trope" 144).

2 Indeed, Collis has participated widely in the Occupy movement of Vancouver since the movement took up residence in October 2011. Collis has since released a collection of writings on this movement entitled *Dispatches from the Occupation* (2012). As David Harvey notes, the tactics of the Occupy movement have been to demonstrate what happens when a protest moves "close to where many of the levers of power are centered" and effectively "convert[s] [a] public space into a political commons, a place for open discussion and debate over what that power is doing and how best to oppose its reach" ("Rebels on the Street" n. pag.). Collis' other writings on the Occupy movement may also be accessed online via *Occupy Vancouver Voice*. I watch with anticipation to see how these movements might yet inform Collis' work in the years to come.

3 Here, I borrow Collis' term "poetry of scale" from "*The Barricades Project*, the Life-Long Poem, and the Politics of Form."

4 My use of the term "imaginary" invokes Slavoj Žižek's reading of Lacan (see *Sublime* 95-144) in that I suggest poetry's desire to enact a politics of form has been accelerated by its search for other aesthetic proving grounds on which it might enunciate its own identity. By keeping the search for identity constantly on the move, poetry itself undergoes a kind of discursive and aesthetic rescaling.

5 In a personal email correspondence, Collis lists several architects, theorists, and poets who have been of "crucial importance" to his own poetic practice. Among those figures, Collis includes Rem Koolhaas, Robert Venturi, Antonio Gaudi, David Harvey, and Ronald Johnson ("Re: Quick Question" n. pag.).

6 Here, my argument follows from insights made by Ron Silliman, Charles Bernstein, Lyn Hejinian, Steve McCaffery, and Jeff Derksen—all of whom comment on how language functions as capital and how poetry shares a dialectic relationship with capitalism. While the arguments made by these critics are both compelling and convincing, these arguments are also far too extensive to rehearse here with any justice. All of these critics, however, suggest the ways in which a radical poetic structure might be used methodologically

in order to combat the potential alienating forces of capitalism. See "Disappearance of the Word" by Silliman, "Dollar Value of Poetry" by Bernstein, "Rejection of Closure" by Hejinian, *North of Intention* by McCaffery, and "Where Have All the Equal Signs Gone?" by Derksen.

7 In "Preface to Lyrical Ballads," William Wordsworth explains that *Lyrical Ballads* (1800) began "as an experiment" in order to discover how poets might use "the real language of men" as a model for the metrical arrangement of poetry (1). Wordsworth continues, explaining that often the language used by "even the greatest Poet" falls short "in liveliness and truth . . . of that which is uttered by men in real life" (16). Wordsworth hopes that his lyrical experimentation might inject some of this passion of "real life" into poetry, thereby resuscitating poetry from obsolescence and stagnancy. Despite these intentions, however, Wordsworth's poetry never actually lives up to this claim, adhering strictly, as it does, to regular metrical patterns and ornate poetic diction.

8 Žižek argues that two kinds of freedom exist today: "formal" freedom and "actual" freedom. He explains that "the distinction between 'formal' and 'actual' freedom ultimately amounts to: 'formal' freedom is the freedom of choice within the coordinates of the existing power relations, while 'actual' freedom designates the site of an intervention which undermines these very coordinates" (*On Belief* 122). I suspect that Collis deploys a similar "actual" freedom throughout his work.

9 I borrow this term from David Harvey's book of the same name. In *Spaces of Hope*, Harvey explores the contemporary urban scene within the context of economic equality and social justice.

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Souvankham Thammavongsa

Fie

This is how you say fire in Lao

Anything that has light must acknowledge *that first fire*

Fie mie is fire when it's burning something down

A house burns down, a forest, a city

Fie sang is flashlight

A man-made object, a thing you take out into that not-knowing

Fie fa is thunder

That scrawl of light in the shape broken things first take

Fie mot is what happens when you're not expecting it to

A power outage, a burnt bulb

Mot fie is when you do something to light

It's a far reach, set above you, a calling out of place

It's a turn, a switch in the wall you go to find

Fie mot

Mot fie

Herb Wyile

"I questioned authority and the question won"

Transnational Muscle Cars and the Neoliberal Order

In our present late-capitalist milieu, critics and cultural producers have increasingly become wary of positing a kind of exterior and resistance space, citing the pervasive power and influence of our present "dogmatic condition whereby the principles of privatization—individualism, financialization, free markets, and commodification—encompass every aspect of life" (Curtis 11). This wariness is not necessarily a kind of defeatist capitulation to this latest manifestation of capitalist hegemony and the neoliberal ideology that has underpinned its consolidation, but results from an increasing sense that any resistance will have to come from within that hegemonic order. Such an awareness is palpable in the poetry of Jeff Derksen, a poet and critic from the West Coast whose work routinely engages with neoliberalism. One of the founders of the Kootenay School of Writing, Derksen shares that collective's concern with the materiality of language, with writing as a form of work, and with resisting a traditional mimetic and individualist model of cultural production. Heavily influenced by poststructuralist theory and by the formalist preoccupations of the Language poets,[1] Derksen's collections such as *Dwell* (1993) and *Transnational Muscle Cars* (2003) are ludic, polysemous, and self-referential, but they also wryly speak to the ways in which personal and public space has been reconfigured according to the largely unwritten dictates of neoliberalism. Donato Mancini contends that Derksen's work as of the early 1990s, in response to the intensified neoliberal conditions of that decade, has moved "away from the semantically shifty terrain of earlier formalism" and "towards a quicker, more communicative, didactic mode of writing" (60). The relative terms of

Mancini's characterization ("quicker, more communicative") are significant here, as Derksen's poetry is still, in the main, fragmentary, discontinuous, enigmatic, semantically disjunctive, and widely allusive; it at once invites a semantic reading and eludes it. Nonetheless, in all its ambivalence and hyper-referentiality, Derksen's poetry still operates towards what we might see as political and activist ends, as Derksen makes clear in his reflections on his own creative practice. In his essay "Poetry and Other Politics," Derksen describes neoliberalism as "the larger category of social relations, and one that has emerged as a powerful determinant socially, culturally, economically, and politically, and yet one that remains abstracted to the greatest degree" and points to it "as the politics that I am trying to grapple with, understand, debunk, ridicule, and shine a harsh light on through my poetics" (*Annihilated Time* 252). While it is important to be conscious of the discontinuities between Derksen's engagement with neoliberalism as a critic and his engagement with neoliberalism in his creative practice—especially in terms of voice and form—there are important continuities as well. Just as Derksen stands out as a prominent Canadian critic of neoliberal ideology, *Transnational Muscle Cars* arguably stands out as the most sustained engagement with neoliberalism in Canadian literature, and my aim here is to take stock of some of the ways in which, and fronts on which, Derksen contends with neoliberalism in the collection.

The nature of that "contention," however, is complex. Writing of the Language poets, George Hartley argues that poetry "which functions according to the notion of the poet/speaker as an independent subject who, having 'found his voice,' presents a situation seen from a single point of view, fosters the key ideological concept of bourgeois society: the self-sufficient, self-determined individual free to participate in the marketplace" (37). The poems in *Transnational Muscle Cars* to varying degrees resist this traditional model of poetry as individual expression. The collection consists of a series of long poems and a cluster of short pieces, which vary in style as well as length. Some of the poems, such as "Forced Thoughts" and "Jobber," are (to use Mancini's terms) "semantically shifty," reflecting Derksen's continuing interest in the materiality of language, and are characterized by formalistic play and less amenable to semantic interpretation. The rest of the collection, however, is (relatively speaking) "more communicative" and "didactic," offering more accessible glimpses of Derksen's take on neoliberal capitalism. A cluster of poems in the collection, for instance, is characterized by series of distinctive, often ironic declarations; poems like "But Could I Make a Living

From It," "Social Facts Are Vertical," and "Compression" are filled with short, usually one-line ironic mottos and logos, unattributed quotations, and what might be best described as anti/aphorisms—witty *aperçus* that make telling points while, in various ways, resisting being recuperated as late-capitalist *bon mots*. However, while the range of topics and tones of these zingers—what Brian Kim Stefans calls "socialist one liners" (qtd. in Jaeger 31)—has a somewhat dispersive effect, Peter Jaeger helpfully points to the scaffolding that gives shape to these poems. Jaeger contends that "[o]ne of the key features of Derksen's poetics is its use of the modular unit as a means to present research on Canada in relation to globalization, ideology, language and the socially-grounded subjectivities which language enunciates" (31). Focusing on "But Could I Make a Living From It," Jaeger argues that

> Derksen's long poem as research is generated through the relationship between large social structures and textual structure. At the micro level, the modular fragment appears as a highly condensed sentence, which ironically and sometimes aphoristically criticizes ideology. At the macro level, on the other hand, the modules conjoin to accumulate meaning, thereby building up a powerful array of integrated social critique. (38)

Jaeger points to how "But Could I Make a Living From It" "repeatedly cites the 'spot rate,' or average noon exchange rate of US to Canadian dollars" from 1976 to 1994 and argues that "Derksen's text uses the history of shifting exchange rates as a leitmotif to further conjoin global economic relations with the personal and social spheres of globalization's subjects" (32). Jaeger notes that Derksen also provides an alphabetical list of developing countries (33), likewise dispersed throughout the text, with the explanatory line coming at the end of the poem, "The 48 least" (*Transnational Muscle Cars* 39) —presumably meaning the forty-eight most impoverished countries. This kind of scaffolding is evident in counterpart poems such as "Social Facts Are Vertical," "Compression," and "Nobody Likes You." In the latter, for instance, scaffolding of a sort is provided by the repeated use of bracketed phrases in which Derksen (in a characteristic move evident elsewhere in the collection) uncouples and denaturalizes cherished and unquestioned conjunctions of the neoliberal era, such as "[Ethical. Investment.]" (42), "[International. Community.]" (44), "[Sustainable. Development.]" (48), and "[Performance. Benchmarks.]" (52), ending the poem with the telling summary phrase, "[Heightened. Uncertainties.]" (52). As Jaeger suggests, this "modular form" gives both shape and purpose to what otherwise to some might seem like a randomly organized *Late Capitalist Book of Jokes*.

In another extended reading of a single poem from *Transnational Muscle Cars*, Jennifer Blair characterizes the speaker of Derksen's "Happy Locally, Sad Geopolitically" as a kind of emotionally conflicted, ironic *flâneur* of the neoliberal era (77), and this description nicely captures the tenor of another significant cluster of the longer poems in the collection. While poems like "Jerk," "Happy Locally, Sad Geopolitically," and "'What to Do About Globalism'" are still discontinuous and disjunctive, and filled with characteristic pithy and ironic zingers, there is a more sustained sense of tone and perspective that is captured in a sequence at the start of "Happy Locally, Sad Geopolitically":

> But here I merely
> talk to myself as if all
> is textual, as if I am a lyricist
> of late capitalism
> …………………..
> ambling in the streets
> of a fin-de-siècle city
> fixed in the fingers of inevitability
> and the gloomy vision
> of the centre right. (11)

Similar disjunctive musings are evident in "Jerk" and "'What to Do About Globalism.'" By taking up this motif of the late capitalist *flâneur*, I aim not to impose a spurious homogeneity between or even within these poems, but to suggest that they both invoke and disrupt a lyric subjectivity, reflecting what Hartley describes as a general suspicion among the Language poets of a poetic model in which "the poet (a self-present subject) transmits a particular message ('experience,' 'emotion') to a reader (another self-present subject) through a language which is neutral, transparent, 'natural'" (xii). A similar resistance is evident throughout *Transnational Muscle Cars*, but perhaps less so in these poems, which operate in a formally different way from poems like "Social Facts Are Vertical" and "But Could I Make a Living From It" and offer a relatively more sustained position for Derksen's engagement with the political, social, economic, and cultural impact of neoliberalism.

While this brief inventory points to the formal variety of the poems in *Transnational Muscle Cars*, however, it should be stressed that across this range Derksen's writing is consistently disjunctive, elliptical, associative, and polysemous, and all of these forms share to varying degrees the different hallmarks of Derksen's style: the formalist play with language; the penchant for quirky one-liners; the disaffected, alienated, critical sensibility; and the immersion in the politically and culturally claustrophobic and commodified milieu of late capitalism. Whereas Blair's and Jaeger's focus on individual poems demonstrates the value of extended analyses of particular pieces of *Transnational Muscle Cars*—essentially taking a sustained, integrated approach to individual texts—what I want to engage in here is a kind of critical cherry-picking in order to highlight the different dimensions of the long neoliberal moment with which Derksen's collection contends. As Nick Couldry observes in *Why Voice Matters: Culture and Politics after Neoliberalism*, one of the distinctive and insidious things about neoliberalism is the way in which its values have pervaded all walks of life and have come to enjoy the status of an unquestioned common sense:

> Neoliberal rationality is reinforced not just by explicit discourse but through the multiple ways in which that discourse and its workings get *embedded* in daily life and social organization. Neoliberal rationality provides principles for organizing action (in workplaces, public services, fields of competition, public discussion) which are internalized as norms and values (for example, the value of entrepreneurial 'freedom') by individuals, groups and institutions: in short, they become 'culture'. Through this process neoliberalism, over time, crowds out other rationalities, other ways of organizing. (12)

Derksen's poetry, in contrast, prompts us to question the ubiquitous verities of neoliberal globalization and to make space for "other rationalities." While Jaeger and Blair explore how this questioning operates in specific poems, what I want to do here is to highlight particularly resonant critical moments across the range of the collection. Stressing politics over form, I read *Transnational Muscle Cars* in relation to critiques of neoliberalism and globalization, including Derksen's own, through selective rather than sustained textual analysis, in order to offer a broader view of Derksen's contention with the neoliberal order and the place of culture in it. Given the increasing transformation of creative practice into creative capital and the increasing commodification of both the figure of the artist and the figure of the cultural critic, my aim here is not to characterize Derksen as the autonomous poet-critic, sagely diagnosing neoliberalism from some Archimedian position outside of it, but nonetheless to stress how—for all its hyper-referential elusiveness, ambivalence, and ambiguity—a key part of the texture of *Transnational Muscle Cars* is an incisive grappling with the economic, political, cultural, and existential dimensions of the neoliberal order.

"Today the climate is . . . 'favourable for business'" (105). This ideological weather report from the poem "Compression" concisely conveys a central motif in *Transnational Muscle Cars*: the privileging of economic and financial considerations above all else under neoliberalism. An era defined by not just the acceptability of capital accumulation but by the widespread surrender to the allure of profit is captured in a deft one-liner from "But Could I Make a Living From It": "*Investment banking* as a sexual term" (28). This witty turn offers a good example of Derksen's "rearticulatory poetics" in operation, as Derksen's poetry functions, Pauline Butling argues, by "rearticulating, or making politically overt through startling juxtaposition, the meanings of apparently ideologically neutral terms" (Butling and Rudy 196). A recurring strategy Derksen employs is the insertion of unattributed quotes that, in isolation, lay bare the problems or contradictions of neoliberal imperatives. In the same poem, for instance, the quoted phrases "Money traders and ordinary people" (29) and "As a banker or a citizen" (37) at once point to and wryly question the privileging of the financial sector in the neoliberal order. Another quote, presumably gleaned from a media report, highlights the naive presumption of the beneficence of finance capital (an observation that resonates with even more irony now, in the wake of the financial sector's pivotal contribution to the global economic meltdown): "It's odd that their quest for justice has led the various regulators and prosecutors to big Wall Street firms" (39). At various points of the collection, the apotheosis of finance under neoliberalism is part of the hegemonic regime to which Derksen's conflicted, alienated subjects react. In "Happy Locally, Sad Geopolitically," for instance, the speaker points to the obsessive calculus and celebration of profit of the neoliberal era, lamenting that "It's an aching slow burn / why 'deficits are unethical' / and surplus is celebrated / not celibate" (14). The disaffected speaker of "Jerk" asserts that

> now I'm wanting transformation
> rather than 'structural adjustment'
> to go with the primitive accumulation
> and worn contradictions. Not more
> of these natural facts ('globalization is'). (10)

As Blair contends, through his "rearticulatory poetics," Derksen "seeks to express various aspects of neoliberalism as contradictory (rather than as a unified, smoothly flowing apparatus that keeps all of the world's populations on a consistent path of social and economic improvement). . . . In general, his aim is to give voice to that which is denied by neoliberal ideology" (86). In these and other ways, Derksen highlights how economic imperatives have "crowded out" other measurements of value and significance, implicitly (if ambivalently) pointing to the "unimaginable conversation outside of commerce" (*Transnational Muscle Cars* 38).

A central charge against neoliberalism—of which the purported principal accomplishment is the generation of wealth—is that it routinely intensifies economic and social inequality. Susan George, among others, argues that contrary to the mantra that neoliberalism promotes ultimately beneficial outcomes, "the evidence shows that the most unequal societies are also unequivocally the most neoliberal and the most dysfunctional from myriad points of view" (96). Or, as Derksen (updating a phrase from *The Communist Manifesto*) puts it in "On," "'the exploitation / of the many / by the few' / just / got / bigger" (125). Pointing to one of the most spatially visible measures of social stratification and inequality in the neoliberal era, the speaker in "Nobody Likes You" confides that

> Days like this
> I ask myself, why can't it be all
> snowboarding all the time
> with stylish oversized hi-tech clothing
> instead of minor misery
> on the outskirts of gated communities
> with their own flags. (49)

Perhaps gesturing to the way in which neoliberal ideology often works to downplay or justify economic and social inequality by contending that the wealthy are automatically the deserving beneficiaries of their own hard work and initiative, "Happy Locally, Sad Geopolitically" opens with this sardonically democratic observation: "The misery of millionaires / shows it is a classless society" (11). Another key measure of success in our globalized economy is mobility, which has climbed, Zygmunt Bauman argues, "to the rank of the uppermost among the coveted values" (2). However, that mobility in reality is highly unevenly apportioned (Bauman 2), an insight that is echoed in a sequence in "'What to Do About Globalism'" that refers to "these times when we are told / that movement is what we all share / it's just that some have more legroom" (98). As Bauman puts it, globalization has involved "the concentration of capital, finance and all other resources of choice and effective action" but it also has involved, "perhaps above all . . . *the concentration of freedom* to move and to act (two freedoms which for all practical purposes have become synonymous)" (70).

One of the most significant and insidious aspects of neoliberal thinking is the way in which it has worked to reshape notions of subjectivity and individual identity. As Helga Leitner et al. maintain,

> Under neoliberalism, individual freedom is redefined as the capacity for self-realization and freedom from bureaucracy rather than freedom from want,

> with human behavior reconceptualized along economic lines. Individuals are empowered to actively make self-interested choices and are made responsible for acting in this way to advance both their own well-being and that of society. Employees are redefined as entrepreneurs with an obligation to work, to better themselves and society, rather than having a right to work. They are responsible for their own education and retraining, to build human capital, and for their own well-being and risk management by behaving prudently, instead of relying on the state. Personal and social responsibility are equated with self-esteem. (4)

One of the key features of *Transnational Muscle Cars* is Derksen's awareness of, and contention with, this ideological reprogramming of individual subjectivity and identity. Neoliberalism, Derksen observes in his introduction to *Annihilated Time*, cultivates "the citizen-subject as an individualized entrepreneurial actor," self-interested and resistant to collective action (30), an insight that is manifested in various ironic or sardonic formulations in the collection. The speaker of "Happy Locally, Sad Geopolitically," for instance, concisely conveys this imperative of competitive narcissism:

> To vote, think
> only of yourself
> in relation to
> yourself, others
> are fucked
> so fuck them (also helpful
> for the workplace). (21-22)

Here, Derksen echoes David Harvey's insight that "[n]eoliberal concern for the individual trumps any social democratic concern for equality, democracy, and social solidarities" (176). An injunction from "Social Facts Are Vertical," "You are value waiting to happen" (72), can be taken as a wry reference to how neoliberalism reformulates the individual in terms of his or her potential to create wealth and "tends to judge . . . all social activities in terms of their contribution to capital accumulation" (Jessop 176). Central to this reconfiguration of the individual is the impact of commodity culture, in which individual subjectivity is increasingly bound up with patterns of consumption, a tension deftly conveyed in a line from "Compression": "I'd like to engage in some collectivity, but I'm busy accumulating particularities" (106). Here, Derksen's quip brings to mind Fredric Jameson's musing about whether, under late capitalism, "the practice of consumption has not replaced the resolute taking of a stand and the full-throated endorsement of a political opinion" (398). In various places in the collection, Derksen parodies the obsession of consumers with commodities and draws attention to the interplay between commodity fetishism and individual identity in an era in which we "have come to understand life as a consumerist adventure in which we scroll through various lifestyle options to find the one that best expresses the inner truth of our individuality" (Curtis 6). Here again, a characteristic strategy is to leave unattributed quotations to speak for themselves: "At some point in my life I became obsessed with having just the right wristwatch" (Derksen 29). Deft descriptions likewise point to the ways in which both public space and private space are inscribed by consumer culture and the values of corporate capitalism. In "Nobody Likes You," "the sun / bounces off the ground's / property" (43), while in "But Could I Make a Living From It," "[t]he sun reflects off the triangular glass tower downtown and into my bed – I sprawl on this corporate light" (24). In these and other passages, Derksen points to the necessity, and perhaps the impossibility, of thinking beyond consumption and the pervasive values of neoliberalism. This ambivalence is nicely evoked by the speaker of "When the Bubble Pops, Inflate a Utopia Dome," whose articulation of this hope is entangled with a riff from the Supremes' "Get Out My Life": "Trusting in art to help me (why wontcha babe) / get over the blank stare of the commodity / (keep me hanging on)" (116).

A key part of this broader preoccupation with the reconfiguration of identity and subjectivity within the intensified commodity culture of neoliberal globalization is Derksen's foregrounding of the reconfigured relationship between capital and labour. Gregory Betts and Robert David Stacey note in their introduction to a special issue of *Open Letter* on the Kootenay School of Writing that "a great deal of KSW writing deals with or discusses labour processes, their organization, and role within the broader structuration of capital" (8), and the poems in *Transnational Muscle Cars* turn again and again to the beleaguered worker of late capitalism and the problems of identifying with one's work under such a regime. In an era in which gainful, secure, and especially unionized employment is under siege, a number of passages in the collection highlight the troubled conjunction between work, identity, and self-esteem, such as the lines "Can one holiday without employment?" (35) and "I aspire to a dental plan – to make myself human" (31) from "Could I Make a Living From It"; here the suggestion is that one's sense of self is bound up with secure employment replete with substantive benefits. In "Nobody Likes You," Derksen conveys this inversion of priorities in a clever riff on the opening lines of the Beatles' "Norwegian Wood": "I once had a job / or should I say / it once had me" (47). Under this regime, capital holds most of the cards and workers are expected to accede to the imperatives of mobility, growth, and flexibility. This entails, as Bauman notes, a euphemistic double standard in which the flexibility of the labour market "means more pliant and compliant, easy to knead and mould, to slice and roll, and putting up no resistance whatever is being done to it" (104). The ensuing downgrading of the value of labour is nicely summarized in a sardonic declaration from "Nobody Likes You": "A proud yet flexible and disposable worker" (27). Elsewhere in the poem, Derksen points to the assault on unionism that many commentators see as a central objective of neoliberal globalization as well as the displacement of tangible employment benefits by superficial facsimiles of the valuing of labour: "Workers cross their own picket line / surely a lifetime supply / of employee of the month / photos there" (43). In these ways, *Transnational Muscle Cars* highlights just what the vaunted "flexibility" of our neoliberal era means for labour: "more part-time and temporary jobs, less full-time secure ones; lower pension rights, limited collective bargaining and the segmentation of salaries and wages" (Hall 715).

Given the self-referential and often almost anti-representational texture of *Transnational Muscle Cars*, it would be misleading to describe Derksen's critique of the treatment of labour as sustained or systematic. Nonetheless, over the course of *Transnational Muscle Cars*, there is certainly a repeated "disarticulation" of a neoliberal ideological framework that privileges capital and accelerates the alienation and disempowerment of labour. Critics routinely point to the intensified suppression of relations of production and the alienation of labour under neoliberal globalization, a concern wryly conveyed in "Happy Locally, Sad Geopolitically": "Work is done / as if by itself and returns / as something alien: imagine saying 'I / made that toilet paper!'" (16). A line from "But Could I Make a Living From It" deftly weaves a Marxist characterization of the working class with a famous slogan for Timex wristwatches to ironically address the historical conditions of labour under neoliberalism: "If 'workers are those who are not allowed to transform the space/time allotted them,'[2] then 'takes a licking and keeps on ticking' is a class prospect" (33). Indeed, "Could I Make a Living From It" is occasionally punctuated by quotes from Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser's influential essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses": "Mr. X, a capitalist who produces woolen yarn in his spinning mill, has to 'reproduce' his raw material," "Mr. Y, a heavy engineer producing machine tools . . . " (Derksen, *Transnational Muscle Cars* 25, 28).[3] This reflection of the significance of critical theory in Derksen's work—in this case his evocation of Althusser's influential concept of interpellation, or ideological "hailing" into particular social positions—highlights his objective of denaturalizing and defamiliarizing neoliberal discourse, especially with respect to relations between labour and capital. This strategy recurs in a reported observation from "Compression" that frames labour not just as an impediment to capital but effectively as a mortal enemy: "A shredded corporation 'fights for its life' by laying off 25% of its workers" (104). In this fashion, *Transnational Muscle Cars* points to a cultural imperialism that, as Derksen characterizes it in *Annihilated Time*,

> helps push, at the level of a social imaginary, the project of neoliberal global capital as the only viable and only existing form of life. . . . By limiting the discussion and imagination of other shapes of the world and of other forms of social order, universal cultural imperialism tries to enact Althusser's call of interpellation at a global level; public cultures and state structures are to turn to neoliberalism's call of "hey you" and further embed themselves into its systems and logic. (98)

If *Transnational Muscle Cars* is geared towards disarticulating neoliberalism's reconfiguring of the individual—whether consumer or worker—its signature poem may well be "Sly Consumption Side Sentence," a short poem near the end of the collection that more trenchantly and less ambivalently evokes Derksen's concern with the impact of neoliberalism on individual subjectivity. Apostrophizing neoliberalism, Derksen's speaker juxtaposes the ostensibly empowered, commodified post-Fordist subject with his exploited Fordist predecessor:

> Dear neoliberalism, I
> just want to thank you
> for letting me
> be a mobile
> self-reflexive
> commodity with agency
> putting no pressure
> on former state structures
> anew, again
> till you use me up
> consumption side
> just like you did
> production side with Dad
> add an *e*, dead. (121)

In this poem, Derksen largely sets aside his characteristic wryness and draws a compelling parallel between industrial capitalism's exploitation of labour and the exploitation and disenfranchisement of the subject-as-consumer under late capitalism. His speaker points to the seductive allure of freedom and choice in a commodity culture that is, ultimately, similarly taxing and exploitative.

Given this picture of the redrawing of power under neoliberalism, a key consideration in looking at *Transnational Muscle Cars* is the place of politics in the collection. Like many critics of neoliberal globalization, Derksen in his critical essays points to the interconnectedness of neoliberal ideology, consumer culture, and a new kind of free-market, transnational imperialism, and *Transnational Muscle Cars* draws similar connections, though more wryly and, at times, ambivalently. For example, a line from "Compression"—"Suddenly a city saturated with police, globally guarding Starbucks" (104)—refers, presumably, to the policing of anti-globalization protests, highlighting how the state "has been retooled in neoliberalism to both an engine of reterritorialization, reregulation, and in forms of repression of social movements, and indeed, even of democracy," clearly aligning itself with the interests of transnational capital (Derksen, *Annihilated Time* 219). In a similar vein, the speaker of "Happy Locally, Sad Geopolitically" archly notes that "[g]etting beaten / with a long rubber hose / is an innovation of flexi post- / Fordism" (21). However, despite the traction of such ripostes, a recurrent motif throughout the collection is the problem of political activism in a regime dominated by consumption and commodification. In "Compression," for instance, lines such as "I personally have not noticed any new forms of imperialism where I do my shopping" (104) and "I'd like to join the boycott, but I've internalized everything" (105) convey a sense that a culture of consumption short-circuits productive political engagement; as Jameson puts it, "the inner dynamic of the culture of consumption is an infernal machine from which one does not escape by the taking of thought (or moralizing positions), an infinite propagation and replication of 'desire' that feeds on itself and has no outside and no fulfillment" (206). In "Social Facts Are Vertical," Derksen's speaker wittily underlines the primacy of economic considerations in political participation under neoliberalism by posing the question, "So, in order to vote you have to ask yourself are you any better off since you began reading this poem or has your economic situation remained the same?" (72), drawing attention to "an ideology that installs neoliberal *economics* as the dominant frame for politics" (Couldry 14). However, other observations have a slightly more resistant edge, such as a line satirizing highly profitable corporations' dubious evocation of global harmony to peddle further product: "I'd like to 'buy the world a coke' but I'm more into critical regionalism than universal civilization" (106). While one must be wary of drawing an overarching conclusion about the politics of the collection, *Transnational Muscle Cars* to a considerable degree cultivates a somewhat enigmatic and ambivalent stance towards political engagement, an ambivalence succinctly exemplified by a line from "Social Facts Are Vertical," a witty reworking of the song "I Fought the Law": "I questioned authority and the question won" (73). On the one hand, the line seems to assert the value of resisting the prevailing political order, while on the other hand, its ambiguity—how does a question "win"?—seems to undercut or at least substantially qualify the impact of such resistance.

Essentially, various lines and passages in *Transnational Muscle Cars* question the role and even the possibility of politics in the "infernal machine" of neoliberal globalization. Derksen's poems also, in turn, routinely question the nature, value, and even possibility of cultural production and artistic practice in the long neoliberal moment, reflecting what Betts and Stacey see as a recurring impulse in KSW writing, "an aesthetic that critiques the status quo from within its given frameworks—speaking its own language against it, parodying and making (almost) unrecognizable its various meaning-making systems. The work of art, in other words, can no longer claim to be an unalienated or otherwise 'free' space outside the domain of capital" (9). In this respect, the poem "Jerk," which is designated as the preface to the collection, is particularly significant. The poem opens with the speaker looking at gondolas ascending a mountain and questions the relationship between commodification and the purposes of art: "The mountain is named after a commodity. Art has made this / a nonalienated view. Is that what / we asked it to do?" (9). Instead, the speaker muses, implicitly announcing one of the imperatives of the collection to follow, "should art not / reveal ideology / rather than naturalize it?" (9). Evoking Jameson's notion of "cognitive mapping,"[4] a sequence at the end of "Jerk" succinctly captures the ambivalence of the answer to that question:

> My idealistic belief
> is that historical consciousness may come.
> My sad cognitive mapping
> is that overdetermined contradictions
> don't lead to new social relations.
> I want an art
> more complicated than that. (10)

Derksen elaborates on this tension in an interview with Pauline Butling and Susan Rudy, describing his interest in "overdetermination and contradiction. You get a build-up of overdetermined contradictions within capitalism and that leads to change. But I think we're at a moment when the overdetermined contradictions can just exist, and it doesn't lead to any change" ("A Conversation" 126). In such a milieu, a mimetic model of writing is less than adequate; "Writing / can no longer be daily mind mapping," the speaker declares later on in "Jerk," "as it once was so easy / to please with point by point / hits (power point)" (14). Elsewhere in the collection, this tension resurfaces, such as in "'What to Do About Globalism,'" in which the speaker ironically undercuts the activist stance of the title itself: "The title is a cynical / maneuver to show up on / topic searches and not a manual / for action, so I will not be responsible / for any injuries incurred" (101). Derksen also winks at his own poetic practice in the parodic ad line, "An oil strong enough for today's hyper-referential poetry" (75).

In light of these tensions, the tempting response to Derksen's work is to see it as a reflection of the neoliberal milieu with which he contends—in a sense to read him as "a lyricist of late capitalism." If the long neoliberal moment is characterized by unresolved, overdetermined contradictions, in other words, it is tempting to see those unresolved contradictions reflected in Derksen's poetry itself, which is at once amenable to semantic interpretation and resistant to it; at once politically charged and politically ambiguous; consistent and cohesive in some respects but fragmented, discontinuous, and centrifugal in most others. Jaeger's comments on "But Could I Make a Living From It" point to this fundamental dilemma. On the one hand, Jaeger highlights the dispersive effect of Derksen's open-ended style and suggests that it is symptomatic of our times, pointing to how the poem "uses disjunction to dialogically foreground the links among subjectivity, economic relations, and social desire. The messy complexities and contradictions of our current social situation are paralleled by the centrifugal form of the text" (36-37). On the other hand, Jaeger sees Derksen's use of modular form as having an integrating, unifying effect: "The poem's accretion of critical material is further reinforced, and given a sense of unified direction, through its repetitive, refrain-like structure" (38). The physicist in me (a very diminutive figure indeed) wants to quibble here; if the text is centrifugal, then the "unified direction" Jaeger ascribes to the poem can only be "outwards." But the apparent contradiction or tension actually seems quite apropos, suggesting an interplay between dispersion and integration that runs through the whole collection. Although to my mind Derksen's work comes across as less unified than suggested by Jaeger's description here, the dialogic quality of "But Can I Make a Living From It," as Jaeger rightly argues, "calls for the active work of a reader to produce meanings"—an observation that can be extended to all of *Transnational Muscle Cars*—"and those meanings may vary from reader to reader according to their position in the 'world'" (37). In this sense, *Transnational Muscle Cars* is an "open text," one in which, according to Hartley (citing Lyn Hejinian), "[m]eaning exists within an active inter-agential process rather than as an object or product existing outside of language, just as value results from a social process rather than from some inherent quality of the object" (38). My reading of *Transnational Muscle Cars* here, in that light, is clearly animated by my interest in the dynamics and effects of neoliberalism, but I realize that its scope comes at the cost of downplaying the fabric and texture of Derksen's poetry and its general resistance to reference. A fuller appreciation of Derksen's work requires a solid grounding in structuralist and poststructuralist theory, a broad range of popular and indie music, modernist and postmodernist architecture, globalization, neoliberalism, and the work of the Language poets. And that's just for starters. A reader more immersed in all of the above than I am would likely appreciate more fully the richness of Derksen's poetics and, in turn, the ways in which Derksen contends with the cultural, social, political, and economic impact of our neoliberal milieu. To some readers, in short, Derksen's work will appear more integrated than it will to others.

In that respect, at the heart of Derksen's engagement with neoliberal globalization is the perennial issue of the equilibrium between coherence and accessibility, because Derksen's work—as a result of its considerable resistance to referentiality—is likely to appeal to a relatively restricted audience. As Derksen's critical and creative writings suggest, though, "accessibility" is no neutral matter but is itself bound up with the complicated politics of neoliberalism and commodity culture. In order to engage in his "disarticulation" of neoliberalism, Derksen must work from within neoliberalism and "contend with neoliberalism's hijacking of language and its basic referential functioning, and with the fact that language is inevitably susceptible to mobilization by the corporate-domination of affect" (Blair 86). What might be seen as incoherence or inaccessibility, in other words, from another perspective can be seen as the strategy of a writer aware of his immersion in a neoliberal milieu in which the commodification of culture is accelerated. As Derksen writes in *Annihilated Time*, "the shift to culture as an accumulation strategy, pushing aside notions of a semi-autonomous position for culture . . . is intensified within neoliberalism, and intensified in the capital expansion of globalization: culture becomes a frontier where financialization is intensified as an accumulation strategy" (33). If resistance to the neoliberal order through cultural production is possible, in other words, that resistance must necessarily come from within, because, as Neal Curtis laments, the "imbrication of financial capital into the very tissue of everyday practices has affected who we think we are in the sense that . . . it has become part of our very being" and, consequently, "thinking about alternatives is more of an ontological problem than an epistemological one" (5). Derksen contends with this conflicted position through a poetics that challenges readers, certainly, but also challenges the myriad ways in which neoliberal thinking has come to impinge upon practically all dimensions of contemporary life.

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NOTES

1 See Derksen's chapter on Language writing in both the United States and Canada, "Inside/Outside the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Site," in *Annihilated Time* (123-71). Touching on the work of writers such as Bob Perelman, Ron Silliman, and Steve McCaffery, as well as the Kootenay School of Writing, Derksen resists reductive formulations of Language writing as a distinctive, succinctly describable school or poetics. Nonetheless, many of his appraisals of the work of other poets in the chapter throw light on his own poetic practice.

2 The phrase appears in Kristin Ross' *The Emergence of Social Space: Rimbaud and the Paris Commune* (41).

3 See Louis Althusser's "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)" (127-86).

4 In *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Jameson defines cognitive mapping as "a pedagogical political culture which seeks to endow the individual subject with some new heightened sense of its place in the global system" (54).

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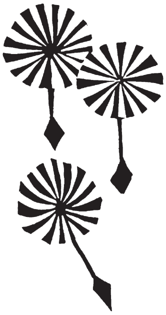

Coleena Fanjoy

Umbra

That outline on the wall, full of nothing—
that's her.

She sewed herself to Pan that night,
though he didn't know.

Boy, why are you crying?

If he'd looked closely he would have seen
that the silhouette was shorter than it should have been,

but he was too content to have one follow him so closely,
so completely,
mirroring all the things he loved best about himself.

Wendy liked when he beat his chest and threw his head back to crow
because she could do it too—long, loud, free.

So she remains, in the corner of his eye,
when he's in that place just before sleep.

Oh, the cleverness of me.

Nathalie Dolbec

Les contours du descriptif dans *Volkswagen Blues* de Jacques Poulin

Pour une analyse de l'écriture descriptive, les voies de recherche sont nombreuses. On trouve chez Ansgar Nünning un « elaborated analytical framework » qui dégage les cinq grands types de description (114-16). On peut aussi relever, dans ce que Philippe Hamon présente comme une « théorie satisfaisante » du descriptif, six centres d'intérêts dont le premier va principalement nous occuper ici, « *le système démarcatif* et signalétique des systèmes descriptifs » (125-26). D'autres théoriciens ont suivi cette dernière piste qui prend comme objet d'étude la délimitation et l'insertion de la séquence descriptive, notamment Jean-Michel Adam et André Petitjean (1989), Yves Reuter (2000), Marie-Annick Gervais-Zaninger (2001) et Morten Nøjgaard (2004). Parmi eux, Reuter pense que « les fragments descriptifs fonctionnent comme des *parcours* construisant l'objet et guidant le lecteur » (79); il faudra donc analyser ces parcours à partir de critères fondamentaux, en particulier leur « mode de présence » (83), lequel suppose « un continuum allant de la *discrétion* à *l'ostension* » (83). Une lecture attentive des fragments descriptifs du *Volkswagen Blues* de Jacques Poulin semble montrer que le mode privilégié tend à l'ostension : « une tendance au soulignement de la description » qui peut se manifester « par un marquage de ses frontières » (Reuter 83). L'examen du balisage des « fragments expansés à dominante marquée[1] » révèle ici une abondance de signaux démarcatifs qui fonctionnent comme des « annonces » plus ou moins marquées de l'apparition d'une description — et inversement de sa disparition (Reuter 24; 98). Cela établi, nous identifierons d'abord les tendances signalétiques repérables dans les contours du descriptif de *Volkswagen Blues*. Dans un deuxième temps, nous dégagerons, à la lumière des théories de Reuter et au-delà, les bénéfices de l'appareil signalétique mis en place.

Tendances signalétiques[2]

Un premier relevé des signaux démarcatifs[3] permet de constater ici un surmarquage du descriptif qui se manifeste non seulement par une présence plus importante mais aussi par une plus grande variété de signaux démarcatifs d'ouverture que de clôture. En termes de variété, et dans les deux cas, on notera cependant la forte récurrence de certains signaux.

Comme les signaux démarcatifs peuvent intervenir en amont et/ou en aval de la séquence descriptive, nous appellerons *signaux démarcatifs internes de début* ou *de fin de description* ceux qui sont syntaxiquement incorporés à la séquence descriptive. Ceux qui la précèdent, nous les nommerons *signaux démarcatifs externes de début de description*, désignant par *signaux démarcatifs externes de fin de description* ceux qui apparaissent après la séquence[4].

Signaux démarcatifs internes de début de description

On observe une prédilection pour les verbes à l'imparfait, « temps canonique de la description » selon Nøjgaard (87), quand il s'agit, par exemple, de décrire la salle où figure la murale de Diego Rivera au Detroit Institute of Arts : « La salle mesurait près de dix mètres de hauteur . . . » (Poulin 93). Parmi ces verbes, « être » — « véritable signal introductif à toute description » (Hamon 115) — domine sans surprise, comme dans cette amorce : « Washington Square était un parc ordinaire . . . » (Poulin 259). Ce même verbe tend à revenir sous la forme « c'était », « présentatif de description » selon Hamon et considéré par ce dernier comme l'« un des "tours" les plus ressassés du style artiste-descriptif du XIXe siècle . . . » (116, note 1). Ce tour inaugure, par exemple, la description d'un Renoir à l'Art Institute de Chicago : « C'était une jeune femme assise à une terrasse . . . » (Poulin 105). Le verbe « avoir », conjugué à l'imparfait, détient lui aussi une valeur signalétique, comme dans ce portrait de Pitsémine : « Elle avait un visage osseux, le teint foncé, les yeux très noirs . . . » (Poulin 11). Quant au tour présentatif « il y avait » — véritable tic, selon Catherine Fromilhague et Anne Sancier, de « "[l]'écriture artiste" de la seconde moitié du XIXe siècle » (180), il trouve naturellement sa place en tant qu'annonce. « [N]otation d'une présence » pour Hamon (118), ce tour, dans lequel Philippe Bonnefis voit « un numérateur, un opérateur de dénombrement » (145), peut en effet conduire à l'énumération, « forme extrême » de la description (Adam et

Petitjean 120). Tel est le cas lorsqu'il s'agit de décrire les Mille-Îles : « Il y avait vraiment toutes sortes d'îles, des petites et des grandes . . . » (Poulin 54).

Les verbes de perception visuelle peuvent également figurer dans cette catégorie, notamment « examiner » qu'Adam considère comme l'« introducteur classique de pause descriptive » (279). S'il tient lieu de signal démarcatif, mais en position externe, dans *Volkswagen Blues*, c'est plutôt le verbe « voir » qui, en position interne, mériterait ici cette appellation. On le rencontre d'ailleurs, dès l'incipit, dans ce premier portrait de Pitsémine : « il vit une grande fille maigre qui était vêtue d'une robe de nuit blanche . . . » (Poulin 9). Il peut même être étayé par un autre verbe de perception, comme dans la description de San Francisco : « Et lorsqu'ils se retournaient pour voir la ville, ils apercevaient les *cable cars* qui bringuebalaient sur la pente abrupte . . . » (Poulin 256).

Le pantonyme, « terme syncrétique-régisseur » de la séquence descriptive selon Hamon (141), peut participer comme signal à la démarcation liminaire du fragment. Baptisé « thème-titre » par Adam et Petitjean (114), il oriente l'« objet du discours ». Ainsi, le toponyme « Chimney Rock » annonce d'emblée la description du site : « Chimney Rock était une formation rocheuse . . . » (Poulin 187-88).

Interviennent enfin les signaux démarcatifs internes qui affichent un « caractère métatextuel dans la mesure où [ils] peuvent désigner la "nature" du fragment mais aussi son importance, sa fonction ou la façon dont il convient de le lire » (Reuter 98). La description de la maison natale de Jack et de son frère Théo propose d'emblée un signal qui identifie sans équivoque le type séquentiel adopté : « Il commença par décrire la maison, un imposant bâtiment de forme carrée . . . » (Poulin 34).

Signaux démarcatifs externes de début de description

Retenons avant tout l'« *effet de contraste* entre le fragment descriptif et l'environnement textuel » (Reuter 101). Ce signal se manifeste surtout par le biais de deux mécanismes qui souvent se répondent. Il y a d'abord la « dénarrativisation », notamment le « passage du narratif à un fragment plus [descriptif] » (Reuter 101) : « Ensuite ils reprirent la route qui longeait le fleuve et ils se rendirent à Ivy Lea. Le camping était divisé en deux sections . . . » (Poulin 54). Ajoutons les « fonctionnements verbaux différents du cotexte » (Reuter 101), en particulier le glissement du passé simple, « temps signalétique de l'effet-récit » (Hamon 65), à l'imparfait : « Elle l'emmena faire une excursion en bateau à aubes sur le Mississippi. Leur bateau s'appelait le *Natchez*. Avec ses deux hautes cheminées . . . » (Poulin 131).

Au plan typographique, le changement de paragraphe intervient ici fréquemment pour annoncer l'imminence d'une description. Même un segment narratif aussi bref que « Ils traversèrent un parc » (Poulin 94), qui constitue un paragraphe à part entière, donnera lieu à un nouvel alinéa consacré à la description du lieu : « Le parc n'avait rien de spécial : des arbres, des fleurs, des bancs . . . » (Poulin 94).

Théoriquement parlant, Hamon note que « [t]out déplacement de personnage, entrée ou sortie, déplacement de temps ou de lieu, mention d'un seuil ou d'une frontière franchie . . . tend à introduire du "nouveau" dans un texte, donc à déclencher "naturellement" une description . . . » (166). Dans un roman de la route comme *Volkswagen Blues*, où la notion de déplacement est omniprésente, l'arrivée d'un personnage dans un espace inconnu constitue bien sûr un signal démarcatif — et ce dès les premières pages du texte, lorsque Jack, accompagné de son guide, se dirige vers le musée de Gaspé : « C'est ici, dit la Grande Sauterelle. Tournez à gauche. Jack quitta la route et rangea le vieux Volks à côté du musée. C'était un immeuble de bois comprenant plusieurs sections . . . » (Poulin 16).

Les verbes de perception visuelle, déjà recensés en position interne comme signaux démarcatifs, peuvent aussi apparaître en position externe — notamment le verbe « regarder » : « Il se tourna pour la regarder. Elle avait toujours le même air grave et réfléchi . . . » (Poulin 15-16). Il en va de même des signaux métatextuels : dans un dialogue entre Jack et Pitsémine, l'adverbe « physiquement » sert d'annonce prosopographique : « — Et physiquement, comment était-il? — Le contraire de moi : il était grand, un mètre quatre-vingt dix . . . » (Poulin 13).

Moins récurrents mais plus originaux sont les signaux démarcatifs empruntés à la ponctuation et ceux de nature iconique. Parmi les premiers, retenons le deux-points qui, selon Bernard Dupriez, accentue une « articulation de sens » et « l'existence d'une relation entre les segments qu'il sépare » (151). C'est le cas lorsque Pitsémine examine Chop Suey : « Elle mit son doigt sur le museau du chat : le museau était frais et humide comme d'habitude . . . » (Poulin 155). Quant aux seconds, le signal prend parfois la forme de trois astérisques dessinant un triangle isocèle[5], par exemple juste avant la description du camping de Brantford : « ⁂ Le camping se trouvait au bord de la Grand River . . . » (Poulin 84).

Pour les besoins de la démonstration, les signaux démarcatifs internes et externes de début de description ont été présentés séparément. Or, la sursignalisation des contours du descriptif tourne d'autant plus à l'ostension

qu'un même segment peut multiplier les signaux. Ainsi, la description de l'avenue Michigan à Chicago cumule huit signaux démarcatifs de début de description (« — On ne restera pas longtemps, dit l'homme en vidant sa tasse de café. On va juste entrer et sortir. ⁂ [Paragraphe.] C'était la fin de mai, l'air était bon et chaud; l'avenue Michigan, très animée, large et cossue . . . » [Poulin 105]) —
cinq externes :

1. dénarrativisation : dialogue → description;
2. fonctionnement verbal différent du cotexte : futur simple → imparfait;
3. arrivée du personnage dans un espace nouveau;
4. changement de paragraphe;
5. trois astérisques;

et trois internes :

1. présentatif de description : « c'était »;
2. verbe « être » conjugué à l'imparfait;
3. pantonyme : « l'avenue Michigan ».

Signaux démarcatifs internes de fin de description

Notons ici une préférence pour les organisateurs reformulatifs. Ainsi, la description du comportement hivernal des manchots empereurs s'achève par « Voilà, c'est tout » (Poulin 61). Dans le même esprit, « c'était » (accompagné d'un pantonyme en position récapitulative) vient clore la description du cimetière de Brantford : « C'était un tout petit cimetière » (Poulin 82). Ailleurs, « c'est » (toujours accompagné d'un pantonyme en position récapitulative) vient conclure l'histoire de l'*Eldorado* : « C'est ainsi qu'est née la légende . . . » (Poulin 29). Une marque de ponctuation, comme les points de suspension, peut aussi suggérer que la description touche à sa fin, comme lorsque Jack convoque ses souvenirs d'enfance : « Il se rappelait que son frère et lui se rendaient dans la forêt, de l'autre côté de la rivière, où ils attrapaient des lièvres avec des collets en fil de laiton. Il se rappelait . . . » (Poulin 35).

Signaux démarcatifs externes de fin de description

Si l'effet de contraste est tout naturellement privilégié, le mouvement des deux mécanismes évoqués plus haut s'inverse, d'abord par narrativisation au moment de clore la description du réceptionniste au YMCA de Toronto : « Il regardait la fille d'un œil soupçonneux. — Single, répondit Jack après un moment d'hésitation » (Poulin 64). Ensuite, par l'irruption d'un fonctionnement verbal différent de celui du cotexte, comme à la fin du constat métérologique du jour où Jack et Pitsémine arrivent à San Francisco : « Le soleil n'arrivait pas à percer le brouillard. . . . Ils se hâtèrent de regagner le Volkswagen » (Poulin 257).

Le recours au changement de paragraphe souligne à plusieurs reprises non plus le début mais la fin d'une description : « Le chat noir, caché sous un siège, grondait sourdement. [Paragraphe.] Jack remit le moteur en marche . . . » (Poulin 253).

Au terme d'une séquence descriptive, les trois astérisques disposés en triangle peuvent également détenir une valeur signalétique. À la fin d'un des portraits de Pitsémine, elles interviennent avant que le dialogue ne reprenne : « Elle avait toujours le même air grave et réfléchi. . . . ⁂ — C'est ici, dit la Grande Sauterelle » (Poulin 16).

Le cumul éventuel de signaux démarcatifs internes et externes à l'orée d'un fragment descriptif vaut également pour la fin — moins souvent il est vrai. Dans le passage sur le « complexe du scaphandrier », cinq signaux de fin de description apparaissent (« On voudrait rester là toujours. . . . Voilà, c'est tout. C'était le complexe du scaphandrier. [Paragraphe.] La Grande Sauterelle se versa une tasse de café » [Poulin 147]) — deux internes :

1. points de suspension;
2. doublet d'organisateurs reformulatifs : « Voilà, c'est tout » et « C'était » + pantonyme, en position récapitulative : « le complexe du scaphandrier »;

et trois externes :

1. narrativisation : description → narration;
2. fonctionnement verbal différent du cotexte : imparfait → passé simple;
3. changement de paragraphe.

Ce genre de cumul n'a rien pour étonner Hamon car « l'une des obsessions du texte descriptif sera, bien souvent, d'hypertrophier son système démarcatif, de souligner au maximum, par divers procédés, l'encadrement de l'unité descriptive elle-même, d'accentuer en particulier son début et sa fin » (46). Même si Reuter ne va pas aussi loin (97, note 1), c'est à partir de trois « intérêts » dégagés par ce même théoricien que nous voudrions évaluer les bénéfices de cette sursignalisation dans *Volkswagen Blues* — dont le dernier donnera lieu à plus ample développement.

Premier intérêt signalétique

« [S]ignaler au lecteur un type de segment textuel et le guider vers un mode de lecture spécifique » (Reuter 98). Dans *Volkswagen Blues*, un nombre considérable de signaux démarcatifs en position interne ou externe de début ou de fin de description amène progressivement le lecteur vers la reconnaissance discursive — que la variété de ces signaux, la persistence de certains d'entre eux et leur accessibilité facilitent plus encore. Les signaux métatextuels, le recours à l'imparfait, aux verbes « être » ou « avoir », aux tours présentatifs, aux verbes de perception visuelle, au pantonyme, aux effets de contraste par dénarrativisation/narrativisation, aux fonctionnements verbaux différents du cotexte, aux signaux typographiques, aux organisateurs reformulatifs, aux points de suspension — tout cela dessine sans grand mystère les frontières du fragment descriptif.

Or, cette démarche n'est pas sans appeler une des fonctions de la description dégagées par Reuter, la « fonction évaluative » (131), à condition bien sûr de la limiter ici aux signaux démarcatifs et, par conséquent, de parler plutôt, comme nous le ferons pour les autres fonctions évoquées, d'« intérêt ». La description « donne à voir *d'une certaine façon* et, ce faisant, positionne tout autant l'objet décrit que le descripteur ainsi que l'image que celui-ci se construit du récepteur de la description. Classant et catégorisant, elle n'est jamais neutre » (Reuter 131). Il s'agirait donc ici d'« intérêt » évaluatif, dans la mesure où la mise en place de signaux peut être perçue comme une main tendue : le descripteur met le lecteur en condition optimale pour l'approche et l'identification de la séquence.

Deuxième intérêt signalétique

« [C]onstruire l'intérêt du passage concerné » (Reuter 98). Si l'abondance et la diversité des signaux vont déjà dans ce sens, certains d'entre eux suscitent plus encore la curiosité du lecteur, telle l'annonce d'un espace nouveau à découvrir, ou bien l'apparition d'un pantonyme prenant l'aspect d'un « asémantème[6] » (Hamon 117), ou encore la mise en relief iconique, non par une seule mais trois astérisques. Nous abordons alors une autre fonction de la description (à retenir ici aussi sous forme d'« intérêt »), soit la « fonction de gestion de l'écriture et de la lecture » qui, selon Reuter, fait que « la composante descriptive participe du contrôle de la compréhension et de l'intérêt » (142). S'il fallait recourir à une métaphore routière, nous dirions que le surmarquage des signaux démarcatifs fait de la description dans *Volkswagen Blues* non point un détour, mais une voie à part entière.

Troisième intérêt signalétique

« [A]rticuler le fragment au cotexte et au contexte via son organisation et l'indication des fonctions qu'il va assumer » (Reuter 98). Ce dernier intérêt des signaux démarcatifs se révèle pleinement ici, si on s'attache plus particulièrement au « contexte[7] ». Le contexte non verbal qui domine *Volkswagen Blues* est évidemment celui de la quête — celle surtout, pour Jack, « d'un frère à travers le continent américain », mais aussi celle « d'un sujet pour son prochain roman » (Miraglia 51). Jean-Marc Lemelin en relève plusieurs autres, plus ou moins explicites : quête, pour les protagonistes, d'identité aussi bien collective qu'individuelle; quête, pour Jack, d'un nom propre, de la reconnaissance, d'une sœur, d'un père et d'une mère — et, pour Pitsémine, quête d'identité culturelle ou encore sexuelle (110-15).

Il faut se souvenir en outre que, dans *Volkswagen Blues*, la quête de Théo continue tout au long de l'ouvrage à travers la découverte et l'interprétation de signaux par les protagonistes — de « signes de piste » pour reprendre une expression du texte (Poulin 178) — et ce dès l'ouverture du roman avec la carte postale énigmatique envoyée par Théo à son frère (Poulin 12) qui croit y voir « une sorte d'appel au secours », voire « un signal de détresse » (Poulin 78).

Nous poserons que l'abondance, la variété et la récurrence de certains signaux démarcatifs du descriptif entretiennent, au niveau même des procédés textuels, l'idée de marquage et de décodage qui traverse le roman, le lecteur étant convié à repérer et à déchiffrer ces signaux. D'ailleurs, Hamon voit dans la « convergence » de signaux démarcatifs un « signal d'alerte complexe introductif à un probable "effet descriptif" » (65), qui n'est pas sans rappeler le « signal de détresse » que Théo envoie censément à Jack par le biais de la carte postale.

Ce rapprochement entre contexte de la quête et signaux démarcatifs appelle la « fonction régulative-transformationnelle » de la description (Reuter 137). Le théoricien désigne par cette fonction « les multiples façons par lesquelles la description assume un rôle fondamental dans la progression sémantique et dans le mouvement de lecture . . . » (137). Dans *Volkswagen Blues*, les signaux détiennent un « intérêt » régulatif-transformationnel dans la mesure où ils soutiennent métonymiquement, au niveau du descriptif, une forte tendance signalétique déjà omniprésente dans le narratif, c'est-à-dire un besoin diégétiquement exprimé de repères — besoin inhérent au principe de la quête. En somme, le contexte de la quête devient d'autant plus intrinsèque qu'il dépasse le cadre de l'histoire pour se manifester au niveau du récit.

Ce rapprochement va nous permettre de dégager une dernière piste, celle du conte, et à l'indexer à un nouvel intérêt — d'autant plus volontiers que l'influence du conte dans *Volkswagen Blues* a été établie par la critique. Jeanne Demers y voit « une tentative d'accrocher la dérive du texte romanesque à un cadre solide et évident, celui du conte fondateur . . . » (« Besoin de tendresse » 32). Giacomo Bonsignore va jusqu'à dire que « [t]oute l'œuvre de Poulin s'identifie au conte » (23).

Dans *Le Conte : du mythe à la légende urbaine*, Demers propose une définition que nous adopterons ici pour sa clarté : « *Est conte tout texte narratif relativement bref, oral ou écrit, qui met en relation langagière de type jubilatoire un conteur (une conteuse) et son auditoire et dont le propos porte sur un ou plusieurs événements, fictifs le plus souvent (mais qu'il faut donner comme vrais) ou d'un passé plus ou moins récent, que ces événements aient déjà été relatés ou pas* » (87). Cette définition qui vaut à la fois pour le conte oral, traditionnel[8], et pour le conte écrit, littéraire[9], permet à Demers d'ajouter que les deux « se recoupent pour constituer l'Archiconte » (*Le Conte* 88), véritable « modèle du conte écrit » (« Jehan de Paris » 75). Or l'appellation « conte » évoque pour beaucoup la thématique de la quête, comme dans ces contes merveilleux[10] où « le héros ou l'héroïne part à la recherche d'un objet difficile à obtenir. Le but du voyage est souvent la délivrance d'une princesse enlevée par un méchant » (Demers, *Le Conte* 31). Un autre cas, puisé par Vivian Labrie dans le catalogue d'Antti Aarne et de Stith Thompson, s'apparente plus encore à *Volkswagen Blues*, c'est la « quête de l'épouse ou du mari disparu » (195). Parmi les caractérisants génériques du conte, deux, d'ailleurs complémentaires, éclaireront notre propos : son « oralité » (Bricout 145) et le fait que le conte « dispose d'un rituel spécifique d'ouverture et de clôture » (Demers, *Le Conte* 52).

La critique s'accorde à reconnaître l'origine orale du conte. Demers rappelle que le conte est « enraciné dans l'oralité depuis la nuit des temps » (*Le Conte* 7) et estime que le « conte littéraire n'existe comme conte que s'il emprunte à l'oralité » (84). Marc Benson observe dans le conte écrit « des éléments d'oralité qui ont pour objectif la simulation du récit oral . . . » (30). Parmi les traits d'oralité qu'il recense au niveau syntaxique quand « la tentative de recréer la cérémonie du conte oral est la plus évidente » (31), figure « l'emploi systématique de formules au début et, moins souvent, à la fin du conte » — technique que le critique considère comme « l'indice le plus connu de l'oral » (31). Or, Bonsignore remarque chez Poulin une « façon savoureuse de conter, dans une écriture proche de la langue parlée », ce qui lui permet d'avancer que le « texte de Poulin possède en effet une dimension orale qui fait du narrateur un conteur avant tout » (25). C'est peut-être, paradoxalement, dans le type de discours le moins souvent adopté dans le conte — la description[11], qu'il faudrait aussi mesurer la dimension orale de *Volkswagen Blues* et son rapport au conte. Ainsi, la tendance à positionner des signaux démarcatifs dans les contours du descriptif de *Volkswagen Blues* ne serait pas sans évoquer cet usage systématique de formules, relevé par Benson, surtout au début du conte et, plus rarement, à sa fin, comme gage d'oralité. Il faudrait sans doute voir dans l'encadrement appuyé des descriptions de *Volkswagen Blues* une façon d'entretenir la composante orale du texte, et du même coup ses affinités avec le conte.

Pour Jeanne Demers et Lise Gauvin, « le conte installe les signaux qui lui sont propres . . . » (22-23), notamment à travers la mise en place d'un rituel d'ouverture et de clôture qui appelle des « traits narratifs stéréotypés » (Calame-Griaule et al. 202), c'est-à-dire des « formules introductives » et des « formules de conclusion[12] » (Demers, *Le Conte* 52). Parmi ces « formules rituelles » (Ferry 95) ou ces « formulettes[13] » (Giard 22; Touati 466), retenons pour mémoire la formule initiale canonique « Il était une fois » (Sébillot 62; Giard 22; Maranda 249; Benson 31, etc.) et certaines de ses variantes : « Il y avait une fois » (Sébillot 62), « Il y avait autrefois » (Benson 31), « Il y a bien longtemps » (Jeangoudoux 229), « Une fois, c'était » (Benson 31), « en ce temps-là » (Jeangoudoux 229). Quant aux formules finales, on retiendra, entre autres, « Ils vécurent longtemps et eurent beaucoup d'enfants » (Basset 234), « C'est tout, mon conte est fini » (Courtés 12), « C'est ainsi que finit le conte » (Basset 351), « Voilà l'histoire. C'est fini » (Basset 349), « Et voilà le conte fini » (Sébillot 66).

Dans *L'Enseignement de la littérature*, et à propos des remarques de Roger Laufer sur « L'Enseignement du conte populaire », Michael Riffaterre insiste sur le fait que la formule « Il était une fois » est « beaucoup plus qu'un procédé phatique! Elle est aussi une marque de genre » (370). Demers surenchérit : « les formules introductives et de conclusion jouent un rôle non négligeable, celui de proclamer que le texte qu'on va lire ou qu'on vient de lire est bien un conte » (*Le Conte* 54), ce qui renvoie à cette notion d'archiconte, qui, selon elle, « s'appuierait sur le double principe d'une surécriture systématique ou hyperécriture . . . le conte se devant de rappeler constamment à son lecteur qu'il est conte . . . » (« Jehan de Paris » 75). Pour ce faire, il importe que le texte écrit qui prétend au statut de conte arrive à produire « l'effet-conte » (Demers, *Le Conte* 85), c'est-à-dire à « recréer, par des moyens relevant essentiellement de l'écriture, les divers éléments du conte oral » (Demers, *Le Conte* 57), d'où le recours aux formules. Cette persistence du conte écrit à souligner son appartenance générique, notamment par le biais de formules initiales et finales, en évoque une autre mentionnée plus haut, celle de la description à montrer son appartenance textuelle à travers la multiplication de signaux démarcatifs « destinés », selon Hamon, « à la rendre “remarquable” dans le flux textuel » (65). Ainsi, l’abondance de signaux démarcatifs dans *Volkswagen Blues* pourrait être vue comme une preuve supplémentaire d’adhésion générique au conte, dans la mesure où transparaît, tant au niveau diégétique (dans le conte écrit) qu’au niveau textuel (pour la description), le même souci de soulignement des frontières. Cette accentuation des contours du descriptif n’est pas sans rappeler certains procédés picturaux, comme le cerne chez Van Gogh — un artiste particulièrement prisé par Théo (Poulin 104-05).

Ce marquage des frontières diégétiques du conte par des formules codées mais aussi apprises (Köngäs-Maranda 265) facilite pour le lecteur le « repérage » générique (Courtés 12). De même, le repérage des frontières du descriptif relève d’une « reconnaissance intuitive » (Hamon 37), par le lecteur, des signaux démarcatifs. Même si les formules initiales et finales du conte peuvent être concises, elles n’en demeurent pas moins « bien connues » (Köngäs-Maranda 265). On pourrait octroyer la même notoriété aux lapidaires présentatifs de description « c’était » et « il y avait ».

D’autre part, on rencontre dans *Volkswagen Blues* des signaux de fin de description qu’on pourrait apparenter aux formules finales du conte. Demers considère le « Voilà, c’est tout » qui clôt la description du « complexe du scaphandrier » (Poulin 147) comme une « formule de conteur » (« Besoin de tendresse » 32). Cette formule, ou ses variantes, apparaît ailleurs, par exemple dans la description du massacre de Wounded Knee : « Voilà, c’est tout » (Poulin 207), dans celle de la naissance de la légende de l’*Eldorado* : « Voilà, c’est tout. C’est ainsi . . . » (Poulin 29), dans celle du rêve de Pitsémine : « Voilà, c’était mon rêve » (Poulin 88) et dans celle du comportement des manchots pendant l’hiver : « Voilà, c’est tout. C’est la fin de mon histoire » (Poulin 61). S’il est vrai que les formules initiales et finales « reposent sur un consensus culturel » permettant d’établir une « connivence » (Benson 32) entre conteur et lecteur, cette connivence est certainement entretenue ici par le descripteur, qui sait lui aussi emprunter au genre ses formules de prédilection.

Pour Reuter, la description peut avoir une fonction positionnelle qu’on pourrait également revendiquer ici à titre de dernier « intérêt » des signaux démarcatifs — celle qui consiste à indexer le descriptif « dans un champ de pratiques déterminé et à une certaine place dans ce champ » (Reuter 145), c’est-à-dire le conte en tant que genre, à travers les deux caractérisants étudiés[14].

En réfléchissant sur les trois intérêts retenus par Reuter quant à l’utilité des signaux démarcatifs du descriptif, nous avons voulu dégager, dans *Volkswagen Blues*, quatre autres intérêts pour ces mêmes signaux : intérêt évaluatif, intérêt gestionnaire d'écriture et de lecture, intérêt régulatif-transformationnel et intérêt positionnel. Si, pour Jean Ricardou, « le texte de fiction est le lieu d'une belligérance continue » entre description et récit, il nous a paru que les signaux démarcatifs déployés ici ne peuvent, par certains intérêts qu'ils suscitent, qu'atténuer cette « polémologie textuelle » (85, 86), voire montrer en filigrane la « complémentarité de la description et du récit » (Mrozowicki 210), c'est-à-dire, d'un point de vue théorique, étayer ce que Michal Mrozowicki appelle le principe d'une « *conception de la co-existence pacifique* » (209-10) entre ces deux formes textuelles.

Analysant le fonctionnement de « l'écriture du détail » (Michaud 74) chez Poulin, Ginette Michaud se demande « si ces accès de précision . . . ne sont pas l'envers de la confusion, de la "brume" qui affectent les narrateurs de Poulin : façon efficace d'échapper, par la reproduction d'une *forme* (découpée, distincte, aux contours tranchés), aux insondables profondeurs, à l'opacité nébuleuse du corps et de la conscience » (74). Cette hypothèse est d'autant plus interpellante, à ce moment de notre étude, que « ces accès de précision » au cœur du descriptif, débouchant sur « une *forme* . . . aux contours tranchés », ne sont pas sans évoquer parallèlement tout le soin apporté dans *Volkswagen Blues* à cerner les frontières du descriptif. À l'encontre d'un narrateur à l'esprit embrouillé, le descripteur poulinien semble manifester un vif esprit de discernement, qu'il s'agisse de décrire l'objet ou de délimiter le fragment dans le tissu textuel.

NOTES

1 À la différence de Reuter, pour qui les « fragments expansés » comprennent « plusieurs phrases », nous retiendrons également dans cette catégorie les fragments constitués par une phrase d'une certaine longueur (25).

2 Nous traiterons, dans cette première partie, des signaux les plus récurrents mais aussi de ceux qui se distinguent par leur originalité.

3 Nous remercions ici notre assistante, Chantal Pomerleau, pour son méticuleux travail de recherche.

4 À cet égard, Nøjgaard déclare : « La présence de . . . signaux [textuels] est particulièrement utile au passage d'un mode de représentation à un autre, notamment au début des descriptions. Les signaux apparaissent rarement à la fin, car le passage d'une description à la narration . . . est normalement suffisamment marqué par les signaux narratifs . . . » (86). On peut tout autant considérer ces « signaux narratifs » comme des signaux démarcatifs externes de fin de description.

5 Certains verront ici essentiellement un souci d'organisation de la matière narrative à l'intérieur d'un même chapitre. Il n'empêche qu'à plusieurs reprises ce signal iconique est immédiatement suivi d'une description.

6 Par asémantème Hamon entend le « *nom propre* », l'« *embrayeur* », le « *néologism*e »,

l'« *archaïsme* », le « *terme technique spécialisé* » (117) et, le cas échéant, « un présentatif-neutre, un indéfini : chose, être . . . ou un monstre innommable . . . » (150).

7 Faute d'une définition du mot par Reuter, nous suivrons le *Dictionnaire des termes littéraires* : « Environnement d'un énoncé verbal (mot, phrase, texte), auquel il sert de cadre de référence. Cet environnement peut lui-même être constitué d'énoncés, ou bien être non verbal » (Gorp et al. 116). Nous privilégierons ici le contexte non verbal, celui qui « désigne "l'univers" auquel renvoie le fragment textuel (ou le texte) : les faits, personnes, lieux, temps, etc. » (Gorp et al. 116).

8 Demers entend par « conte oral », un texte « littéraire » et « éphémère » (*Le Conte* 84).

9 Demers voit dans le « conte écrit », un texte « littéraire » et « fixé par l'écriture à un moment précis » (*Le Conte* 84).

10 Pour Bonsignore, une « intervention du merveilleux » n'est pas à écarter chez Poulin, puisque aussi bien « de nombreux exemples nous orientent davantage du côté de l'imaginaire que de la réalité » (26).

11 Quant au conte oral de Haute-Bretagne, Paul Sébillot note que « la description est toujours sobre et succinte : les conteurs ne s'attardent point à décrire des paysages, et les vêtements des héros sont à peine indiqués . . . » (63). Pareillement, Paulette Galand-Pernet relève dans le conte écrit berbère une tendance à l'imprécision tant dans les indications de lieux et de temps que dans les « mentions des personnages humains et animaux » (72). Certes, cela ne signifie pas que la description soit étrangère au conte. Ainsi, le conte oral de Basse-Bretagne propose des descriptions de festins, dans lesquelles « se complaisent d'ordinaire les conteurs » (Luzel 338-39), et le conte écrit fantastique québécois du dix-neuvième siècle propose des « références géographiques ou des éléments socioculturels décrits avec précision » (Benson 32).

12 Naturellement, ces formules d'usage sont parfois délaissées (Giard 22; Sautman 142).

13 Nulle intention péjorative dans ce diminutif. Pour Anne Giard, ces « formulettes » sont, au plan fonctionnel, d'une « très grande richesse » (22), et pour Henri Touati des « outils indispensables . . . du récit » (466).

14 Si tant est que *Volkswagen Blues* « initie la lecture de plusieurs romans américains » (Miraglia 55), on pourrait évoquer l'influence possible de certains d'entre eux sur le descriptif de Poulin, à commencer par les récits de voyage de Jack London et de Jack Kerouac. S'agissant plus particulièrement des affinités du descriptif avec la logistique du conte, on pourra confronter la description de l'arrivée à San Francisco dans *Volkswagen Blues*, et celle que l'on trouve dans *On the Road* de Kerouac : « — Il est fait moitié en acier et moitié en rêve, dit Jack. — C'est le plus beau que j'aie vu de toute ma vie, dit la fille. — Quand j'étais petit, je pensais qu'il était en or. . . . Ils parlaient du Golden Gate Bridge, qu'ils apercevaient au loin sur la droite, émergeant d'une masse de brouillard, tandis qu'ils s'engageaient sur un autre pont, le Bay Bridge, pour traverser la baie qui les séparait de San Francisco » (Poulin 255). « It seemed like a matter of minutes when we began rolling in the foothills before Oakland and suddenly reached a height and saw stretched out ahead of us the fabulous white city of San Francisco on her eleven mystic hills with the blue Pacific and its advancing wall of potato-patch fog beyond, and smoke and goldenness of the late afternoon of time » (Kerouac 108). Ces deux séquences descriptives renvoient implicitement à un lieu commun du conte, la découverte d'un espace régi tout à la fois par le merveilleux et par l'anecdotique. On observera, entre autres, un soulignement du caractère soudain de la découverte qui contribue à en faire une véritable épiphanie : chez Poulin, par l'incipit *in abrupto* du chapitre 29 (d'ailleurs intitulé « Les fantômes de San Francisco ») et chez Kerouac, par la mise en situation temporelle (« It seemed like a matter of minutes . . . suddenly reached »).

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Hendrik Slegtenhorst

Chrysoglott

The Wurlitzer end of Omphalic fertility,
Whitened in the Fredericton snows, the theatrical
Tracery of fools altered to ice as car wheels are spun,
And slide into the intersection. Oedipus looks out
Over the frozen St. John River; Gretchen
Seeks her lost child on the bridge to Nashwaak;
Marco Polo reaches the Friendship Store
On Albert Street, and purchases ramen in bulk.
In the Gösser of memorialized time, the Urquell
Of history, little Bardolino plays on the lunar palate
And readies the receptacle for the halls of power.

Andrew Lesk

Underground, Unseen, Unknown

Negotiating Toronto in Maggie Helwig's *Girls Fall Down*

Think of how certain urban spaces figure in the national literary imaginary: Timothy Taylor's *Stanley Park* with its homeless population; Kensington Market's ethnic vibrancy in Dionne Brand's *What We All Long For*; the transcendent mountain at the centre of Montreal in Hugh Hood's "Looking Down from Above"; Gabrielle Roy's impoverished St. Boniface in *Rue Deschambault*; and the exploding Halifax harbour in Hugh MacLennan's *Barometer Rising*. Perhaps because Canada is such a large country, we aren't able to visit all these places (though we can read about them); and often what results are quickly formed generalizations that render such spaces seemingly static.

But, of course, they aren't. Doreen B. Massey, in her study of space and place, asserts that locales, from small city parks to gritty alleys, are "processes" since "places can be conceptualized in terms of the social interactions which they tie together . . . [and] these interactions themselves are not motionless things, frozen in time" (155). In reading about geographically differentiated spaces, we might heed Massey's conclusion that the "specificity of place . . . derives from the fact that each place is the focus of a distinct mixture of wider and more local social relations" (156). Since social relations are constantly made and remade most intensely in urban spaces, it is unsurprising that cities—including their ostensibly inert elements, such as parks and ravines—possess the potential for random public explosions.

It is this potential for spontaneous or unforeseen eruptions or outbursts—and their equally unpredictable consequences—that is central to Maggie

Helwig's *Girls Fall Down*. In it, Toronto-the-built-city is in an often fraught relation to its populace, as both the city's artificial and natural components are never as transparent as those who must negotiate the city's terrain might hope. The mix of buildings, roads, subways, and utilities is situated in an apparent contradistinction to the trees and lawns and ravines that are often considered "natural" aspects of the city's landscapes.

But each of the latter categories might be said to have been constructed through *intention*—they have been planted, for example, or very consciously left alone—with the result that there is, arguably, nothing really natural about anything in a city. Indeed, as Don Mitchell argues, "[t]he degree to which landscapes are *made* (by hands and minds) and represented (by particular people and classes, and through the accretion of history and myth) indicates that landscapes are in some very important senses 'authored.' Hence landscape can be understood to be a kind of text" (121). And so, a person moving within or through certain locales—a tunnel, say, or a park—requires not only familiarity with routes or paths, but also an awareness of how to read his or her position in relation to the situation of others *and* other things. *Girls Fall Down* proposes that such attentiveness—the very ability to clearly map one's place in relation to other, shifting people and things—demands an understanding that control over one's environment (including how one presents oneself in it) is merely a fantasy, and that more attention to the machinations and the agendas of those seeking control is imperative.

Such control extends, naturally, to one's own body. In her pioneering study of the relation between bodies and cities, Elizabeth Grosz contends that the built environment that is the city is intimately involved in the social production of corporeality. She asserts that these entities are mutually defining to the extent that

> the form, structure and norms of the city seep into and affect all the other elements that go into the constitution of corporeality and/as subjectivity. It affects the ways the subject sees others . . . as well as the subject's understanding of alignment with, and positioning in space. Different forms of lived spatiality . . . affect the ways in which we live space, and thus our comportment and corporeal orientations and the subject's form of corporeal exertion—the kind of terrain it must negotiate day by day. (248-49)

Invariably, the city's and the body's respective landscapes—their surfaces and their often masked interiors—constantly work to shape the constitution of one another, creating environments that are always in flux.

The resulting instability creates environments that render people vulnerable to various powerful forces—concerning, say, the maintenance of class and/or racial privileges—and their hidden agendas. Try as people may to stabilize their citified worlds in the face of these often unknown mediating influences, obtaining an enduring, settled state becomes a task that requires constant (self-)surveillance. A city and its conflicted inhabitants (who constitute that very city) are threatened with disarray, confusion, falling down. Reading the scripts and maps that constitute the city's texts requires constant attention to revision.

And so a person's inability to map out *with certainty* the city as it is encountered suggests, in Helwig's book, a crisis of legibility that is inherent in the urban landscapes themselves. Various urban networks—from assorted means of transportation to interpersonal human relationships—are fragile and fraught, to the extent that what we easily label as "the city," despite its seemingly solid material forms (both alive and inert), is best understood as provisional: the confluence and convergence of its actors underscore both a place and a landscape that is constantly re-envisioned, always makeshift, and potentially problematic. Professional and personal maps might help in navigation, but these things cannot protect against the undercurrents and unseen dangers of the urban fabric.

The City and Its Actors

Such instability arises, as Erik Swyngedouw argues in his discussion on the work of David Harvey, because "the city condenses the manifold tensions and contradictions that infuse modern life" (80). It becomes easy and rather commonplace, he continues, to see cities as "highly differentiated spaces of activity, excitement, and pleasure. They are arenas for the pursuit of unoppressed activities and desires, but also ones replete with systematic power, danger, oppression, domination, and exclusion" (80). *Girls Fall Down* addresses these often contrasting and difficult-to-read categories through characters that act out urban tensions, to various degrees.

One of the novel's central characters, Suzie, is writing a dissertation using network analysis theory to examine Toronto's homeless populations. In discussing her proposal with Alex, her erstwhile lover, she remarks that gathering data concerning the "network[s] of acquaintance" that are hallmarks of any urban constitution is a way of "[p]utting together pieces of the city" (57), one not unlike Alex's obsession with photographing after-hours Toronto. Suzie's specific interest in the homeless populace, however, arises from her desire to locate her brother Derek, a schizophrenic man living in one of Toronto's many ravines.

Suzie's somewhat self-serving academic endeavour, then, is an effort to *read* the social relations of the city as somewhat self-evident. Her need is to render Derek accessible and stable, to vanquish the instability that plagues his (and thus, her) life. Her literal use of text—writing out what Derek *means*—is meant to contain him in a tangible map of her own making, in the hopes that she may be able to plot his life and have him *act* it out according to her script. In this, she unwittingly works counter to the analysis she is applying in her studies.

Her attempt to find her brother through a rigid rather than flexible framework recalls the work of Bruno Latour, perhaps the most original of actor-network theorists. He states that "it is possible to trace more sturdy relations and discover more revealing patterns by finding a way to register the links between unstable and shifting frames of reference rather than by trying to keep one frame stable" (24). The impetus of the theory, he continues, is not "to stabilize the social on behalf of the people it studies; such a duty is to be left entirely to the 'actors themselves'" (30-31). Suzie's attempt at stabilizing Derek's relation to other people literally through remedial medication or re-institutionalization or figuratively in her dissertation is not unlike a desire for that "one stable frame." Although Suzie professes to be studying patterns in order to achieve deeper understanding, she really wants such patterns simply to reveal Derek's whereabouts to her.

The inherent irony in Suzie's search is that it leads her not only back to Derek (later in the story), but also back to Alex, whose former, youthful infatuation with Suzie has been rekindled as the two now approach middle age. Alex's own "network of acquaintances" extends only to his cat, Lady Jane, and a homeless man who inhabits the sidewalk outside Alex's apartment and who proffers cryptic wisdom for a loonie. Alex's own internal network is "corrupted" by diabetes; and his need to take insulin as a remedy for this internal, unseen disease merely increases his desire for isolation and self-control. His internal physical conflict is made manifest as a psychic one when he dwells upon the diabetes that ails him: he finds that "his body had identified a part of itself as a foreign invader and destroyed it" (64), though, of course, this process never ends as he is never cured. Like the city, his corporeality is, as Grosz has stated above, a "terrain [he] must negotiate day by day" (240).

Yet in imagining himself as a citizen who is perfectly legible to those around him, he admonishes a friend, Adrian, about his ostensible availability: "I'm in the phone book, as it happens. . . . [Y]ou open up the book and see it or not. I mean, if you want to know, it's not like it's an actual difficulty" (13). Alex, though, never offers to look up the numbers of other people himself. The text that is the phone book provides him with a kind of cover in that it is simply about numbers and cannot reveal any of his physical and concomitant emotional vulnerabilities. Indeed, just prior to meeting Adrian, he has witnessed other people's helplessness in the Toronto subway: he photographed crowds of people affected by an invisible ailment suddenly plaguing people in the system, and thus the entire system itself.

That the subway network succumbs to temporary paralysis is a parallel to the "hypo" state Alex can fall prey to if he does not take his insulin. On what he has seen and photographed, he later muses:

> There were no visible effects of the subway incident, but he thought that people did know somehow, fragments and rumours; he was not even sure why he thought this, except for a slight modulation in the atmosphere, a measure of silence, glances of quiet complicity between the Portuguese housewives and the Asian teenagers. (16)

Despite knowing that the rumours of "poison" in the subway are just hearsay, Alex attempts to look for *visible* clues to interpret something unseen, in order that what is threatening might be made less so. But the fact remains that the people around him in the streetcar likely know even less than he, a witness, does about the episode. In his effort to decipher the abstract, he misreads the situation by considering exteriors—his easy way of identifying people by their race, for example—in the same way that he thinks people can read him as simply as if he were a number they could look up.

Here, Alex implicitly distinguishes himself as white, in as much as Helwig implicitly classifies him and the central characters of the novel as white. Various omniscient passages in the novel discuss how other persons, often denoted by race and class, are reacting to the ongoing poison scare. In some ways, Helwig's specific attention to them serves to set into relief Alex's relatively privileged position in the city, as a white male who is able to move about freely in ways that non-white persons may not be able to without arousing the suspicion of various authorities. Such gestures to the always present yet liminal "phantoms" of class, race, and ethnicity engage peripherally what other recent Toronto-centered novels translating the immigrant experience deal with upfront.

For example, Dionne Brand's *What We All Long For* (also set in Toronto) begins with its central characters on the same subway Helwig describes. Brand writes that "[w]hat floats in the air on a subway train like this is chance. People stand or sit with the thin magnetic film of their life wrapped around them. They think they're safe, but they know they're not" (4). Unlike Helwig's protagonists, who never profess to feeling particularly *unsafe*, Brand's central characters Tuyen, Oku, and Carla experience "the earth beneath them shifting, and they all want it to stop" (4). They cannot take for granted their positioning in the city, since their "race" or ethnicity visibly marks them as different. There is clearly a hierarchy operating within the urban machine that reads the body in specific ways and attaches hindrances to various types of bodies—usually to those whose race is not white and who are economically less advantaged.

In order to get a reprieve, at least, from the constant shifting, Tuyen and her friends establish what Nancy Fraser has termed "subaltern counterpublics"—that is, "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate their counter discourses based on oppositional identities, interests, and needs" (67). They effectively rewrite the urban text so that it responds to their own needs. Yet these counterpublics remain within the overall urban framework and, thus, emancipation from prescribed (white) racializing notions of subaltern classes is not always tenable.

Helwig's frequent glances at those who occupy such counterpublics and who now constitute the bulk of Toronto's population suggest that there is a constant pressure on those who were once considered the city's invisible others. These become layered in the novel: early risers, including a Somali girl and an Iranian man (23); drug dealers (58); a cleaning woman (119); two graffiti artists (128); panhandlers (150); a prostitute (172); a man in a turban (175); and a Nigerian man (202), amongst others. Their stories, while not advancing the central story, hover and demand consideration as to how they are nevertheless affected by the ripples and pulls on Toronto's urban fabric, since they now constitute the majority of Toronto's population. Envisioned as part of Helwig's novelistic margins, they are signs of how the city itself often attempts to relegate certain people to the periphery, but without much success. And the people inhabiting these worlds do stand in contradistinction to Alex's and Suzie's worlds. Those inhabiting the margins, though, are swiftly compromising the city's "centre" and cannot, Helwig implies, be ignored.

It is not, then, that Alex remains ignorant of those around him, nor does he seek to stereotype others.[1] But the city's flux and the evolving emergency now demanding attention require more than a surface viewing, and Alex requires more than photographs and conjecture to get at the truth about a subway incident he cannot (and never does) wholly fathom. To his credit, though, he wonders that the underground fracas might give rise to more curiosity, but he is aware that what people end up doing, in the end, is to "incorporate it almost instantly into the flow of daily life" (17)—which is what he does. His actions reveal the often unacknowledged necessity people feel, including himself and Suzie (and all the others in the city, including people like Brand's characters), to move to homogeneity—a sense of an agreed-upon reality that will "stabilize the social"—when confronted with a complexity of networks and systems that, whether internal or external, are or can be corrupted.

For example, the homeless man outside Alex's apartment is employed by Alex in the attempt to locate Derek. He is of little concrete help, yet he is part of the city's fabric whose worth should not be, Helwig suggests, minimalized or marginalized. City dwellers may ignore or shun him; but as a visible part of the landscape, he is one facet of the city's homeless population and should not be generalized as a symbol of that marginal populace. His logic is perhaps evident only to himself, and his cryptic messages play to the crisis of legibility that plagues the city's actors. He says to Alex that "maybe there was a breakdown in the system a while ago" (60), suggesting that to read the present crisis as isolated is to miss the larger point, that the city's networks have been frayed to the extent that ever more people have become disempowered. And as he says later to Alex (in one of his allusions to the falling World Trade Centers in 2001), "[S]ometimes things fall down, sir, and the force of your will can't keep them standing" (107). The implicit suggestion is that as the constitution of the city continues to change, the old centre—inhabited by those holding advantages by virtue of their wealth or race—cannot hold.

This homeless man directs Alex to an address nearby, on Bathurst Street, and Alex's ensuing encounter with Mrs. Nakamura reveals how the agendas of two people, regardless of race or class, can (appear to) result in a lack of connection, since each person is essentially travelling along a different, non-intersecting network. Alex lives above a store; Mrs. Nakamura lives in a basement apartment. His internal disorder is physical, while hers is mental. Yet, while Mrs. Nakamura asks him to fix (by writing to City Hall) a somewhat imaginary problem he cannot remedy, Alex realizes that neither of them is really all that stable. Like Brand's characters, "the earth beneath them [is] shifting" (Brand 4); and though they hail from different social spheres, it is what everyone *needs* that he feels brings them together: "Mrs. Nakamura and I are waiting for rescue," he silently prays (Helwig 105).

The Hidden City

Mrs. Nakamura's basement apartment is metonymic of the legion of networks that, in the city, remain hidden because they are underground. The novel opens with the observation that Toronto "is a city that burrows, tunnels, turns underground. It has built strata of malls and pathways and inhabited spaces like the layers in an archeological dig, a body below the earth. . . . The dangers to this city enter the bloodstream, move through interior channels" (7). As with Alex's diabetes and Derek's schizophrenia, the city's own networks of ravines and underground malls and subways, ostensibly benign places, have the potential to make latent tensions visible.[2]

The Don Valley ravine that Derek lives in, a part of a very large, interconnected citywide system, is a place of pleasure for its visitors but is also a refuge for (mostly transient) people who seek to hide there.[3] Although it may appear to be left untouched as parkland, the impetus behind not developing the ravines for housing or commercial uses likely arises from the difficulty of navigating steep banks and waterways. The Don Valley has a history of accommodating the homeless and those thought to be less desirable denizens; it is, thus, a place that is in some ways already "fallen." Indeed, as Jennifer Bonnell observes, a connection exists "between perceptions of the river valley as a marginal space at the edge of the city and its function as a repository for marginalized people" (2). Derek may be thought to present a "danger" to those using the parkland, but Helwig intimates that the danger to the city is a result of the marginalization of people like Derek who are, though often unseen, a part of the city's bloodstream.

Derek exists in one of the city's many liminal spaces, which "knit the rough edges of the city together, buffering its boundaries and marking transitions between the punctual, predictable Toronto we think we know and the feral, disordered or supernatural city we have always suspected exists alongside it" (Harris 58). The natural disarray of the secretive ravine contrasts sharply with another bloodstream, the subterranean PATH system—twenty-seven kilometres in length—which functions as a series of malls and linking pathways for shoppers and office workers. Yet for Alex, it is a place for him to document, after hours, the empty and sterile city spaces that unwittingly reflect the isolated nature of his own life. As a hidden part of the city, the PATH system, which Alex photographs, represents a kind of homogenization of the more sinister connotations associated with the word "underground." In his study of Toronto places, John Bentley Mays says of the PATH:

> Moving through those immaculate and almost shadowless corridors, one finds none of those characters typically associated with the undergrounds in legends and stories—sexual desperados, outlaws, mad hermits, wild boys who rule the whole terrifying tracks of the dark world. (150)

Mays adds that the urban planners responsible for such structures have "also begun banishing from the city its ancient cloacal darkness, its space of the sinister, perverse, untamed" (151). Mays is not suggesting that we return to live within the dangers of hidden passageways and alleys; rather, he bemoans the fact that in the name of commerce, the urban experience is being turned into "unending day" (151).[4] Alex bears witness to this cultural shift in his role as a *flâneur*, a person who "wanders the city, slightly invisible, just on the outside of everything—he . . . observes from an anonymous perspective" (Micallef 11).[5] It is this anonymity, however, that reflects his emotional distance both from the dangers within and the complexity of social actors all around him. And change does press upon Alex, though he likely believes himself immune to the swiftly mutating social shifts in the urban fabric of which he is part. His corporeality is as fragile as those he observes.

It is the subway, though, that functions as the network that causes most danger and anxiety. Supposedly a system that moves people swiftly from one place to another, the underground rails can sometimes go off the rails: the system simply breaks down. Like the people who have created it, the subway network has its own bloodstream that is vulnerable to other forces or internal problems. The young girl (identified in the novel only as "the girl" but whose name, we are to infer, is Eve) tells her friends that she was involved in the (real life) 1995 subway accident, known informally as the Russell Hill Accident.[6] Eve is also involved in the central clash that provides Helwig's novel with its engine: while on the subway, she falls ill and falls down, resulting in rumours that she had been poisoned. As panic ensues, the "poison" spreads throughout the system; and the fear takes on a life of its own as emotion supplants reason.

Yet it is reason that we most often use, as rational actors, to counter fear when traversing the unknown city. That the urban landscape, including its built form, might be grasped in relatively rational terms is misleading, as the people within cityscapes—including its otherwise inert materiality—are not as predictable as inhabitants might imagine. Society and its structures are not monoliths, as their respective discrete components often break down or act irrationally. As Mitchell argues, the "very built form of a place can have an effect of solidifying particular notions about how the world is structured and works. Landscape therefore becomes an essential ingredient for structuring the material social relations that make up the world" (100). As I have stated, such relations are always provisional, in that their meanings are constantly created and re-created by the actors who traverse the urban landscapes; their interactions with the built environment's static and transitory elements result in the construction of associations whose occurrences and outcomes often cannot be anticipated or easily determined.

To think, then, that one can effortlessly negotiate the city's landscape—because built forms imbue a sense of constancy and legibility—is to presume too much, to one's detriment. Indeed, Mitchell concludes, "We all *do* read the landscape, but we are not all equal in the process of 'authoring' it—nor in controlling its meanings" (139-40). Reading the city and its depths—such as a subway or a ravine—and successfully navigating them requires an attention to various scripts which the average city dweller, beset by various demands, may not be able to adequately comprehend. These places, Barney Warf says,

> are not locales as much as they are processes in which different types of activities are embedded and different forms of interconnection are established. As they become increasingly connected, the repercussions of actions in one area inevitably spiral out to shape other places, so that discreet [sic] boundaries have less and less significance as they are permeated with mounting ease. (71-72)

With a network as formidable, extensive, and interconnecting as a subway or a ravine, it is easy to see how certain actions—a girl falling down or a schizophrenic man trying to hide—can have extensive repercussions. The city's various actors, who may themselves, consciously or inadvertently, set in motion an influential event, often find they have lost control of these episodes' meanings or outcomes.

For example, Derek lives in a ravine near the defunct Toronto Brickworks, just off a deserted stretch of Bayview Avenue, in what Helwig terms "the city's sunken veins" (182). He frequents one of the city's prostitutes, which is for him a "thin line of connection" (232) that links him to many other men and results in him becoming infected with a sexually transmitted disease. His refusal to take medicine that might help stabilize him exacerbates his isolation, from which his sister Suzie would like to rescue him. The tentacles of Derek's actions reach outward through the city's "veins," affecting, Helwig proposes, others in unanticipated ways—as does Eve's fall in the subway.

At Derek's encampment, Alex, who has helped Suzie successfully locate a now-ailing Derek, waits for an ambulance, whose lights provide for him a measure of legibility. From the encampment, he observes:

> Outside its pale circle there was nothing but blackness, a chaotic punctuation of lights moving in meaningless patterns. . . . And here, on the edge of this valley, half-blind and tainted with disease, he felt the city inside him with a kind of completeness, all the tangled systems. Money and death, knowledge and care, moving constantly from hand to hand; our absolute dependence of the actions of bodies around us, smog and light and electric charge. (220)

Alex feels within himself not only the weight of his own disease and unease, but also the daunting burden of a network whose script he can only feebly attempt to make legible to himself. Derek is neither at the beginning or end of this "tangle"; but Alex, however obliquely, comes to understand that bodies that may seem distant are indeed inevitably linked to us in ways that are never fully intelligible (echoing his earlier encounter with Mrs. Nakamura). As a photographer who uses a camera as a buffer against the swirl of life around him, he comes to understand that he can live with the paradoxes the city presents.

Falling and Rising

Although he is eventually located, Derek has no idea how his proximity to the "first girl" (72), Eve, and other girls has led to the crisis that continues to affect the city. Eve, at the beginning of the novel, suffers an unwelcome advance from the geography teacher Mr. Sondstrom and a confusing objectifying look from a boy at a Starbucks, both of which intensify her conflicted feelings about her changing body and volatile emotions. Their networks, however, overlap in unanticipated ways that suggest a *perpetrated* coincidence on Helwig's behalf, one that reflects the inevitability of intersecting city realities.

In school, Eve is studying both the Book of Genesis and William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, the latter serving as an extended metaphor for her experience with her group of friends. Left to their own devices, the girls are as volatile a mix as the marooned boys in Golding's novel.[7] As Suzie says to Alex, the (so-called) "poisoned girls . . . are like a highly reactive compound" (52).[8] It may also be that girls who are not poisoned are also reactive in ways that cannot be anticipated. Their explosive natures result in effects felt *across* various citified networks, suggesting how individual instances of suffering—Eve, like her biblical namesake, falls from grace—resound throughout society.

No one has been poisoned, though, as Eve's fall on the subway is an emotional result of her residual confusion over what she and her friends did to Derek, whom they encountered earlier in Chorley Park, an idyllic Eden not far from his home in the ravine. When Eve and her friends see Derek in the park, he is minding his own business. Derek addresses them, apropos of nothing, saying, "Once upon a time there was a little girl" (235). Although he is thinking of his sister and his revised, mythical version of their childhood, Derek's words also allude to Alice of *Alice in Wonderland*, who falls down the rabbit hole and encounters a confusing world filled with misunderstandings and cryptic knowledge. This parallels Derek's own status as a misunderstood person living "off the grid," who speaks in a language apparently comprehensible only to himself, and whose efforts to connect are distorted and, in other ways, disastrous.

His isolation is not unlike Eve's. She is defined by her role in the subway incident as "the first girl who had fallen" (as opposed to the "girl who had fallen first," reflecting Helwig's careful wording), whose body "bled and ached and fell" (72). She is most forcefully associated with the biblical Eve here, who inhabits the park that is Eden for a time; but also with Suzie, who falls at an abortion rally and is saved by Alex (69); and also the young woman who spray-paints the word "FEAR" about the city and who almost falls onto the subway tracks (235). This loosely formed association of women—based on their belonging to a network of "fallen" or falling women—first suggests the fragmentation inherent in the city (they are similar yet unknown to one another); and, second, that women who have transgressed (biblical Eve's eating of the forbidden apple; Suzie's abortion; the young woman's defacing of public property; the prostitutes Derek visits; and, now, Eve's assault on Derek) are not barred from redemption, or perhaps should not have been considered as transgressors in the first place. Helwig clearly maps their (hidden) relation to the other as the ground beneath them shifts, in that they are part of the same network, and not different ones.

While participating in the assault on Derek, Eve misreads Derek's intent—if it ever were legible or intelligible—and projects her anger onto him: "You have no right. . . . Being like this. *God*" (237). (Or "Being like this god"?) When she enters the subway shortly afterwards, she remembers the Russell Hill Accident that she had been involved in:

> [H]er own half-distorted memories of being pulled from the subway car in the darkness, and trying to understand what she had done to make this happen. Bodies falling around her. . . . You could get hurt. People could hurt you. People could hurt you for no reason. (239)

She attempts to apply her prior experience to what has just happened to her, with Derek and Mr. Sondstrom and the Starbucks youth. She knows that "she *had* done something wrong. Or something was wrong, near or around her" (239). But her past experiences in the cityscape cannot give her a rational answer.

Nor should they, since the forceful emotions that roil within her defy easy explanation. The density of the downtown cityscape—the concentration of heterogeneous social actors navigating a compact built environment—merely adds to the pressure attendant upon her. As Steve Pile asserts, "both the body and the city are intensifying grids for simultaneously social and psychic meanings, produced in the mobile, conflictual fusion of power, desire and disgust" (177). Eve has, throughout the course of the day, experienced these in ways that are layered and difficult to unpack in a rational manner. She is but one actor in a network of actors, some close to her, some not; and it remains difficult to navigate various social and concrete terrains that are prone to shifting, even when that city grid is one way to organize the flux of urban experience.

Her immediate circle of friends evinces the tension between asserting one's individuality and adhering to the group's norms and mores. Eve wonders "if there was a book about what girls did, how you could talk about it" (129), implying that her self is both apart from and a part of the group. Of course, in a metafictional way, Helwig answers the question with *this* book; yet the aforementioned *Lord of the Flies* is the most obvious (male) parallel. Lauren, the prime motivator of the assault on Derek, reads the derivation for "Beelzebub" at her teacher's instruction: "Hebrew for Lord of the Flies! Awesome!" (208). She is, in some ways, Eve's antagonist, playing *The Lord of the Flies*' Jack to Eve's Ralph; and Eve has clearly thought of her, that "*[e]verything you're saying is a lie*" (73).

Yet Eve doesn't divorce herself from the group. Helwig implies that it would be difficult for a teenager to act apart from groupthink, especially when emotions become heightened and the social stakes are high. The only constant among the group of girls is the unpredictability brought about by incremental or sudden change, whether those changes arise internally (in their bodies) or externally (in the cityscape). As David Knoke and Song Yang state,

> networks are not static structures, but are continually changing through interactions among their constituent people, groups, or organizations. . . . [T]hese entities also transform the relational structures within which they are embedded, both intentionally and unintentionally. (6)

It is as though Eve is in constant battle with unseen, shifting forces—which include both her own emotions and her friends' needs and desires—that she herself does not, or cannot, rationally recognize. Her anger toward Derek is clearly misplaced—it should likely have found its targets in Mr. Sondstrom or the boy at the Starbucks.

Eve, much later, ponders her reaction to Derek and her subsequent fall on the subway: "She knew she had been singled out at that moment in the subway. That she would always be, at least in some small way, the girl who fell down and started it all, and she knew there was a reason for that" (96). The correlation to the biblical Eve is clear enough; and Helwig reworks that story to suggest that, beyond the unpredictable nature of the girl's world, redemption for both Eves is possible:

> Girls fall down because they have come to know too much, and have no words for that knowledge. Sometimes girls fall down and bring chaos to the city, not just because of the bad things around and outside them. Sometimes girls fall down because of a tiny emergent good. (240)

The irony of Eve's fall is that while it provides her with a larger understanding of her own emotions, it renders other parts of the city unstable. This instability continues outside the parameters of the story itself; the intimation is that we come to, and come away, from Helwig's own novel negotiating our own ways as social actors.

What You Can't See Can Hurt You

Even though it is believed in the novel that there is a poison moving through the city's various networks and systems, no one can actually prove what cannot be seen. While airborne toxins can be lethal, they are not visible to the human eye—and neither is the emotion and illogicality wrought by the scene of a young girl falling on a subway car. It is what cannot be rationally read or visually apprehended—especially in places that are under the ground or off the beaten path—that gives rise to fear and miscomprehension. The dangers that circulate through the city's networks are never fully apparent—until they happen, often without much warning. Thus, Helwig's narrator observes that "[t]his is the nature of safety in the measured world—you can be certain of the presence of danger, but you can never guarantee its absence. No measurement quite thrusts itself down to zero, down to absolute lack" (21). Paradoxically, then, certainty as a category is treated with cynical distrust, as city residents must always be cautioned to be alert to the dangers in what is *potentially* unknowable, as Helwig's narrator concludes: "We are not at home in the measured world. We would prefer our safety to be an unmeasurable absolute. Not an approximation" (30). To ask for certainties is, in the end, to demand a fantasy.

NOTES

1 Helwig does not use categories of race to reinforce any character's esteem or sense of self. People like Alex, who are racially unmarked in the novel, are meant to be understood as a racial group amongst many, and it is their (implicitly non-exclusionary) stories that are, by and large, being essayed by Helwig. As a social activist, Helwig does not, I think, feel privileged or qualified enough to write more fully on the lives of racialized others whose realities she may not share. I would argue from this that the novel's inattention to others whose race or ethnicity is marked is not a matter of Helwig having a blind spot concerning such matters.

2 Much has been written on the paradoxical nature of Toronto's ravines, most notably, in Margaret Atwood's *Lady Oracle* and *Cat's Eye*. For a more complete discussion of Toronto ravines and their literary fictive and non-fictive representations, see "Ravine City" in Amy Lavender Harris' *Imagining Toronto* (38-51).

3 As of this writing, the decommissioned Don Valley Brickworks, adjacent to the ravines and just below the site where Derek is living, is being redeveloped into a centre for arts, crafts, and food sales.

4 In *Generation X*, Douglas Coupland reflects upon this kind of urban sterility when he amusingly renders Toronto as possessing "the efficient, ordered feel of the Yellow Pages sprung to life in three dimensions, peppered with trees and veined with cold water" (18).

5 Micallef perceptively notes, in the next sentence, that such "invisibility can disappear, however, if your gender is a little more female or your skin colour a shade or two away from white" (11).

6 Both human error and mechanical failure caused the accident on the Spadina line on August 11, 1995. One train rear-ended another, resulting in three deaths and thirty people hospitalized.

7 Helwig alludes to the murder of the teenaged Reena Virk by a group of seven girls (and one boy) on November 14, 1997, near Victoria, BC. Helwig writes: "[T]here are girls, sometimes, who gather in groups and choose on of their own to cast out, a girl like them but faintly different. Perhaps they surround her underneath a bridge by a river and begin to hit her . . . and when she falls in the water for the final time they do not pull her out" (56). See *Under the Bridge* by Rebecca Godfrey for a book-length account of the case.

8 Alex's question to his friend Adrian concerning the "airborne toxic event" (11) reveals Helwig's debt to Don DeLillo's *White Noise*: Alex asks, "That's from a book, right?" (12). In DeLillo's novel, Jack Gladney, living with a chemical imbalance as a result of an airborne toxic event, muses on the brain's neurotransmitters: "We're the sum of our chemical impulses. . . . What happens to good and evil in this system? Passion, envy and hate? Do they become a tangle of neurons? Are you telling me that a whole tradition of human failings is now at an end, that cowardice, sadism, molestation are meaningless terms?" (190). Haruki Murakami's *Underground* is another obvious influence on Helwig's *Girls Fall Down*, in telling ways. In his account of the sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway in 1995, in which thirteen people died, one of the people interviewed by the author rhetorically states of her illness on the subway that "women are more susceptible, aren't they?" (41). Alex himself imagines the perpetrators of the Tokyo attack twice in the novel (Helwig 28, 75).

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Patricia Young

How Was It for You?

Like stomping on shredded cabbage
inside a fifty-gallon stoneware crock.
Like leaves slipping between your toes.
Like being doused in salt, fermenting in juices.
Like running home after school, ravenous,
slurping down a bowl of the raw sauerkraut
your Polish grandmother made every October,
if you had a grandmother, if she were Polish.
Like the cellar door falling shut, winter coming on.
Wine and spices and the vegetable dark.

Sarah Waisvisz and Brenda Carr Vellino

The Steveston Noh Project

The Gull as Intercultural Redress Theatre[1]

Only in the last few decades has the wartime internment of Japanese Canadians entered public consciousness with the accumulating weight of histories, memoirs, novels, photo exhibits, historic sites, and even a recent children's opera, thanks to the passionate energies of Japanese Canadian artists and historians.
— Daphne Marlatt, "How *The Gull/Kamome* Took Flight"

Nearly twenty years after the government redress settlement with Japanese Canadians, the Vancouver theatre company Pangaea Arts began work on a Canadian Noh play about two brothers from Steveston, BC, who return in 1949 after their family's World War II internment. *The Gull*'s playscript, created by Canadian poet Daphne Marlatt, unfolds the tensions between forced uprooting, reclaimed space, and multi-generational trauma negotiated by survivor witnesses. As Jean Miyake Downey observes, such an artistic grassroots redress initiative signals the resonance of ongoing and unfinished work: "*The Gull* is a powerful expression of historical fear, shame, and grief that still haunts Canada's Pacific Coast and reaches back into Japanese Canadian diasporan family connections" (n. pag.).[2] In the play, as the brothers return to fish the BC coast, they are confronted by a startling seagull figure who embodies the ghost of their mother; as the lead character in the role of the *Shite (*pronounced sh'tae*),* she is a forceful yet anguished presence who challenges them for neglecting her during the internment and also urges them to return to her natal Japan.

The stories of the internment's aftermath are animated through the multi-artist, intercultural collaboration process that came to be known as the Steveston Noh Project (SNP).[3] Co-directed by Japanese Noh master Akira Matsui and American Noh artist Richard Emmert, the SNP interrogates the limits of the official state apology through its focus on multiple registers of family, community, political, ethical, and Buddhist priorities. As Richard Emmert suggests, the play-script by itself does not constitute Noh theatre, since the interrelationship between "music, movement, and text" is integral to the art form ("Preface" 10-13). Thus, despite the limitations of imaginative reconstruction, in this article we seek to engage the multi-artist process that led to the convening of the intercultural creative team, the training of the artists, the development of the play, and the performances of *The Gull.*[4] Through its staged negotiation between Japanese, Japanese Canadian, and North American theatre artists; its bilingual production in Japanese and English; and its multiple modalities of stylized Noh and Western dramatic realism, the SNP as case study is suggestive of the contribution that intercultural theatre might make to unofficial redress practices "from below" in contemporary Canada.[5] We see artistic contributions as essential to a multi-focal process that is often necessary long after official ceremonies, apologies, and reparations are over.

A contemplative ethos integral to the Buddhist roots of classical Noh further extends the intercultural redress possibilities of the SNP (Downey n. pag.).[6] Because Buddhism has been cultivated in the West over the past four decades by Tibetan and other traditional teachers, and because it encourages a contemplative ethics, the Buddhist register of Noh opens up a space in which difficult intercultural questions, in the context of reckoning with historical injustice, might be sensitively engaged.[7] In fact, we suggest that the Buddhist contemplative ethos threaded throughout the dramatic action, design, pacing, choreography, and thematic structure of the SNP may potentially be generative of ethically attentive witnessing positions within the play and among diverse audience/reader positions. From this standpoint, as two academic women from variably privileged locations, we ask how the play works to unsettle our complicity (along with other settler beneficiaries) with uneven power relations in the Canadian state via its intercultural and Buddhist ethos. Joanne Tompkins' notion of intercultural theatre as producing a "diversity of contact points" for a "heterogeneous audience" (qtd. in Knowles and Mündel xv) suggests that critical dislocation and new possibilities for encounter may happen precisely in the spaces in-between, arising from dissonance between two or more cultural, subjective, or linguistic modes.

From the perspective of state beneficiaries, acknowledging complicity is neither an end of nor an alibi for taking responsibility in an ongoing redress process. As theatre scholar Julie Salverson points out, an ethical witnessing stance involves a risky process, based on "the willingness to step forward without certainty. The goal is relationship, not success" (246). In our project, we align with a stance that requires self-interrogation from those who have benefited from state actions, without succumbing to critical paralysis or retreat in fear of "appropriation" or "getting it wrong" (Salverson 250-51). "Getting it wrong" may in fact be part of the ethical practice, an opportunity for critical unsettlement. A stance of openness to critique and a willingness to further rethink and rework ideas as an unfinished process may be conducive to the difficult practice of critical interculturalism as a mode of responsibility-taking within unofficial redress initiatives.[8]

The creative process of the SNP suggests a commitment to ethical intercultural collaboration, as modelled by the core creative team's practices of apprenticeship across sites of difference. The idea for a Japanese Canadian story presented in traditional Noh style was Heidi Specht's; as artistic director of Pangaea Arts, she had already spearheaded many intercultural endeavours with project and production manager Lenard Stanga, and had herself trained in Noh dance and chant with Richard Emmert (Knutson 9).[9] Specht asked Matsui to play the lead role of the *Shite* as well as to direct and choreograph the play. Additionally, she asked her former teacher Emmert (a long-time student of Matsui's) to train the actors in the techniques of Noh performance, to lead the chorus, and to compose the music.[10] The core creative team further included Wakayama mask-maker Hakuzan Kubo; Japanese Canadian actors who played the role of the *Waki*, the elder of the two Canadian-born fishermen brothers, and the *Ai*, an older Japanese fisherman; as well as a Filipino Canadian actor who played the *Wakitsure*, younger brother.[11] Performances were produced at locations of historical importance to the communities most affected: two staged readings were held at the Gulf of Georgia cannery (now a historic site) and at the Nikkei Cultural Centre in Burnaby, BC (May 2005), followed by six performances of *The Gull* in the plaza at Richmond City Hall (May 2006).[12]

Collaboration between theatre artists is usually integral to any dramatic production, so in this sense, the dynamics of the SNP may be unremarkable. Yet in an intercultural and transpacific collaboration such as the SNP, attention to asymmetries (especially of power and privilege) is essential; this requires conscious strategies of apprenticeship that support a relational ethics. We define apprenticeship as involving an approach of "standing under," as Krista Ratcliffe terms it in *Rhetorical Listening,* rather than claimed "mastery" of diverse experience or practices (28). Such a stance is indicated in the SNP through the extensive time and energy commitments necessary for the participants to develop cultivated awareness of historical, cultural, and subjective contexts. Apprenticeship undertaken as "standing under" may partially unsettle the agency accrued by culturally privileged subjectivities. In this project, for instance, non-Japanese theatre artists and the playwright were in the position of being tutored and led by the culturally specific priorities of the Japanese Canadian story and the Japanese Noh aesthetic, as well as by the co-direction of Matsui and Emmert.

Pangaea Arts' productions have developed within a surge of transnational and Canadian interest in intercultural theatre. From the earliest scholarly conversations, we note a debate between universalizing priorities (exemplified by critics like Erika Fischer-Lichte, directors like Peter Brooks, and productions such as Brooks' *Mahabharata*) and more nuanced attention to postcolonial and diasporic priorities promoted by critics like Rustom Bharucha (see *The Politics of Cultural Practice* and "Somebody's Other") and Patrice Pavis ("Introduction"). Bharucha's essay "Somebody's Other: Disorientation in the Cultural Politics of Our Times" points to how early intercultural theatre practices were embedded in ethnocentric and ahistorical colonial systems of power, oppression, and orientalism. Ric Knowles and Ingrid Mündel's *"Ethnic," Multicultural, and Intercultural Theatre* offers contemporary Canadian engagement with such questions. Critics in this volume suggest how intercultural theatre is no longer concerned with finding universal truths that unite cultures, but rather with highlighting specificity and difference. Indeed, in his introduction to the *Intercultural Performance* special issue of *The Canadian Theatre Review,* Knowles suggests that "in spite of a shaky history internationally," in which Western artists were often guilty of having "exoticized, commodified, and decontextualized cultural forms" from elsewhere, "a kind of grassroots interculturalism-from-below has been evolving, in which productive exchange takes place across multiple sites of difference" (3-4). Knowles' acknowledgement of a "grassroots" movement does justice to the burgeoning field of small-scale theatre companies such as Pangaea Arts, which are changing not only the field of intercultural theatre in Canada, but also theatre more generally.[13] In this instance, contemporary intercultural theatre's commitment to staging "contact points" across "multiple sites of difference" suggests its productive contribution to the theatre of redress that invites multiple actors into a space of complex engagement, witness, and responsibility-taking.

From the outset of the SNP, every effort was made to involve Japanese Canadian and/or Japanese artists as the lead artists in the creative team.[14] Specht first invited Japanese Canadian Joy Kogawa, author of the post-internment novel *Obasan*, to write the script. She declined, but suggested instead Daphne Marlatt because of her close engagement with Japanese Canadian history and culture since the 1970s. In 1975, as part of a collaborative team led by interviewer and translator Maya Koizumi, Marlatt edited an oral history of the uprooted fishing community of Steveston, BC, published as *Steveston Recollected*. This was followed by a collaboration with photographer Robert Minden on a long poem, *Steveston*.[15] Marlatt, then, is no stranger to intercultural and artistic collaboration. Further, as Downey notes, the play-script is a collaboration with Japanese Canadian storytellers and writers: "Marlatt cast the creation of this play out like a fisherman's net, interweaving a Steveston fisherman's ghost story and the poetry of Joy Kogawa, Roy Miki, . . . and the late Roy Kiyooka into the lines" (n. pag.). Thus, Marlatt underscores the significant contribution of her Japanese Canadian contemporaries to both the redress movement and to coastal BC literary culture. The intertwining of Japanese Canadian voices, partly drawn from the stories embedded in the earlier oral histories and partly from the words of the three poets, produces a deep texture of collaboration that is crucial to this practice of ethical interculturalism.

At the developmental stage of the SNP, the actors and chorus members, along with Marlatt, undertook substantial training in Noh dance, chant, and music with Matsui and Emmert in a series of workshops held over a two-year period. Marlatt also travelled to Japan to undertake further training, including attending Noh performances.[16] With respect to maintaining cultural integrity, Marlatt suggests that she was "not interested in writing a play that would be some kind of fusion theatre," implying that the Noh and Western theatre elements would each maintain their specificity to create a particular Japanese Canadian story ("How *The Gull*" 24). Features of each tradition stand distinctly next to the other in *The Gull*, suggesting how an intercultural practice need not subsume one culture into another. The development process of the SNP indicates some of the deep practices of cultural apprenticeship, which may be required of those who seek to engage ethically in ongoing redress processes.

Additionally, the decision to produce the play-script and performances in both Japanese and English foregrounds the inter-community commitments of the SNP and furthers the "in-between" experience for diverse audience members and/or readers. When actors playing the older Issei characters spoke or sang in Japanese, this conveyed generational, linguistic, and cultural tensions. As critic Beverly Curran explains of the first Issei generation, "[I]n Canada, they were Japanese; in Japan, foreigners. The notion of authenticity and the state of being neither here nor there seems a very appropriate theme for translation theatre . . . a performance of translated tongues and bodies" (117). Different communities engaging the legacies of the internment might include residents of Wakayama Prefecture, the coastal Japanese region where most of the BC fishing families originated; the Issei, first-generation Japanese Canadians; their second- and third-generation descendants (Nissei and Sansei), who are often more comfortable with English; and diverse members of the non-Japanese community. The play's use of untranslated Japanese words and phrases underscores the Gull/Mother's identity as Issei as well as the cultural and familial rift that results from her sons' inability to communicate with her. Her speech reveals both her vulnerability to systemic misunderstanding and her resistance to neo-colonial erasure of her particular linguistic and cultural identity. In contrast, the brothers have partially lost their ancestral language and with it part of their connection to their mother and heritage. Likewise, for some younger generation audience members, the Japanese passages in the performance would be lost in translation, a sign of fractured family, cultural, and linguistic ties. Communication is thus vexed in *The Gull*. Yet the Noh medium enables other modes of connection across linguistic borders through sound and movement. When the *Shite* dances her dance of grief, her sons come to understand her suffering. Perhaps gesture and dance such as the *Shite*'s might bridge misunderstanding within the family, community, and broader non-Japanese society. The different registers of spoken Japanese and English in the performance and play-script mean that diverse characters and audience members experience linguistic dislocation differently. For non-Japanese-Canadian audience members, such a temporary shift in cultural access and agency might enable the insight of "standing under" (Ratcliffe 28) necessary to ethical intercultural redress work.

Further, an encounter with Noh theatre for most Canadian (Japanese and non-Japanese) artists and audience members requires apprenticeship to its cultural and aesthetic norms, because its style is very different from that of Western theatre. A Noh play involves ritualized and stylized movements, non-linguistic vocalizations, and chanted text by the chorus and main characters. Four musicians who play three types of staccato drums and an atonal flute provide musical punctuation and rhythm. The two acts in a Noh play are subdivided into a series of chanted rather than spoken musical passages. Further, the contemplative tempo of the music and the choreography conveys a dream-like quality in opposition to realistic character blocking and movement. Costumes are usually lavish as are the masks; props, on the other hand, are minimal, as is the stage decor. It would thus be essential for any classroom encounter with *The Gull* to spend time watching archived productions of other Noh plays.[17]

In *The Gull*'s play-script, Marlatt combines aspects of two traditional categories of Noh plays: a "Woman Noh," in which the *Shite* (or lead actor) plays a woman, and a "Ghost Noh," where the *Shite* plays a restless ghost haunted by an unresolved past. Most Noh plays involve the co-presence of the spirit world and the human world, whereas such interaction is rare in contemporary Western theatre. Liminality in the play also manifests through the interspecies depiction of the *Shite*'s character, which mysteriously manifests as both gull and woman. As the production's mask-maker explained, he "could not [make] a straight gull mask . . . is she a gull? Is she a woman?" (Specht and Kubo n. pag.). In *The Gull,* the *Shite* plays the Ghost/Gull/Mother who needs to be released through her Japanese Canadian sons' witness to her traumatic past and through remembered echoes of Buddhist chanting at her girlhood temple back in Japan. As Susan Knutson points out, the mother is caught within several nets of social suffering: "The unresolved pain of the ghost in *The Gull* flows directly out of the person's cruel internment and separation from her family during the war, but it is also tightly wound together with the female roles she played in her life . . . it is she who bears the full brunt of history's assault" (11). The other primary Noh characters, the *Waki* (the witness to the *Shite*) and *Wakitsure* (the *Waki*'s companion), here presented as the Gull/Mother's sons, tell a different story of loss and reconnection to the BC coast. They must witness their mother's story, along with the *Ai* (the interlude actor and narrator of the background story of the *Shite* or the place), an old fisherman from the coast, and the *Ji* (the chorus). While Noh is not typically concerned with historical verisimilitude, here the characters are survivors of the Japanese internment and their story activates a narrative of political and ethical reckoning.

In act 1, the *Shite* as Ghost/Mother appears as a homeless gull that hovers, suspended, between the BC coast and her natal home of Mio, Japan (see fig. 1). She mourns her estrangement from Japan, her tenuous moorings in Steveston, and her subsequent dislocation from her husband and sons during the internment. The play stages her confrontation with her fishermen sons when they return to the BC coast eight years after the internment and her accusation that they abandoned her in a camp hospital after she fell ill from tuberculosis. Her sense of betrayal is doubled; she was "gulled" both by her family and by the Canadian government (Knutson 11). The audience learns that when the

Figure 1
Photograph by Michael Ford. *Akira Matsui wearing Noh mask by Hakuzan Kubo in* The Gull: The Steveston Noh Project. 2006. Courtest of Pangaea Arts, Richmond.

Gull/Mother was a young woman in Japan, she was lured by a photograph of her husband-to-be as a much younger man into coming to Steveston as a "picture bride" as well as by inflated promises of economic opportunity.[18] The mother's story stands in proxy for the stories of many other Japanese women who experienced a kind of double exposure to gendered and political betrayal. In this way, *The Gull* and the SNP animate the multi-layered traumatic history and internment aftermath through the Gull/Mother's diasporic unmooring: "lost bird caught in history's torrent / having no home to call my own, no refuge in / the battering waves that come and come" (*The Gull* 1.2.44). Throughout act 1, Marlatt figures historical and temporal rupture through coastal imagery of the sea in full storm surge: "battering" waves and "winds of war" buffet the Gull/Mother who is caught between maternal attachment to her Canadianized sons and ancestral attachment to Mio (1.2.44; 2.9.69). While the play-script risks over-emphasizing the victim position of the mother, the power of the *Shite*'s performance when the Ghost/Mother confronts both her sons (and implicitly the diverse members of the audience, including settler beneficiaries of the Canadian state) counterbalances this perception. Her haunting presence on the stage is a sign of her resilience. Readers and audience members are thus invited to consider the Ghost/Mother's determination and endurance, her intent to haunt and confront.

Unlike the unresolved past of the ghost in conventional Noh that draws from myth rather than from a documentary archive, this play stages persistent witness to historical suffering as an ongoing requirement of redress work. Marlatt notes, "As a writer, I can only serve as witness, as I have tried to do in *Steveston* and *Steveston Recollected*. As witness and reminder that such denial of citizens' rights is not forgotten as a black moment in our national history, only to be too easily re-enacted with other people in other situations" (Personal interview n. pag.). Relentlessly, act 1 and the *Kyogen Interlude* between the two acts confront the audience with details of the internment. The *Ji*, or chorus, gives voice to community memory:

> JI: . . . —condemned,
> families split and sent
> from the coast to camps far away,
> in icy crowded huts and ghost
> town rooms we were penned up
> in the frozen mountains. (1.4.53)

The interned, once condemned to "ghost / town rooms" in the interior, reclaim agency through haunting the marginal spaces of the nation and the broken narratives of belonging and citizenship.[19]

Marlatt explains that the state of being "gulled" by the promises of citizenship, only to be radically dislocated, is a central question in the play: "That's part of the story line, that sense of being taken in by the notion that you had rights because you had settled here or were born here, and then your rights, your property, your good name were stripped away. . . . So then what happens to your sense of home, where is home?" (Interview by Lenard Stanga 7). In *The Gull*, the *Ji* vocalizes the mother's consequent longing to return to her remembered girlhood home of Mio:

> JI: on the far shore of endless ocean
> . . . .
> . . . I pulled the bell rope
> in my father's temple, chanting
> Namu Amida Butsu, Amida Bu
> . . . o to pull
> that bell again, o the ache
> of this pull back to Mio. (2.8.68)

The echoing assonance of the repeated "o" aurally inter-knots loss, home, ocean, and Mio to convey the ache of unmooring. The "o" reverberates from the stage to the audience members, and, potentially, across diverse communities in Canada.

The unsettled ghost figure is, in part, a product of the oral storytelling tradition in the Japanese fishing community of BC, where fishermen's tales featured ghosts haunting the coastline around China Hat/Klemtu, the main setting in *The Gull (*Marlatt, "How *The Gull*" 18). It is to these coastal fishing grounds that the Gull/Ghost/Mother returns to unsettle her sons' intent to fish the same waters that their father once worked. The stage directions in *The Gull* and the set design of the production emphasize that China Hat/Klemtu is a site of layered histories.To the early Japanese fishermen, the geography of this temporary moorage on Swindle Island in Finlayson Channel resembled a Chinese hat; for the Aboriginal people who lived there, it was named Klemtu ("How *The Gull*" 24-25). The setting underscores the intersections of the communities and histories of the coastal Aboriginal people with those of newer diasporas.[20] One set design element, in particular, signifies the geographical and historical specificity of this Canadian story and the convergent experiences of the Japanese and Indigenous communities. Traditionally, the wall at the back of a Noh stage features a painting of the Yogo Pine at the Kasuga Shrine in Nara, Japan, where the first Noh dance was performed. In the SNP, however, the traditional pine tree is transposed to a stylized painting of the BC coastline, which shows, in silhouette, the outline of the mountains, anchorages, and valleys of China Hat/Klemtu. Marlatt suggests that locating the main action of the play at China Hat/Klemtu was a way of putting these villages on "the Canadian literary map," thus affirming their importance in the regional and national imaginary ("How *The Gull*" 25).

Intercultural production elements in the SNP thus speak to multi-community political and ethical redress priorities. Design elements of Western realism share the stage with conventional Noh costumes, masks, dance, and musicians. In the SNP, the traditional Noh bridge-way is "draped" with "fishing nets with cork floats" ("How *The Gull*" 25). Additionally, the production stills and stage directions convey the use of modern props; when the fishermen brothers—the *Waki* and *Wakitsure*—first enter the stage, they carry a lantern, a net, and a gaff (1.1.41) (see fig. 2), and in the *Kyogen Interlude* between acts 1 and 2, the men drink whiskey from tin mugs and a bottle (*KI*.5.57). While the inclusion of these simple props would not surprise an audience accustomed to realist conventions, these are significant departures from traditional Noh, in which few props are used besides fans and bamboo poles.

2

Figure 2
Photograph by Michael Ford. *Simon Hayama in* The Gull: The Steveston Noh Project. 2006.
Courtesy of Pangaea Arts, Richmond.

3

Figure 3
Photograph by Michael Ford. *Akira Matsui in* The Gull: The Steveston Noh Project. 2006.
Courtesy of Pangaea Arts, Richmond.

Further, audience members (or readers) will note the jarring juxtaposition of intercultural costuming choices. In the production, the second-generation Japanese Canadian characters are dressed in 1940s-1950s woollen fishermen sweaters and rain gear and use Western props.[21] In contrast to such costuming of the *Waki*, *Wakitsure*, and the *Ai*, the *Shite* wears a traditional kimono, and she alone wears the masks created for the production (see fig. 3). Because they wear modern costumes, drink whiskey, and speak modern English, second- and third-generation Japanese, as well as non-Japanese, audience members are encouraged to identify with the two brothers. Further, the two brothers, despite the internment years, assert that their return to the Pacific coast is a homecoming; this stands in counterpoint to their mother's lament for her lost girlhood home. Act 1 opens with their affirmation, "we return at last" (1.1.41). Intergenerational tensions are further materialized in coastal tropes for location and dislocation. The sons are figured as "homing salmon" (1.1.43), looking for refuge in the ocean and river currents, while the mother is figured as a "hapless gull" who is "not at home," but rather "stranded" in "destiny's rough wind" (1.2.44, 45). In the third musical passage of act 1, the brothers and mother speak past each other out of different interpretations of their (dis)locations. To the mother, her sons are lost "Mio birds" on an "alien shore," while the brothers insist that "this salmon-coast is our home" (1.3.48). This figural tension conveys the crux of the mother's suffering in the play, for she not only wants to return to coastal Japan (in answer to the state's disingenuous invitation to "repatriate"), but she also wants her sons to go with her. In act 2, she scolds, "home—you must go," to which they reply, "what was home to you / Mother, is not home to us" (2.10.71). It is their different experiences that she and her sons must acknowledge in order for the mother to be released from her grief. A Buddhist practice of accepting change, as well as a redress practice of attentive listening and witness, is required for these characters to work through their tensions.

Zen-inspired aesthetics in Noh emphasize simplicity, spaciousness, and "reflective restraint," which are conveyed through the minimalist set and slow dance movements of actors (Nafziger-Leis 30). A number of production elements in the SNP thus evoke the Buddhist aspects of Noh. For example, the tempo and choreography involve stillness, sparseness, and contemplation, which reflect a Buddhist quality of sustained "deep and quiet energy" that Emmert suggests is required of the performers and musicians ("Making" n. pag.). The dialogue is delivered at a much slower pace than would be typical of "realistic speech" (Emmert, "Preface" 10). Further, "moments of 'non-action'" and "spaces of silence" are meant to convey the essence of Buddha-nature or awakened being (Nafziger-Leis 36). Marlatt also suggests that Zen tempo and movement in Noh are due in large part to the "meditative stillness" of the performers and to their intense "inner focus" which, in turn, creates "a vivid sense of inner engagement in the audience" ("How *The Gull*" 30). Such "vivid inner engagement" may open space requisite for the quality of ethical attentiveness that is central to the work of complex witnessing within intercultural redress initiatives.

One aspect of the Ghost/Mother's suffering is rooted in her (mis)perception of the radical separateness of the BC and Japanese coastlines. Her longing for her girlhood home becomes a "cord tangling [her] feet . . . so tightly it binds [her] / wandering spirit" (2.9.70). The temple bell-cord wrapped tightly around her feet is a trope for unreconciled memory. The Ghost/Mother grapples with her sons' acceptance that life is governed by relentless change: "home, it changes like the sea's / rough waves we ride / its changes constant, changing / our quick lives . . . caught, she turns this way and that, / desperate to understand / what they are saying—wave? change?" (2.10.72). Cultural memories of the ringing temple bell, triggered by the sound of a bell buoy in the harbour, and remembered communal chanting enable a transitional release: "in a lull we hear the name so faint / Amida Butsu / tossed by the waves / Amida Butsu" (2.11.74). The mother realizes that the same wind rings the harbour bell in China Hat/Klemtu and the temple bell in Mio: "turning [she] sees / ocean joining here and there / one current circles through" (2.11.73). The Gull/Mother's release can only come with the understanding that the ocean cradling her childhood home Mio is the same ocean her sons want to fish from the coast of BC.

A poem fragment by Roy Kiyooka mediates this intercultural, intergenerational, and inter-coastal moment of connection: "nothing but a mouthful of syllables / to posit an ocean's breath, the poet wrote / nothing but brine and a little bite of air" (2.10.72). Connecting "ocean's breath" and "heart's breath," the *Shite* and the chorus, in Japanese and English respectively, pick up Kiyooka's meditative lines as a chant:

> SHITE (in Japanese): ocean singing ocean's breath
> JI: ocean singing ocean's breath (2.10.73)

The ebb and flow rhythms of breath, body and ocean-tides merge to transform into the whispered echo of chanting: "a living tide of syllables / to wash out the line that divides / shore from shore in her / anguished mind"

(2.11.73). Within the Buddhist priorities of Noh theatre, redress work in *The Gull* is undertaken at the family and personal levels. After the Ghost/Mother confronts her sons, they offer her recognition and apology: "Mother, we failed to understand / how deeply you felt / abandoned there—forgive our blindness" (2.10.71). This suggests that reconciliation work needs to take place *within* communities broken by historical violence, as well as between survivors and perpetrator/beneficiary communities. Several testimonials from Japanese Canadian audience members suggest they felt a connection to this re-performance of their family stories (Fisher n. pag.).[22] According to Buddhist Noh priorities, the unsettled Ghost/Mother, her sons, and perhaps the community they represent, find some measure of healing in the play.

At this point, we note that our initial responses to the conclusion of the play were restless and vexed, informed by postcolonial, human rights, and feminist critiques of too-easy reconciliation. After being compelled by the play to witness the Ghost/Mother's gendered and racialized betrayal, we found it hard to accept such a seemingly quick resolution to the complex weight of history. Yet, reading for cultural context, we also recognized that the Buddhist and formal priorities of Noh require that the witness of the *Waki* and *Ji* resolve the ghost's unsettled journey. Our dilemma reflects debates within critical redress studies, such as those articulated in Jennifer Henderson and Pauline Wakeham's essay collection, *Reconciling Canada: Critical Perspectives on the Culture of Redress*, as well as in the introduction to their edited special issue of *English Studies in Canada*, titled *Aboriginal Redress*. For an increasing number of critics, redress conceived of as resolution or closure is often seen as a betrayal of justice.[23] Henderson and Wakeham emphasize that the historical reckoning of state-initiated redress is incomplete. For example, they argue that the Canadian state's staged apology for the Indian Residential Schools "has occluded broader consideration of the long history of colonial genocide" and its aftermath legacies (*Reconciling* 12-13). Like Wakeham and Henderson, we are concerned with the potential for the reconciliation/forgiveness mandate to displace the necessity of substantive historical reckoning required by multi-party actors. Yet, like Julie McGonegal, we are also sensitive to the way reconciliation within redress-from-below projects might at times coexist with resistance and critique, so that each category would not empty the other of its performative possibility ("Preface" xiii and "Introduction" 19).[24]

The official 1988 government apology to Japanese Canadians, who were "guests" in the Parliamentary gallery but not invited speakers, may be read as the closing act in Canada's first performance of the official theatre of redress (Miki, *Redress* 3). This act, entitled "The Apology," performs the mature nation putting to rest its unsavoury past in order to confirm a multicultural and transnational future. Yet the SNP unsettles the certainty of the official performance by calling for ongoing reckoning within and across diverse national, community, familial, and spiritual registers.[25] Because the main action of redress appears to take place in the familial, personal, and spiritual domains, the play might invite a critique of seeming "quietude and resignation," similar to that advanced by critics like Roy Miki in response to Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*. However, we suggest instead that the SNP performs "complex reparative" work (McGonegal, "Introduction" 7).[26] While the Ghost/Mother's anguish needs to be witnessed by her sons and her restless spirit settled, national memory remains unsettled by the haunting presence of internment memory and requires ongoing attention. Each time *The Gull* is re-encountered in a production or classroom setting, the story of the fishermen brothers returning belatedly to the BC coast and re-narrating communal experience of state-inflicted injury and injustice reanimates internment history. Audience members, as well as students, scholars, and readers, might learn to see themselves as implicated in the critical work of redress and reckoning not only in this instance, but also with respect to other types of historical and ongoing injustice. Crucially, the SNP must be situated as one initiative within the continuum of committed work by members of the Nissei and Issei generations who, by their creation of a multi-site testimonial archive in literary, community activist, and museum projects, suggest the open-ended *labour* of redress.

The SNP thus conjoins intercultural theatre with the priorities of ongoing redress from below to enact a contemplative "ethical remembrance" project as a practice of "critical learning" (Simon 133).[27] Many intercultural theatre scholars are concerned with how the audience can be invited to participate beyond the experience of *catharsis* or entertainment, so that they are moved "to witness in ways that are responsible to . . . confronting the implication of stories that challenge normative structures of national belonging and of 'home'" (Knowles and Mündel xiv). As Knowles and Mündel note, "Salverson argues that a new kind of ethical and active relationship can emerge between teller and listener in staging stories that are cross-cultural or run against dominant perceptions both of 'Canada' and of racialized bodies" (xiv). Perhaps such possibilities of active ethical witness might be available to a diversely positioned audience/readership of productions and readings of

The Gull. The SNP encourages diverse audience members to move beyond empathy and toward ethical response-ability, in part through the liminal spaces of its intercultural practice. This includes the co-presence on stage of the spirit and human worlds; the interspecies connection between the gull and human (ghost) mother; the traditional Noh dance and costumes for some characters juxtaposed with the realist Western costuming and props for others; and the Japanese/English registers of the play. Each of these tensions creates an encounter that is generative of negotiation across disparity and difference, suggestive of a mode of unsettled redress that, in the case of settler-colonial Canada, is inevitably intercultural. The Steveston Noh Project's collaborative practices, critical dislocations, and Buddhist contemplative properties created space for complex responses from diverse audience members who were each called to engage ethically and actively with the labour of redress—a practice we hope to see taken up in further productions, staged readings, and classroom encounters where the unfinished work might continue.

NOTES

1 We are grateful to the Human Rights Literature Seminar at the ACLA and to CACLALS, where we first presented this work, and especially to Susan Gingell for her support of collaborative criticism.

2 We first found Downey's article on October 20, 2009 at www.kyotojournal.org/10,000things/043.html, but this webpage no longer exists. Interested scholars can use the Internet Wayback Machine to access the archived article.

3 Following Pangaea Arts' reference to the overall creative collaboration process as "The Gull: The Steveston Noh Project," we will refer to the Steveston Noh Project as the "SNP" throughout this article to signify the multi-artist creative process, the intensive training and development period, and the theatrical production.

4 To some extent, our problem of "imaginative reconstruction" is one that many theatre scholars and theatre classrooms confront. Union restrictions prohibited a full video of *The Gull* from being recorded, so we are grateful to Pangaea Arts for allowing us to screen a video of a staged reading that featured a full cast. This was to be our only encounter with the dynamic energies of Noh performance featuring dance, chant, and instrumentation. Otherwise, we had to glean performance details from interview and/or introductory statements by Heidi Specht, Akira Matsui, Richard Emmert, and Daphne Marlatt, as well as from the articles by Susan Knutson and Beverly Curran.

5 Other examples include Colleen Wagner's *The Monument* (1993), produced by several companies in Canada and the United States, as well as in Rwanda by ISÔKU; *Rwanda 94*, created in Belgium by GROUPOV; and the South African production *Truth in Translation* that has played in Belfast, Rwanda, and the US. Together, these productions comprise a migratory transnational theatre of redress that suggests a productive role for theatre in

engaging transitional justice questions in post-conflict societies. Our notion of "redress from below" is indebted to Kiernan McEvoy and Lorna McGregor's edited volume, *Transitional Justice from Below,* which emphasizes the role of grassroots actors in a field that has been largely defined by legal and political actors.

6 While some scholars disagree, Cheryl Nafziger-Leis makes a convincing case for the integral Zen elements that have informed Noh aesthetics and priorities since the medieval period. Noh was developed in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries by Zeami Motokiyo, who in his treatises on Noh emphasized Buddhist principles (27, 28, 31).

7 Daphne Marlatt's engagement with the Buddhist elements of Noh was contextualized by her own long-time training in Tibetan Buddhist practice; see the interview with Roseanne Harvey in *Ascent Magazine*.

8 We are grateful to one of our anonymous assessors for challenging some of our invisible assumptions and catalyzing the practice of critical unsettlement we hope to cultivate.

9 Pangaea Arts' mission statement explains that the company is "an intercultural, interdisciplinary world arts organization" that fosters "cultural interaction and the exchange of ideas between diverse communities" (Pangaea Arts n. pag.).

10 After years of apprenticeship in Japan, Emmert has become recognized there and internationally as a Noh master in his own right.

11 For further details about the artists involved in the production, see Susan Knutson's article in *alt.theatre*.

12 Richmond, BC is paired as a sister-city with Wakayama City (Marlatt, "How *The Gull*" 29). Beverly Curran also notes that "more than 75% of the Japanese Canadian residents of Steveston still trace their ancestry back to Wakayama Prefecture. Akira Matsui . . . [also] from Wakayama . . . made his first overseas trip to Richmond when he came as part of a cultural exchange between the sister cities" (125).

13 In addition to Pangaea Arts, there are many theatre companies in Canada that focus on intercultural work, including Multicultural Theatre Space (MT Space) of Kitchener-Waterloo, Modern Times and Cahoots Theatre Projects in Toronto, Teesri Duniya Theatre of Montreal, and Theatre Replacement of Vancouver. For further insights on intercultural theatre practice, see Jacqueline Lo and Helen Gilbert's "Toward a Topography of Cross-Cultural Theatre Praxis" and Patrice Pavis' *The Intercultural Performance Reader*.

14 Heidi Specht's ideal casting would have had Japanese Canadian actors playing all the roles: "In the end, the cast was mixed, with four Japanese Canadians participating" (qtd. in Curran 127).

15 For more on what she calls the "migrations" of her Steveston project, see Daphne Marlatt's *At the River's Mouth: Writing Migrations*.

16 In addition to travelling to Japan to watch Noh productions and participating in Emmert's workshops in Vancouver, Marlatt worked closely with him to understand the intricacies of Noh's musical structure and dramatic style (see Curran and Knutson).

17 For more on Noh aesthetics, see Michael Ford's "The Gull Production Stills" and listen to Heidi Specht and Hakuzan Kubo's interview by the CBC program *North By Northwest* on Pangaea's website under "Media About Pangaea Arts." Also, see the webpage of the Japan Arts Council, where students can access videos of Noh performances.

18 Marlatt credits Mio museum curator Hisakazu Nishihama for the story of the "picture bride," daughter of a Buddhist temple priest ("How *The Gull*" 18). As well, see Marlatt's *Steveston Recollected* for a powerful testimony about the experience of being a "picture bride."

19 As with the "postcolonial gothic" that has the potential to unsettle neo-colonial certainties, such generative haunting may be taken up as a "politics of memory" (Goldman and Saul

645). For more on these questions, see Marlene Goldman and Joanne Saul's "Talking with Ghosts: Haunting in Canadian Cultural Production" and Cynthia Sugars and Gerry Turcotte's *Unsettled Remains*.

20 We are indebted to Renate Eigenbrod's paper "The 'look of recognition': Transcultural Circulation of Trauma in Canadian Aboriginal Literature" for drawing our attention to Japanese Canadian and First Nations' overlapping redress initiatives.

21 Set and props designer Phillip Tidd and costume designer Margaret McKea took the lead in pushing for authentic Canadian elements in the play. While McKea won a grant to research and create authentic Noh costuming, she also wanted the collaboration to be clearly visible at the level of costumes. This was also in response to Japanese Canadian members who found the workshop version of the play to be "too traditionally Japanese" (Specht n. pag.).

22 The translator of *The Gull*, Toyoshi Yoshihara, commented that Noh is an ideal medium for a re-visitation of the internment experience because it allows for expression of "quiet anger" (Abell n. pag.). Downey and Fisher further report that audience members whose fathers and grandfathers were among the displaced fishing community were deeply moved.

23 Many thinkers in the Aboriginal Healing Foundation Research Series advance similar critiques of the IRS TRC. See *Cultivating Canada: Reconciliation through the Lens of Cultural Diversity*, edited by Ashok Mathur, Jonathan Dewar, and Mike DeGagné.

24 McGonegal's call for a "complex reparative project" is a timely intervention into the position taken by those postcolonial critics who "risk reductive" dismissal of "the gains of redress movements by focusing almost exclusively on their problems and contradictions" ("Preface" xiii and "Introduction" 7). Yet we are also concerned that her project may risk a conflation of performative categories like redress and reconciliation that we do not see as inevitable synonyms. For us, as for Wakeham and Henderson, redress suggests political agency constituted through extraordinary political mobilization and many decades of work, struggle, setbacks, and compromise undertaken by community activists, cultural workers, and public intellectuals (*Reconciling* 5).

25 Our concept of theatre as both metaphor for and performative practice of official and unofficial redress is informed by McGonegal's notion of the 1988 state apology to Japanese Canadians as a "theatrical display of national benevolence" ("The Future" 113) and Wakeham and Henderson's conception of the "drama of redress" in *Reconciling Canada*.

26 While Miki's view that "complex patterns of complicity, substitution, and containment," ensured *Obasan*'s place in the early canon of multicultural CanLit is salient ("But What About" 135-44), McGonegal's intervention into a potentially dualistic reading that constructs an either "revolutionary" or "resolutionary" binary is also instructive ("The Future" 114). Significantly, Knutson does not read the "spiritual dimension of the play [as obscuring] the layer of political and social meaning" (15).

27 We would like to acknowledge the late Roger Simon, whose work on the ethics of witnessing and critical remembrance pedagogies is a touchstone for our collaborative work.

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George Elliott Clarke

A Letter from Henry Tucker, August 28, 1789

I

Arrowing from Bermuda—
"Isle of Devils"
(whose rocks and reefs wreck ships)—
right after the Equinox,
and veering to Nova Scotia,
skirting the Leeward Isles,
I was strengthened in my persuasion
that Bermuda is a "sea-garden,"
a tropical England,
a "Summer Island,"
except that sly types hold the government tiller,
and plunge pirate hands in the public till,
shouting "Free Trade" in slaves
(for they are dissatisfied with profits
from salt and Madeira wine),
and do resort to any pulpit-fraud,
(their piety echoing thunderously),
to seize whatever riches
from whomever
in whatever way.....

I'll forget these woes.
I have one dream~
to kiss my daughter,
to have my wife again....

II

I met them, out of Ireland,
off Newfoundland,
and my sweet darling Mrs. Tucker,
surprised by my bronze, Bermudian complexion,
exclaimed to our excited daughter,
"That's *not* your papa, Nellie!
That's a Coloured man!"

She was assured of her error
in our evening intimacy,
and her face shot pure crimson,
while I guffawed like a Bedlam madman:
"Oh, how can a white ever be black?"

III

On to Halifax—inclement town,
we came,
to streets parading snow and sleighs,
the sound of a million puny church bells tinkling—
as cheery Christians slid (or backslid,
blaming ice
not *Vice*).

The British soldiers looked like Finns—
furred in beaver at the head
and in buffalo to the toe.

The Haligonian houses and wharves—
all wood—
await a match
to render them Xmas candles.
I'm sure they'll not wait long:
Halifax is as favoured with fires
as it is with blizzards.

Our Nova Scotian stay was only loss and loss.
We explored a salt-and-vinegar world—
miserable with slush and caustic with ice
and dirty.
(*Love* itself was covert there:
the streets churned up urchins and sluts.)
Opinions proved as provincial as indigestion.

IV

After weeks of cold that needled us worse
than Bermuda's mosquitoes
(whose bites whelp blisters as big as buckles),
we set out for our "Devil's Summer Island,"
but got pitched and bitched in the North Atlantic—
a merciless ocean.
We could not gain softer latitudes quickly enough.

(At night, the black-face ocean was lit
only by stingy stars;
the light was dingy....)

We took the "wine of height"
as soon as was possible,
downing port-and-cheese by candlelight,
salted by the sea.

Not too long after Sable Island,
we reached our realm feeling blessed
(save for the Yellow Fever
that floats in with the Southern cotton).

V

Now we have darkies,
and Nova Scotia has darkies,
and we all have Christ.
And we all split “fair” from “dark.”
But no one cares for the Nova Scotian Negroes,
despite the black-robed, long-coat traffic
of clergy twixt Halifax (NS) and Hamilton (BDA),
with white Believers assisting brown Bermudians,
but ignoring New Scotland’s scruffy blacks.

It seems *Salvation* is segregated too.

But we shouldn’t wonder.

Must slaves have souls?

[Southampton (Bermuda) 30 mars MMXII]

—George Elliott Clarke

Keeping in Touch

Nelly Arcan; David Scott Hamilton, trans.
Exit. Anvil $20.00

Ivan E. Coyote
Missed Her: Stories. Arsenal Pulp $18.95

Karen X. Tulchinsky
Love Ruins Everything. Insomniac $19.95

Reviewed by Neta Gordon

The three works under discussion here run back and forth along the gamut of representing despair and hope, though hope generally prevails. Karen X. Tulchinsky's *Love Ruins Everything*, first published in 1998, was reissued by Insomniac Press in 2011; the new edition includes comments by the author about the context for one of the novel's plots, in which Henry, an HIV-positive queer activist, works to make known some controversial theories about the origin of the AIDS virus. In her foreword, Tulchinsky describes her introduction to the idea that AIDS was developed by the US government and purposefully introduced into gay communities. The conspiracy-plot section of the novel, however, is not nearly as well-realized as the romantic-familial adventures of Henry's cousin Nomi, a Jewish lesbian living in San Francisco, who returns home to Toronto for her mother's wedding. Tulchinsky's insights into her overlapping lesbian and Jewish communities are both heartfelt and entertaining. She is not afraid to poke fun at stereotypes, as when she notes such "long-standing lesbian tradition[s], like moving in together on the second date, or becoming best friends after breaking up." The emotional core of *Love Ruins Everything*, however, is the collision of Nomi's family shenanigans and Henry's activism: in particular, the scene in which their grandmother asks Henry point blank if he is ill undermines the idea that each generation is justly suspicious about the other. The wedding itself is entirely love-affirming and life-affirming, as Henry's father, an ex-con who did not always accept Henry's sexuality, dances the tango with his son. And Nomi gets the girl.

The 2011 English-language translation of Nelly Arcan's *Exit*, first published in French in 2009, is a challenging read, and not only because Arcan's own suicide—which occurred days after she delivered the manuscript—acts as a painful gloss to this speculative fiction about the protagonist's increasingly bizarre interactions with "Paradis, clef en main," a company specializing in custom-suicides. Antoinette's voice is thoroughly belligerent as she mercilessly explains why she is bent on pursuing hopelessness, ugliness, all that is antithetical to life, and what it means to exist without "that strength of will to desire, to discover, to love, to believe." Arcan further explores the would-be suicide's "lack" by representing "life" in the problematic figure of Antoinette's mother, a woman whose youthful appearance is preserved unnaturally by a dizzying array of unguents and pills. The text carries forward with a startling amount of energy, as Antoinette's dealings with "Paradis, clef en main" are written as a surreal quest narrative, complete with mysterious car drives, examiners wearing Magritte bowler hats, and a ubiquitous barking poodle. Ultimately, though, *Exit* is a strangely hopeful novel in that it culminates in another communion of sorts between parent and child.

Ivan E. Coyote's 2010 publication *Missed Her* is a collection of thirty "stories," though that term doesn't seem sufficient for these small narrative treasures, many of which gesture towards the memoir, the editorial, the travelogue, or the essay. What links the several pieces together is a common aim to explore, as one of Coyote's students puts it in the story "Good Old Days": the various ways humans can "[show] us in words that love is just love." In her capacity as a voice for the queer community, a role she especially relishes when it comes to reaching out to young queers and helping them recognize themselves in her stories, Coyote thoughtfully questions gender categories: in "Je Suis Femme," for example, she hilariously laments the incompatibility of her butch identity with the fact that, because she is gluten intolerant, she can't drink beer. The collection's title hints at an elegiac tone that haunts many of the pieces and manifests explicitly in "On Angels and Afterlife," a memorial for two "missed hers": Vancouver East End activist, Catherine White Holman, and Coyote's grandmother, Florence. As much as Coyote is a fierce advocate for youth, she is equally admiring of the surprising wisdom of older generations, modelling her notions of cultural transformation on the way intergenerational communication—the sharing of stories across seeming divides—fosters acceptance. In the story "Nobody Ever," Coyote describes, on the one hand, a young fan telling her that "the little girl in [your] story, she reminds me of me" and, on the other hand, an older woman she meets who tells her to "Keep in touch . . . you remind me of me when I was a kid." Coyote's thoroughly hopeful and yearning collection guides us all to "keep in touch."

Reading Masculinity

Todd Babiak

Toby: A Man. Harper Perennial $17.99

Christine Ramsay, ed.

Making It Like a Man: Canadian Masculinities in Practice. Wilfrid Laurier UP $42.95

David Adams Richards

Facing the Hunter: Reflections on a Misunderstood Way of Life. Doubleday $29.95

Reviewed by Jennifer Hardwick

David Adams Richards begins *Facing the Hunter: Reflections on a Misunderstood Way of Life* with an anecdote about a Chardonnay-sipping poet who condemns hunting as "deplorable" at a dinner party. Richards minces no words when it comes to his views of "men like this," whom he sees as "clever enough to have expensive cloth covering their arses, and pleased to carry with them a register of human complaint and a suspicion of certain jobs and of so, so many people." The passage epitomizes Richards' disdain for those who disagree with hunting, and it nicely illustrates the tone of his book, which is described as both a memoir and a polemic. It also introduces two divergent representations of masculinity—the educated, sophisticated, arrogant urbanite, and the rugged, rural, outdoorsman—which are long-standing tropes of Canadian male identity.

Richards definitely identifies with and privileges the latter strain of masculinity. He comes from a long line of outdoorsmen and he has great reverence for those who have taken the time to learn about the lands they inhabit. His book is filled with stories of hunting that feature the land, and more specifically his beloved New Brunswick, as a central character. Richards' New Brunswick is untamed, but not entirely unpredictable;

good hunters know how to take their cues from their surroundings and the best hunters are so finely tuned they can almost predict an animal's whereabouts on any given day. Richards portrays these hunters as heroes; they exude wisdom and skill, and serve as testament to how hunting can better a man. On the other hand, he shows nothing but distaste for men who hunt without awareness of, or deference to, their natural surroundings. In *Facing the Hunter*, these hunters are almost always tourists who come to the wilderness to kill for sport. They are an extension of the urban elite: entitled and completely ignorant of the principles that have guided Richards, his family, and his friends through decades of hunting—respect, integrity, and a deep understanding of the land. Ultimately, these are the virtues that Richards seeks to highlight, and he does so with some success. While his sentimental view of hunting—and condescending view of all those who disagree with it—likely won't win over any staunch opponents, his book does demonstrate that hunting is about having a relationship with the non-human world, not dominance over it.

Toby Menard, the central character in Todd Babiak's novel *Toby: A Man*, could easily be the Chardonnay-sipping man in Richards' anecdote. Toby is a cultured and emotionally stunted Montrealer who has devoted his life to teaching men about fashion, wine, and etiquette. He would be aghast at Richards' brash opinions, and would likely pass out if he was forced to gut his dinner. Toby lives the perfect urban existence, hosting his own TV show by day and drinking and dining with his glamorous girlfriend by night. However, his life begins to unravel when his father attempts suicide, and within a few short weeks, Toby finds himself disgraced, fired, abandoned by his girlfriend, and thrust into accidental fatherhood. Destitute and depressed, he takes his young charge and moves into his parents' home in the suburbs. Slowly but surely, through experiences with fatherhood, family, and friends, Toby begins to realize what is really important in life. This process of maturation is clichéd and predictable at best; the story of a selfish but successful man who falls from grace only to discover what he has been missing is an old one, and there are few surprises in store for readers. However, Babiak's writing is witty and smart, and he manages to inject both humour and heart into situations that could easily be read as trite. Toby's memories of his ailing father singing "You Are My Sunshine" to put him to sleep as a child are moving, and it is hard not to chuckle when Mr. Dempsky advises that Toby tell potential employers he is American because, "[n]o one cares where you came from. You might win a literary award in Toronto for mooning over your origins, but you won't get laid and you won't get paid. Not in a real country." It is these moments of connection and humour that make *Toby: A Man* worthwhile. While the novel does very little that is new, it does inject life into an old story, and it offers an enjoyable portrayal of masculine identity in-process.

Both Richards and Babiak construct dichotomies between "proper" and "improper" masculinities; in *Facing the Hunter*, true men are those who take the time to form a relationship with the land, and in *Toby: A Man*, they are those who have moved beyond the trappings of commercialism to embrace authentic familial relationships. *Making It Like a Man: Canadian Masculinities in Practice*, a collection of essays edited by Christine Ramsay, seeks to address and complicate these forms of masculinity. The collection, which endeavours to "offer the international field of masculinity studies . . . the most recent research on the cultural, geographical, and historical specificity of Canadian masculinities in practice," investigates Canadian masculinities across disciplines, spaces, and time periods. Essays explore everything from national settlement propaganda in the late 1800s to Indigenous rap in contemporary Regina, and the authors make use of a wide array of analytical and theoretical approaches. It can be hard to make connections between all of these different strains, but ultimately the collection does its job: it proves that Canadian masculinities are varied and contextual, and it makes strong connections between gender and Canada's social, political, and economic histories. While *Making It Like a Man* leaves room for the strains of masculinity seen in Richards' and Babiak's books, it also suggests that we need to move past the binaries (urban/rural, white collar/blue collar, bachelor/family man) that govern them in order to engage more fully with the complexity of male identity in Canada.

Politically Un-signified

Jonathan Ball
Clockfire. Coach House $16.95

Gregory Betts
Psychic Geographies and Other Topics. Quattro $16.95

Steven Zultanski
Cop Kisser. BookThug $22.50

Reviewed by Megan Ruttan

Jonathan Ball's *Clockfire* is poetry fashioned through Brechtian drama and apocalyptic nightmare. A series of short poems, Ball's work is less concerned with poetic imagery than it is with the narration of the impossible and the description of the theatre as the absurd or perhaps the next logical step of performance art. If life is all performance, then *Clockfire* presents a textual world wherein performance takes over life. The audience and the actors trade places according to a non-existent script. Poetry stands in for stage direction and dramatic dialogue.

Ball's poetics are confrontational and relentless. The poet demands violent attention, as do the actors in his gory theatre. The poems themselves are deliberately short: they find no answers and purposefully offer nothing but the stage and the minimalist set pieces enacted there. Rooted firmly in theatre and literary history, Ball's work interrogates the cathartic nature of theatre and the motives—often sinister—for our incessant desire to watch. Instead of being the site of the *deus ex machina,* this theatre is a god, or rather, the place where we look for new gods knowing that our gods have abandoned us.

Ball's theatre is apocalyptic. His audience, for its part, desires something completely new, the old wiped away, but Ball realizes that there can never be anything wholly new unless the old is violently murdered. The theatre we desire can only ever be "glimpsed" through the diegesis of Ball's poetry.

In Ball's theatre, the end is repeated—performed—every evening. The theatre acts as an arena of auto-*thanatos*—a death drive—that forces the audience and the actors to perform their own demise every night again and again.

Concerned with history, identity, and the rhetoric of public speech, Gregory Betts' *Psychic Geographies and Other Topics* is lyrically political and attentive to the space and distortion of language. Cicero is a touchstone for the discussion of public speech and the ethic of politics, and for Betts' deconstruction of the linguistic construction of Canadian history. Some poems are overtly polemical while others—a poem found in a wine list—work with juxtaposition. Words are allowed to travel the intertext.

Like many poets, Betts exhibits artistic anxiety and a heightened awareness of self as artistic producer as well as product. Poetry is that "attempt at disorganizing the external world, a kind of feverish rush towards disorientation" but, aside from the product, what then is the artist?

Despite the internal meaning of language and its covert and overt references to rhetoric, art, and history, Betts' poetry is meant to be public speech, not just a mimesis of Modernist high literature. Language is not simply consigned to poetry but is a shared code, implicit with power that nations use to create themselves. We are never outside the text of ourselves, no matter which geography we find ourselves situated in, be it historical, national, or personal. The "superior goal / is the life-realization of / an awkward sentence," as removal from the accepted syntax will make real our entrapment within it.

Marxism is the strongest theme in Steven Zultanski's *Cop Kisser*, even as the endless string of signifiers in the text tries to escape theme. The laborious repetition of the physically printed word being enacted and written, over and over again, as the poem—that supposed abstract of the artistic life—becomes a material endeavour. The work of Zultanski's poetry is alive with speed, however, even as it spins its wheels. Despite being longer poems, short line breaks and repetitive phrasing lend alacrity to the work, even if the images and language remain pointedly static.

Dryly humorous at times, the poems themselves alternate between lyric and list but are largely poststructuralist in their addressing of structuralism and political in their de-politicization. Zultanski works within the Marxist dialectic—supposedly oppositional peaks existing parallel to each other and working against each other—but, purposefully, there is no middle space. The absurdity and emptiness of language create nothing between the two fixed positions. As Zultanski writes in "This and That Lenin," "we have come to the doors of Utopia," or quite literally nowhere. In this way, Zultanski resists Marxist dialectic in that language moves constantly in *Cop Kisser* but doesn't quite get anywhere. The work is done, the dialectic chugs away, but language is brought back to the same words, the same signifiers, that, after constant use, cease to mean anything.

In his overuse of language, Zultanski interrogates it as "administered order"—a forced political system that holds no inherent value in its prescribed syntax; such syntaxes include Ball's construction of the theatre and reality and Betts' reworking of history, nation, and literature. Various rules and practices delineate and dictate the way that language is used, but ultimately language is a fruitless and meaningless system. It categorizes words, separates them, but coalesces again into a mass devoid of meaning. Language is at once the assumption of power and the loss of it.

Canadian Picture Books

Tim Beiser; Rachel Berman, illus.
Bradley McGogg, the Very Fine Frog. Tundra $9.99

Jim McGugan; Murray Kimber, illus.
Josepha: A Prairie Boy's Story. Red Deer College $16.95

Andrea Spalding; Pascal Milelli, illus.
Seal Song. Orca $19.95

Ludmila Zeman
Sindbad: From the Tales of the Thousand and One Nights. Tundra $11.99

Reviewed by Judith Saltman

The thirty-two-page picture book is, for many children, their first exposure to story and art. The format encompasses many genres. This selection of four titles includes historical fiction, fantasy, poetry, and folklore and includes reissues of award-winning and shortlisted titles, some originally published almost twenty years ago.

The often painful experience of immigrants in Canada is explored in *Josepha: A Prairie Boy's Story*, originally published in 1994. The text is a poignant remembrance of an early-twentieth-century prairie boyhood as the narrator recalls the loss of his friend, the adolescent immigrant Josepha, who is leaving the schoolhouse and the bullying he has experienced due to his size and struggle with language. Murray Kimber's stylized oil paintings are evocative of Edward Hopper's, in the eerie calm of the imagery, and the work of muralist Thomas Hart Benton, in epic rural feeling. Dramatic prairie vistas of horizon and endless sky are depicted as stormy and turbulent with fierce brushstrokes.

Sindbad: From the Tales of the Thousand and One Nights, originally published in 1999, is the first of a Sindbad trilogy of Arabian Nights tales. Ludmila Zeman retells and illustrates the mythical sailing voyages of Sindbad the Sailor, framing the tales through the classic structure of cunning Shahrazad enthralling King Shahriyar with her marvellous storytelling over a thousand and one nights. The atmosphere of the Persian folk tales and the ninth-century Arabic culture of ancient Baghdad are beautifully evoked through character, setting, and metaphor. Sindbad's strange adventures are conflated and suspensefully chronicled as he travels across oceans and countries, escaping from a whale-island, a giant flying Roc, and valleys filled with diamonds and poisonous serpents. Zeman's illustrations provide both historical and folkloric context in the subtle colours and etching-like style, which recall early manuscripts and maps, as well as Persian miniature paintings and Oriental carpets.

Bradley McGogg, the Very Fine Frog is a paperback issue of a 2008 publication. Tim Beiser's comic verse in rhyming couplets and catchy rhythm begs to be read aloud in this classic anthropomorphized animal fable of a hungry frog's journey through his animal friends' culinary tastes and talents, with the final return home and realization that his taste for his bog bugs is just right. Usually, slightly nonsensical stories are matched by cartoon art. Rachel Berman's fine draughtsmanship, however, is a comic realism blended with fine realist imagery and sets the tale in a British fantasy world of Edwardian clothing, class, and behaviour. The style recalls early-twentieth-century classic children's books with finely realized Beatrix Potteresque detail and echoes of the shadowy fields and woods of Arthur Rackham.

Seal Song is a 2011 release, inspired by traditional Celtic Selkie folktales. All Selkie tales are touched by tragedy and loss as the female seal shape-shifts into a human woman's form to join her human lover, but must ultimately return to her seal existence. Adapted by Andrea Spalding for a child audience, loss is tempered, love becomes friendship, and adults become children. The formal text retains the grave and romantic tone of folklore and incorporates free-verse poetry in lyrical songs that echo folkloric rhyme. Pascal Milelli's illustrations in oil are slightly abstracted and cubist. The imagery creates a recognizable, early-twentieth-century British Columbia coastal fishing community. Harbours, islands, conifers and arbutus, and the palette of blues, greens, and burnt umber evoke the spirit of Emily Carr and E. J. Hughes channelled through Cézanne. The design and typography of the poems enhance the emotional cadence and parallel the movement in the underwater scenes.

Each of these titles is different in tone and style. The range reflects the strength of Canada's vibrant picture books.

Explorations d'une double solitude

Michel Biron

La Conscience du désert. Boréal 22,95 $

Compte rendu par Christine Otis

La Conscience du désert de Michel Biron est constituée d'un assemblage d'essais pour la plupart publiés dans différents ouvrages collectifs ou revues entre 1998 et 2007. Malgré qu'il s'agisse là d'un recueil, cette entreprise suit une ligne directrice, cette conscience du désert perceptible dans les différents textes la composant. Cette conscience du désert est plus directement nommée et décrite dans l'avant-propos de l'ouvrage et marque la littérature québécoise à la fois dans son éloignement par rapport à la littérature française et dans une façon d'être relevant plutôt de la « culture contemporaine ». D'abord, la relative autonomie et la force de la littérature québécoise qui la rendent plutôt indépendante face à la littérature française, sont aussi responsables de sa presque invisibilité aux yeux de cette dernière et la font exister dans un désert, comme une île isolée du continent. D'un autre côté, la culture contemporaine, ayant plus ou moins évacué l'idée de contrainte, va même, comme le suggère Biron, jusqu'à rompre « avec l'idée de rupture ou s'interdisait d'interdire », et laisse l'individu dans un vide où rien ne se présente plus comme un élément rassembleur permettant la composition de communautés. C'est donc autour de cette double solitude, solitude de la littérature québécoise face au monde et solitude de l'individu contemporain, que s'articulent les seize essais de ce recueil, aussi regroupés en trois parties intitulées respectivement : « Le désir de culture », « La tentation de s'effacer » et « Devant la littérature ».

« Le désir de culture » présente la littérature québécoise par ses contours, de l'extérieur ou par jeu de comparaisons, en tout cas, « de loin » (comme dans « À un lecteur étranger »). Les questions de la solitude, du manque d'une communauté littéraire québécoise comparable à la bohème parisienne, de l'absence d'un certain canon littéraire sont soulevées.

« La tentation de s'effacer » montre la conscience du désert traversant plusieurs personnages d'œuvres québécoises et françaises, contemporaines ou non, sous le signe de l'isolement, de la dépression, du refus du conflit, de l'indifférence, de l'effacement de la distinction entre culture savante et populaire ou entre « ris de veau et poutine ». Cette perte de repères, ce refus de l'âge adulte et du conflit sont nommés comme étant des marqueurs de ce désert.

La dernière partie, enfin, « Devant la littérature », propose des pistes et des hypothèses sur la littérature québécoise que ce soit en réfléchissant aux avenues prises pour écrire ou apprécier la poésie, en suggérant de « miser moins sur la littérature québécoise en tant que projet collectif et davantage sur les écrivains singuliers » à l'exemple de la Belgique ou en signalant cette « cassure invisible » qui « fait de la littérature française une littérature quasi étrangère au Québec ».

"storee lines"

bill bissett

novel. Talonbooks $17.95

Carl Peters

textual vishyuns: image and text in the work of bill bissett. Talonbooks $24.95

Reviewed by Weldon Hunter

The *difficulty* involved in reading the work of bill bissett, who has been writing and publishing for about fifty years now, is possibly a different kind of difficulty than that of other contemporary experimental poets. His iconoclastic orthography (where "of" becomes "uv," for example) is the most salient impediment to the casual observer, so that a reader of bissett's work must also be a serious and patient participant in constructing sense and meaning from his texts. Carl Peters is just such a reader, and *textual vishyuns*—significantly, the first sustained work of criticism on the venerable beatnik poet—is a much-needed study, by turns polemical and proselytizing. Peters' book signifies a crucial starting point for investigation of bissett's important contributions to Canadian literature, and it also provides some helpful assistance in navigating the Lunarian's latest work, *novel* (subtitled "a novel with konnekting pomes n essays").

Peters' book has two aims: to situate bissett's oeuvre (both his visual art and his poetry: the "image and text" of the book's subtitle) "within a modernist tradition that consistently foregrounds praxis over theory" as well as to counter unsatisfactory critical "misreadings" of the poet's output, which dismiss his radical orthography and poetics as merely the endless repetition of a "signature style" (and here Peters is explicitly arguing against Darren Wershler-Henry's critique of bissett's poetry). Peters is remarkably polemical in the introduction: he accuses bissett's critics of one-dimensional interpretations, and even suggests a critical bias towards a supposedly more "authentic" Coach House mode of experimentalism, as opposed to the putatively "middle-of-the-road" Talonbooks, bissett's long-time publisher. These comments are fascinating because they hark back to the disputes of the early 1960s between West Coast (read: *TISH*) and "Eastern" poets (Acorn, Purdy). The battle for the "real" Canadian Modernism is still around, and even if the stakes have changed—the turf wars haven't.

textual vishyuns doesn't linger long in this territory, though. Peters is more concerned with placing bissett's work within the broader historical contexts of international modernism: reading his cultural productions which unite "image and text" beside examples such as Marcel Duchamp's "readymades" (in the first chapter), Guillaume Apollinaire's "calligrammes," and Gertrude Stein's notion of the "continuous present" (in the second). An early bissett text—"now they found th wagon cat in human body" from 1966—is used by Peters to illustrate Stein's insight. The poem, which consists of a seemingly fragmented narrative that offers multiple "reading paths" (unlike Apollinaire's, bissett's calligramme-like text can be read vertically or diagonally), achieves the "continuous present . . . through simultaneity, which a series of discontinuous lines open up." Peters makes his point here and elsewhere in *textual vishyuns* by reading the "image and text" as one—insisting that we read bissett's text "by experiencing it as a visual work of art. The eye is not forced to any one centre or point in the composition: it is free to wander—there are choices."

There are "choices" and "paths" throughout bissett's *novel*, and the process of how we interpret whatever "storee line" we choose to follow (and how we follow it) is emphasized by the book's repeated refrain, "evree brain is different." The first fifty pages of *novel* introduce the idea of relationships and "relaysyuns"—particularly homing in on romances and friendships—in a way that recalls one of bissett's great books, *Pomes for Yoshi*. That book tracked the dissolution of a romance amidst the dissolution of countercultural ideals in the early 1970s, while *novel* explores the reunion of two lovers—"jimmee" and "mark"—amidst "peopul who havint reechd 2012 yet or bgun 2 unravel the puzzuls uv terribul kodependenseez." In this book, the shifting and recombinant nature of sexual relationships (which bissett humorously compares to square dancing: "change yr partnrs ala / mane left doez si do all th way home") mirrors the multiple narrative paths offered by texts such as "now they found th wagon cat in human body." Is this life imitating art, or does it signal our need to impose narrative interpretations on random or chaotic events? This is what bissett wants us to consider.

A few of the "konnecting" essays in *novel* reveal bissett's "historical" relationships with other writers, just as Peters includes an interview with the author which provides similar context. But are these "supplements"? Nope, they're just part of the "storee."

Getting High on Writing

George Bowering
Horizontal Surfaces. BookThug $18.00

George Bowering
How I Wrote Certain of My Books. Mansfield $19.95

Reviewed by Alessandra Capperdoni

George Bowering does not cease to surprise us. *Horizontal Surfaces* and *How I Wrote Certain of My Books* are meditations on language and writing—not a new focus in the lengthy and prolific career of the first Poet Laureate of Canada, a poet associated with *TISH* and the avant-garde. But Bowering's obsessive return throughout the years to writing on writing is anything but redundant, and the witty, informal, and playful incursions in the "writing act" accomplished in these texts confirm a long-held suspicion in his readers: beware of readability—or, writing is not meant to gratify the reader's fantasies.

Bowering's poetic meditations weave together literature and criticism without indulging in abstract language or academic jargon. But the abundance of intertextual references, citations, self-citations, as well as information about Canadian and transnational communities of writing that infuse his work is a tour de force into a poetic world that defies the very notion of "readable" or "consumable" literature. Yes, the texts are easy reads, yet this easiness is highly deceptive and in line with the poet's lifelong credo well expressed in *Horizontal Surfaces*: "In politics I am a socialist, but when it comes to art, I am a snob. Often I get into discussions about high art and low art regarding poetry, and I always come out on the side of poetry that aspires to difficult air, of poets who study the language and strive for the hard to reach."

Not unlike his earlier *Craft Slices* and *Errata*, *Horizontal Surfaces* is structured by a constraint set on the writing. It comprises forty-eight short pieces on an alphabetical list of some of the most significant words in poetry. The list is far from objective, drawing from Bowering's poetic world: Alphabet, Baseball, Line, Lyric, Muse, Open, Plot, Poetry, Verse, Voice. Yet the poems lose nothing of their relevance and freshness as they force us to plunge into language and resurface breathless. What is the meaning of "difficult" poetry? What is the difference between *the* line and *a* line and what effects does it produce? How is writing embodied through "footfall" and cadence? Should verse conclude or propose? The flippancy of the poet's tone only renders more acute the engagement he is asking of his readers. Other words listed—Bible, God, Pilgrim—may at first sound surprising given Bowering's iconoclastic nature, but less so if we think that the poet's unflinching commitment to the power of poetry partakes of a special kind of "religious devotion." What else could we expect from P. B. Shelley's devotee?

As once noted by Smaro Kamboureli, it is difficult to pin down Bowering's writing to a genre. This sequence, for lack of a better word, is neither a collection nor a series. In *Horizontal Surfaces*, we can only visualize the poet's messy writing table with notes left over after the completion of the writing. What better way to organize this material than the non-referential and non-hierarchical alphabet?

The recently released *How I Wrote Certain of My Books* also blurs generic boundaries. Neither autobiography nor biotext, it purloins its title from Raymond Roussel's 1935 anthology *Comment j'ai écrit certains de mes livres*, thus showing the poet's fascination for the work of poetic surface and defamiliarization. These twenty-six pieces are titled after the most important of Bowering's published and, in a few cases, unpublished works. Like Roussel's, Bowering's work is a meditation on the writing project of a lifetime. In musing on the compositional method of his work—the constraints and accidents set up to force the writing "away from representation and the description of what I think I see in front of me"—the text also revisits the cultural conditions that made it possible. Spanning from the sixties to the turn of the century, the book blends the poet's reflections about the writing process with details about the construction of his texts (including so-far undetected references). Most importantly, it provides a topography of the alternative writing scene of which Bowering has long been part, a cultural history against the grain, and, implicitly, a reminder of the rich opportunities offered by a now-terminated federal cultural policy truly supportive of the arts. That this work, as well as that of many of Bowering's close poet-friends, is no longer "marginal" and, in fact, represents an inalienable contribution to Canadian writing is beside the point. As Pierre Bourdieu reminds us, this shift may define the avant-garde.

The Good, the Bland, the Quirky

Tim Bowling
Tenderman. Nightwood $18.95

Bruce Hunter
Two O'Clock Creek: Poems New and Selected. Oolichan $18.95

Christian Petersen
All Those Drawn to Me. Caitlin $18.95

Reviewed by Joel Martineau

All Those Drawn to Me collects nine stories set in the BC interior, ranging from the Barkerville Gold Rush in the 1860s to contemporary river kayaking, from revisiting nineteenth-century histories to reviewing twenty-first-century economies and cultures. Christian Petersen authored one previous collection of stories that appeared in 1999 and a novel published in 2009; his small body of carefully crafted work shares the confidence in local language and concerns essential to his mentor Jack Hodgins, while only fleetingly employing the magic realism Hodgins favours. "Aurora" playfully recounts the tail end of gold fever in Barkerville, when the hurdy-gurdy girl Anneke escapes her evening duties long enough to artfully seduce the newly arrived fire-and-brimstone preacher. Their trysting lights up the sky then sparks the fire that levels the town, magically enabling Anneke to stare "into the face of a final, mighty joy" and recall rolling in the Friesian fields with her youthful true love. "Horse from Persia" begins in December 1879 with a note from the outlaw Alex Hare to the officers and posse surrounding the McLean gang, then shifts to his final words from the gallows at New Westminster on January 31, 1881. Petersen gives Hare an articulate voice steeped in vocabulary and biblical references learned from his Native mother and leavened with touches of wit; the condemned adolescent portrays respect for the warring frontier factions that he and his gang represent, even as he admits befuddlement at their fate. When Hare pauses, the narrator chillingly concludes: "The Hangman then adjusted the ropes, commencing with Hare; the signal was given by the Sheriff, and the doomed men fell." At their best, regionally based collections offer sharp glimpses into local particulars that insightful readers will extrapolate to global concerns. *All Those Drawn to Me* reaches far beyond the Cariboo.

Two O'Clock Creek combines poems from Bruce Hunter's four previous books of poetry with new material. The eighty-three poems trace his path from boyhood and adolescence in post-World War II Alberta through decades as a gardener in Ontario (often mowing grass in graveyards) to his recent work as a college instructor. "Images of War" pits Billy and Klaus at opposite ends of their small street in their small town, learning their fathers' respective versions of the war: one a Dutch Resistance fighter who ate tulip "bulbs boiled into bitter soup," the other a "former SS sergeant / his flower garden precise and clipped." "Deep in the South of My Country" shows union workers in St. Catharines, a "hard town of steel plants," hurling bricks to "air-condition the house of a scab" because the union men, "their wives / swollen with a first or second child," are "banded in fear." In "Hawk on a Shrouded Urn," a raptor perches at dawn and dusk on the tallest grave markers: "When a blade or twig moves / she drops" then springs "steep over the trees / to a nest of sticks, / a shadow dangling in her grip / for the young / in that dead oak across the canal." Hunter's poems typically hint at such circularity as they reflect a quiet, measured life view. Many seem personal, likely more important to the author than to most readers.

Tim Bowling debuted in 1995 with *Low Water Slack*, a collection of brilliant poems that caught the divergence between the rapidly fading BC salmon fishery and the exploding urban sprawl. His acute use of industry vernacular sharpened the contrast between the Steveston docks and Ladner sloughs at the mouth of the Fraser River and the encroaching city. Bowling has produced fifteen books since—poetry, novels, a memoir, and industry analyses. The sixteenth, *Tenderman*, gathers forty-one poems written at some spatial (he now lives in Edmonton) and temporal distance from the titular figure, the poet's youthful doppelgänger. Bowling defines a tenderman as "a crewman on a salmon packing boat" and dispels romantic notions, insisting that such workers have "gone into that pulsating grave of spirit where most wild species have also gone." The tenderman synecdochely stands for the salmon industry, and Bowling admonishes nostalgia: "Wake up, tenderman. This is our stop. / The past — where the unhappy take their honeymoon." Bowling repeatedly juxtaposes the technologies and sensibilities of the tenderman's heyday (linen webbing, "the world of towns") with the instantaneity of contemporary communications (uploading and iPhones) and urges his other to avoid regret: "You don't have any children, tenderman? / No one to pass the hopelessness on to? / . . . I stand with my three at your door." Bowling masterfully titles one poem "An Hour of Twitter, Texting, Facebook and Thou," another "Real Men Read Jane Austen." I urge you to sample his work.

Everyday Oddities

Bonnie Bowman
Spaz. Anvil $20.00

Rachel Wyatt
Letters to Omar. Coteau $21.00

Reviewed by Margo Gouley

Bonnie Bowman's *Spaz* and Rachel Wyatt's *Letters to Omar* are classified as comedic novels in both the blurbs and micro reviews appearing on their jacket covers. But what makes a novel funny? It is impossible to reduce humour to the wit of a particular turn of phrase, the energy of a dialogue, the novelty of a premise, or the irony of a situation. Humour is about balance and timing: the narrative should fall somewhere between the real and the fanciful; the prose must ring true, while also managing to consistently surprise the reader; and the characters can be neither too strange, nor too ordinary. Such finely wrought narratives are not easy to craft. *Spaz* and *Letters to Omar* each manage to strike this balance to varying degrees of success. The laughs are many and they are genuine, but comedy is not the strongest aspect of either novel. The most memorable moments of both narratives are their sensitive descriptions of the strangeness of ordinary lives.

Spaz is the story of a misfit in love. We meet the protagonist, Walter Finch, as a boy growing up in Agincourt. Bowman's Scarborough, charming in its detail, is not the prototypical sleepy suburb full of endless model homes, each as identical as the families inside. The model homes are there, but Bowman's characters are wonderfully, unabashedly weird. Walter is an unremarkable boy in all ways but one: having earned the nickname "Spaz" for his unusual gait, he develops a childhood fascination with shoes after a salesman suggests that he might learn to walk more correctly by wearing a pair of orthopedic straight last shoes. This childhood humiliation develops into an intense, consuming foot fetish that defines Walter's adult life. The novel's fairy-tale narrative begins when he slips a pair of red strappy sandals onto the most beautiful feet he has ever seen and she walks out with them, leaving her own shoes and socks behind. While Walter's intimate relationship with feet as a shoe salesman, a shoe designer, and a fetishist is represented with a great deal of humour, the best moments in Bowman's writing are her rhapsodic descriptions of Walter's moments of ecstasy with objects of desire (sometimes human, often inanimate) that exceed the attainable. These dramatic sequences, sometimes written as interior monologues, sometimes as dream sequences, are so relentlessly detailed and evocative that they test the reader's own limits around the question of sexual taboos.

Letters to Omar also explores the inner lives and fantasies of ordinary people leading seemingly mundane lives. At the centre of Wyatt's novel are three elderly women: cousins Dorothy and Kate and their college roommate Elsie are lifelong friends who have shared homes, family, and friendship for more than forty years. While Wyatt gradually fills in fragments of each woman's history, her focus is on their daily lives in the present moment, especially their struggle to remain effectual in their own lives and their broader social context. Wyatt represents this struggle as both a function of the aging process and of the peculiarities of the dynamic between these particular women. From Dorothy's collection of unsent letters to public figures (the titular Omar Sharif is her most frequent correspondent), to her collaboration with Kate and Elsie on a fundraiser for relief efforts in Afghanistan, their ambitions for the eighth decade of their lives are represented with a self-consciousness that gives the reader licence to laugh as well as to sympathize. Wyatt has a playwright's ear for dialogue: the direct discourse between characters is the liveliest aspect of her prose and the source of much of the novel's humour. Characterization, which is central to the humour and drama of Bowman's novel, is achieved to varying degrees of success in *Letters to Omar*: at its best, Wyatt's representation of her three protagonists is affectionate and dynamic, portrayed through a realism that is as hilarious as it is heartbreaking. Dorothy is one such example. Kate and Elsie feel underdeveloped in comparison, and at times their voices aren't distinct enough to differentiate them for the reader.

Like *Spaz*, *Letters to Omar* hooks the reader with its quirky premise and witty dialogue. But what sustains both narratives is their startlingly honest representation of the odd. Bowman and Wyatt suggest that everyday life is far from mundane. The way things really are is very strange indeed, and the most compelling characters are those who are, in the end, strangely, hilariously, and tragically ordinary.

Poésies diverses

Denise Brassard
L'Épreuve de la distance : proses et poèmes. Noroît 18,95 $

Louise Dupré
Plus haut que les flammes. Noroît 17,95 $

France Théoret
La Nuit de la muette. Forges 12,00 $

Compte rendu par Amélie Dorais

En 2010 paraît le huitième recueil de poèmes de France Théoret, *La Nuit de la muette*. Sur la quatrième de couverture, on lit que *Bloody Mary*, le premier recueil de l'auteur, « est devenu l'un des textes emblématiques de l'écriture des femmes ». La question est de savoir si le fait d'en appeler à l'écriture des femmes, ici, est une circonstance atténuante pour l'inanité de cette poésie. Dès le poème liminaire, où l'on trouve : « la télépathie de ton esprit / accourt jusqu'ici » (oui, une *télé*pathie qui accourt), on constate que Théoret confond trope et impropriété. Mais il y a pire. C'est la *présomption* de l'auteur : « comme moi elle aussi a été une affamée », dit Théoret au sujet . . . d'Anna Akhmatova. *La Nuit de la muette* comporte deux sections. La première, éponyme, réunit de courtes proses dont on se demande si elles ont été écrites à la course; on y perçoit de l'affliction du fait de l'hospitalisation d'une amie : « Ma révolte est un feu sans fin. La vie extérieure m'inscrit devant la protestation indignée. Je suis une antinomie vivante ». Les poèmes de la seconde section, « Marcher n'importe où », se donnent à lire comme des déambulations à Saint-Pétersbourg et à Montréal. Mis à part les six derniers, les poèmes de cette section sont tous écrits en vers, lesquels n'excèdent jamais ou presque le compte de sept mots; cela correspond-t-il au souffle de la poète? Le comble est un fac-similé de poème, imprimé à la fin du recueil, qui laisse l'impression que l'auteur s'imagine déjà dans la collection « Poètes d'aujourd'hui ».

Le nombrilisme et la prétention ne sont pas non plus absents des « proses et poèmes » de Denise Brassard, lesquels, réunis sous le titre *L'Épreuve de la distance*, font suite à ceux de *La Rive solitaire* (Noroît, 2008) : on trouve ici, en effet, des phrases telles que « Le vent se lève sur une page où je devrai parler d'errance, d'éphémère, de rive solitaire » (où elle *devra*? l'auteur aurait-elle des obligations envers quelque organisme qui lui eût octroyé une bourse d'écriture?); il y est abondamment question de « *mon* écriture » (on lui sait gré de ne pas dire, au moins, son « œuvre »); nombre de textes croulent sous les prudences, les appels (titres, sous-titres, dédicaces, exergues, etc.). Entre un « Bestiaire », en amont, où les bonheurs d'expression (« dans cet écrin de bleu où les jours se comptent sur les doigts ») côtoient les inepties (« un parasol se prend pour une fleur »), et, en aval, un « Novembre » (évidemment dédié à Jacques Brault) et des « Ombres déprises » (qui donnent tout son sens à l'expression « poésie poétique »), la section centrale du recueil, elle-même sous-titrée « L'épreuve de la distance », fait alterner le poème et la méditation sur celui-ci dans une dynamique somme toute féconde, et qui n'est pas sans rappeler, justement, le *Il n'y a plus de chemin* de Brault. La prose de Brassard, bien qu'émaillée de poncifs (« tenter de voir à nouveau, pour une première fois, ce que la proximité innombrable rend invisible »), est nettement supérieure à la poésie. On trouve peut-être, d'ailleurs, dans celle-là, une explication quant aux limites de celle-ci : « Le poème s'écrit par cooptation : il s'agit non tant de faire silence, d'éliminer les scories, de se boucher les oreilles pour entendre sa voix intérieure, que de lancer les mots en gravitation dans ce dehors . . . ». Peut-on imaginer meilleur éloge du flou, aveu plus clair d'abandon?

Plus haut que les flammes, de Louise Dupré, paru aussi en 2010, redonne envie, à lui seul, de s'intéresser à la production poétique actuelle. Indignée, horrifiée par les images qu'elle a colligées lors d'une visite dans les camps de concentration, l'auteur, à la recherche d'un espoir, tisse des liens entre la chambre à gaz et la chambre de l'enfant; d'un même souffle, elle interroge le poème qui alors « surgi[t] de l'enfer », voire le confronte, exige de lui des comptes. L'exercice est marqué par une pudeur et une rigueur qui font trop souvent défaut dans la poésie actuelle. En dépit de quelques passages un peu fades (« la joie tient à un fil / invisible ») ou affectés (« rouge Francis Bacon »), une tension est maintenue de la première à la dernière page du livre qui constitue une véritable suite poétique. Surtout, *Plus haut que les flammes* offre à son lecteur des vers qui *résistent*, auxquels il peut revenir comme à quelque chose de neuf. Quant à savoir si cela relève de « l'écriture des femmes », je laisse à d'autres le soin d'en juger.

Holocaust Resurfacing

Jacquie Buncel
Turning the Corner at Dusk. Wolsak & Wynn $17.00

Ron Charach
Forgetting the Holocaust. Frontenac $16.00

Reviewed by Ilana Finkleman

Jacquie Buncel's *Turning the Corner at Dusk* is a collection of poetry that reflects the burden of second-generation Holocaust-survivor identity in an accessible and, at times, emotionally raw and visceral manner. Buncel's work is personal and confessional; her poetry reveals the potentially paralyzing effects of second-generation trauma and the challenging journey of working through it. Her collection is structured into three complementary and progressive sections that build on each other in order to provide a sense of working towards renewal. Yet, throughout *Turning the Corner*, Buncel's deep preoccupation with trauma resurfaces in a variety of images, jolting and destabilizing the process.

In the first section, Buncel focuses on her father's return journey to his hometown of Prešov, Slovakia, forty-eight years after being forcibly expelled by the Nazis. She reveals how the spirit of her family is still rooted in Prešov, despite the destructive force of the Holocaust. In "Return," she illustrates her father's deep-felt belonging to his hometown; in "Discovering," she relays how her grandfather's engraved initials remain visible on her father's childhood home; and in "The River," the River Sečkov revives her father's adolescent stories. As her father is committed to silence over the details of his Holocaust experience, Buncel confesses that she relies on her imagination to fill in the silence. In poems such as "Trains" and "Hiding," she shifts from the present into scenes of deportation and Nazi-inflicted terror, allowing the past to intrude into the present and drawing attention to the inescapability of her traumatic history.

Following the first selection of poems set mainly in Prešov, Buncel's focus shifts to defining her role as second-generation survivor and her life as partner and mother of two children. Poems such as "Therapy" reveal her inability to dissociate from the Holocaust: "Slipping in deeper / At the back of my head / Flies, stench / Skulls with gold fillings extracted." Yet these pockets of despair are juxtaposed with the possibility for renewal. In "Children of Holocaust Survivors," the second generation is cast as memory bearers who resist the erasure of their parents' and grandparents' traditions. Upon the birth of her first daughter, Buncel displays a refreshing sense of contentment, renewal, and hope. Still, ever present is her concern that she will transmit her trauma to her children: "Let them escape my Holocaust past." In "Divining," the final poem of her collection, with the support of her partner, she excavates (through poetry?) the source of her pain and is hopeful for the future.

Ron Charach focuses less directly on the Holocaust than does Buncel; he demonstrates how contemporary Canadian life is nuanced by the lingering presence of the Holocaust. Charach's poems focus on a humanist and often-anecdotal engagement with Jewish culture and tradition, locality and place, his professional relationships as psychiatrist, and his role as poet. Yet, in many of his poems, through metaphor or peripherally, the Holocaust resurfaces, illustrating its ever-present haunting. For example, "Cancer of the Vulva" offers a sad and intimate portrait of a patient whose medically performed genital mutilation has left her sexless, reminiscent of Nazi experimentation. And "Tattoos" questions the contemporary cultural value of marking one's body with ink, leaving the reader to extend the comparison to prisoners numbered in concentration camps. Charach seamlessly interweaves Holocaust signifiers into personal episodes so that their intrusion becomes almost subconscious. Thus, he attests to the Holocaust's presence even amidst the act of *Forgetting the Holocaust* and attempting to carry on life in contemporary Canada. In "For the Polish Poets," Charach writes, "If history isn't over until its effects are gone, / God knows this story isn't done." His collection of poetry is positioned as an exploration of the resurfacing of the Holocaust in contemporary Canadian consciousness.

Charach's poetry is complex and detailed, straddling the personal and the universal. Through his well-tuned storytelling, he reveals a diverse cast of characters who share different relationships to the Holocaust. Characters he meets in childhood include his melancholic Holocaust-survivor choirmaster and the bombastic Turkish Jew, Joe Bendit. French Holocaust survivor Jacques in Caesarea is a figure of resistance and self-assurance, while Dov and Daouda Feltzner, the Israeli/Palestinian couple, share an electric idealism and love that is enough to "reshape the world."

Turning the Corner at Dusk and *Forgetting the Holocaust* probe differently at the resurfacing of the Holocaust in contemporary consciousness. Buncel and Charach offer illustrations of the tentative process of exposing trauma, demonstrating the precarious balance between past Holocaust trauma and future life.

Une nation à enseigner

Karine Cellard

Leçons de littérature : un siècle de manuels scolaires au Québec. PUM 34,95 $

Compte rendu par Marilyse Turgeon-Solis

Fruit d'une thèse de doctorat primée, ce volume est consacré à l'étude d'une douzaine de manuels scolaires dédiés à l'enseignement de l'histoire littéraire au Québec. Le livre est divisé en cinq chapitres et l'analyse des ouvrages suit l'ordre chronologique de leur publication. Si les trois premiers chapitres sont consacrés à l'examen d'autant de manuels et de leur auteur — soit successivement Camille Roy, la sœur Marie-Élise et Samuel Baillargeon — les deux derniers chapitres s'attachent davantage à des périodes associées à deux tournants majeurs dans le domaine de l'éducation au Québec, soit le Rapport Parent et la réforme Robillard. Ces deux événements servent de pierre angulaire contextuelle à l'auteure pour l'analyse croisée d'une dizaine d'autres manuels scolaires.

Afin d'interpréter l'approche littéraire qui se dégage de ce corpus — dont les éditions s'étalent sur l'ensemble du vingtième siècle — Cellard se donne pour tâche de retracer la trame narrative de chacun des ouvrages. Cette démarche visant à exposer le récit critique des manuels confère d'ailleurs une grande originalité à l'entreprise de l'auteure. Parallèlement, celle-ci examine l'évolution de l'histoire littéraire scolaire, évolution qui se manifeste autant à travers les différentes éditions d'un même manuel (en témoigne le premier chapitre sur Roy) qu'à travers d'une lecture transversale de tous les ouvrages mis à l'étude. En plus de s'intéresser aux aspects pédagogiques de chacun de ces manuels, l'auteure analyse les différentes formes de transmission de leur contenu, les valeurs qui y sont véhiculées et la place accordée à la construction d'une identité nationale. En ce sens, un questionnement apparaît en filigrane dans le volume et prend davantage d'envergure à mesure que se forme le propre métarécit de l'auteure : à la lumière de l'interprétation globale du corpus, peut-on parler de la constitution d'une tradition littéraire nationale qui mettrait en évidence une construction identitaire québécoise?

C'est avec une méthodologie solide et une démarche fort bien explicitée que Karine Cellard nous guide à travers l'univers du manuel scolaire québécois. À la fois par souci d'accessibilité et de rigueur historiographique, une attention particulière est portée au contexte historique dans lequel chacun des ouvrages est publié, de même qu'à la présentation des rédacteurs de manuels que nous devons considérer en tant que narrateurs qui structurent le discours selon les valeurs et convictions qui leur sont propres. Bien au fait des limites de son entreprise, l'auteure évite de tomber dans les généralisations et nuance brillamment ses interprétations et conclusions. Par exemple, si elle affirme que le manuel scolaire s'avère un riche témoin de la transmission culturelle des lettres et des diverses modalités d'une diffusion de l'identité québécoise, Cellard souligne toutefois les limites de ses sources. En effet, le manuel pris individuellement ne saurait être considéré comme le miroir d'une époque ou le reflet d'une identité collective, tant est qu'il relève, dans bien des cas, de la subjectivité d'un seul individu. Cependant, alors que l'auteure considère le manuel comme « objet de savoir », elle mise sur le panorama offert par son corpus — se souciant même de manuels plus marginaux — pour étayer ses interprétations.

In the Wake of Art and Beauty

Kevin Chong
Beauty Plus Pity. Arsenal $17.95

Jen Sookfong Lee
The Better Mother. Knopf Canada $29.95

Reviewed by Marie Lo

According to Sau-ling Wong in *Reading Asian American Literature: From Necessity to Extravagance*, the second generation's pursuit of art and beauty is often perceived as an "extravagance" by first-generation Asian immigrants whose lives are constrained by the "necessities" of survival. This articulation of the intergenerational conflict found in many Asian North American narratives (think Evelyn Lau's *Runaway: Diary of a Street Kid*) is reworked in novels by Jen Sookfong Lee and Kevin Chong. While the pursuit of art and beauty is a central theme in both, they offer refreshing and complicated tales of its impact on intergenerational relationships.

There are many similarities between the two novels. Both are set in Vancouver, and their Chinese Canadian protagonists are verbally restrained and emotionally withdrawn. Danny of *The Better Mother* is a photographer and Malcolm in *Beauty Plus Pity* is an aspiring model. Despite being on opposite ends of the camera, they have a similar relationship to it; through the camera, they are able to capture what they otherwise cannot express. The camera becomes a metaphor for alienation, memory, and loss, as well as for the transformative possibilities of art.

Inspired by the late photographer Theodore Saskatche Wan's photos of exotic dancers, *The Better Mother* shuttles between the post-war period and the 1980s during the early days of AIDS. Danny, closeted and estranged from his parents, is haunted by a childhood encounter in a Chinatown alley with a burlesque dancer, the Siamese Kitten. Captivated by her unapologetic sexuality and glamour and touched by her warmth, Danny sees the Siamese Kitten as the antithesis of the drab and cold oppressiveness of his parents. He spends his adulthood trying to reconcile his desires with his parents' expectations, and when he finally meets the Siamese Kitten, now known as Val, he learns that she too has secrets. Her choice to be an artist and push the boundaries of respectability have come at a tremendous cost.

The nostalgia that powers Danny's longing is heightened by Lee's evocative and vivid snapshots of a Vancouver that no longer exists. Her scenes of Chinatown and the rise of the burlesque in the 1940s with its shifting racial and moral codes are powerful foils for her descriptions of 1980s gay culture, undergoing a similarly radical change as AIDS begins to spread.

Whereas the tone of *The Better Mother* is melancholic and nostalgic, the tone of *Beauty Plus Pity* is light and comic. The only child of frustrated artists, Malcolm is a sardonic and socially awkward slacker who half-heartedly begins modelling because there doesn't seem to be anything else to do. He is not handsome so much as he is "distinctive," and he goes from one humiliating gig to another under the wing of a modelling agent who is more lonely than he is. After the death of his father, a failed filmmaker-turned-commercial director, his fiancée dumps him and he learns that he has a bi-racial half-sister. Though his sister Hadley did not grow up with the same privileges, she is self-confident, open, athletic, and motivated—everything Malcolm is not.

The novel's breezy tone belies its pathos, and Chong effortlessly moves between the absurd and the heartbreaking. As Malcolm and Hadley's relationship deepens, the particular burden of being a neglected child of artistic parents comes into focus. Malcolm's foray into modelling becomes better understood as a way to mourn the loss of his father and become visible to his self-absorbed mother.

In exploring the pull of art and beauty, *The Better Mother* and *Beauty Plus Pity* make clear that no one is immune to their calling or protected from what they leave in their wake.

Skunk Nights

Michael Christie

The Beggar's Garden: Stories. HarperCollins Canada $24.99

David Davidar

Ithaca. McClelland & Stewart $29.99

Reviewed by Christoph Irmscher

In his iconic 1958 poem "Skunk Hour," American poet Robert Lowell, immersed in misery ("I myself am hell"), watches a skunk and her young parade down Main Street in search of garbage. He finds himself envying the animals, even as the skunk mother jabs her nose into a cup of fetid sour cream. David Davidar's novel and Michael Christie's collection of stories are in different ways about people during such skunk hours, or rather, skunk nights, when they hit the rock bottom of their lives. Davidar's novel, featuring a smooth-talking, Indian-born publisher named Zachariah "Zach" Thomas, was highly anticipated in Canada and abroad and with good reason: once the wunderkind of international publishing, Davidar was forced out of his position at the helm of Penguin Canada after harassment allegations became public. He has since returned to India, where he has co-founded a new boutique publishing firm, Aleph. Readers expecting *Ithaca* to provide some exposé of the world of high-stakes international publishing, spiced with autobiographical self-revelation, won't be disappointed. If Davidar's father were a tea planter, Zach's worked for a coffee company, and like the novel's author, Zach loses his position as a result of a scandal, though of a more professional than personal nature. Zach is in charge of Litmus, a small but important publisher on the verge of a takeover by the improbably named Globish Corporation. He is an unrepentant snob, freely expressing disdain for the "unattractive bodies in string bikinis and Speedos" surrounding him when he is on vacation, as well as for the authors he must deal with. Writers are mainly irritants in Zach's world, populated as it is by agents, editors, and CEOs sporting Brioni suits and Hermes ties or tight dresses with "the merest hint of cleavage."

And so we watch Zach drink his way through meetings and book release parties, downing one whiskey after another until it finally seems to matter little whether he is in London, Toronto, or Frankfurt. Not surprisingly, the book's most memorable passages are set in India. In a haunting memory from Zach's boyhood in the Shevaroy Hills of Tamil Nadu, we see him crouched inside his fancy home, clutching his absent father's shotgun, because he feels the lurking presence of an escaped convict outside, behind the hibiscus hedge. No one believes him. Days later, the convict is caught and admits that indeed he was there.

When Zach's multimillion dollar gamble on the last work by a recently deceased author (and audience favourite) collapses because the novel turns out to have been largely plagiarized, the CEO of Globish fires him and he returns to his home in India, where the old postman Nagesh comforts him: "The journey is not over." Shining Ithaca, the blessed home, is still waiting for him. But Zach is no Odysseus. His haughty response to the postman-turned-prophet: "The insights . . . are not new." There is nothing this publisher *extraordinaire* thinks he doesn't yet know, though recent developments should have taught him otherwise. This also warns the reader not to take Zach Thomas as a simple stand-in for the author himself: unlike his protagonist, Davidar is a writer, too.

Michael Christie's characters hail from a world that is as different as can be from the cocktail parties Zachariah Thomas frequents. His stories, linked by an intricate system of subtle cross-references, are set mostly in Vancouver's Eastside, and they tell of people whose lives are teetering on the edge of the abyss and of the remarkable things they do to keep themselves and others from falling over. Christie was a professional skateboarder, and it's tempting to think that the incredible sense of balance required of him in his other life also shapes his storytelling. An example of his secure handling of detail is "An Idea Companion," a story of the failed relationship between Dan, owner of a bumbling wolfhound named Buddy, and Ginnie, owner of a large terrier called Josephine. Christie unsparingly describes the moment when Dan and Ginnie attempt a kiss, "a string of spit briefly trapezing between them," but then brings the story home to an unexpected conclusion: while Dan and Ginnie cannot be together, their dogs can. When Dan, asked to mind Ginnie's dog while she is away, happens upon his Buddy mounting Josephine right in his living room early one morning, he simply (and beautifully) closes the door upon the animals: "Enjoy it."

Christie's "beggar's garden" is full of people like Dan who settle for life's second best. Take Bernice, for example, the "Queen of Cans and Jars," a thrift-store owner who once sold shoes for Woodward's. Or the aptly named Earl, a retired worker for BC Hydro, who recognizes the face of his long-lost, now homeless, grandson Kyle in a news program on television and promptly sells all his possessions to be with him. Settling into a seedy Vancouver motel, he joins Kyle in his daily dumpster-foraging without ever letting on who he really is. In "Goodbye Porkpie Hat," Henry, a hopeless junkie in a rooming house across from scrappy Oppenheimer Park, is visited by the actual Robert J. Oppenheimer come-back-from-the-dead, who is looking, you guessed it, for a fix (never mind that the park isn't even named after him). And while he might be nothing more than a crack-cocaine-induced fantasy, "Oppie's" delirious verdict that "Humanity, my friends must experiment" might serve as a motto for Christie's collection as a whole. The author's narrative risk-taking has the reader participate also in the weird self-coronation and apotheosis of "King" Saul, whose mind might be in shreds—the reason he has been committed to Riverview Hospital—but whose vision of the future, announced to his dazed fellow patients, is beautifully complete: "He vowed to rule kindly and justly. . . . His subjects would be free to live as they pleased."

Perhaps the most memorable member of Christie's motley cast of derelict would-be royals is Sam Prince, who, abandoned by his family, has moved into the toolshed behind his house and spends his days talking to the beggar Isaac (coincidentally, the lost brother of King Saul of Riverview Hospital). One night, Sam and Isaac surprise a family of raccoons rummaging through his garbage. Like Lowell's skunk and so many of the characters in Christie's book, the animals, shabby monarchs of the junkyard, simply "will not scare." The following morning, Sam, a true Prince once more, retakes possession of his empty house.

Pop Guns

Patrick deWitt
The Sisters Brothers. Anansi $29.95

Guy Vanderhaeghe
A Good Man. McClelland & Stewart $32.99

Reviewed by Timothy Dugdale

Ah yes, I knew the Western well, before and after its deconstruction. When the door shuts on a lonely John Wayne at the end of *The Searchers*, it might as well have been the starting pistol for a wholesale looting of the genre, if it had not already begun two years earlier with Joan Crawford sporting six-guns in *Johnny Guitar*.

That is not to say that fine Westerns did not emerge from the funhouse. Both Sergio Leone and his student, Clint Eastwood, created masterpieces with compelling admixtures of genre fealty and creative audacity. Patrice Leconte, that rather unsung French director, managed to pull off the best Western in the last twenty years with *Man on the Train* (2002) by disguising the film as an existential crime drama.

But if the more recent spate of Westerns is to be believed, quality is not the name of the game. Winking is. The Coen Brothers with their adaptation of Cormac McCarthy's *No Country for Old Men* epitomize this strategy. The viewer is always safe, no matter how much blood is spilled, because the Coens make sure your disbelief is never fully suspended and the boys pat you on the back in the bargain.

Thus, to read *The Sisters Brothers* in hopes of enjoying a straight Western would be a fool's errand. The story begins with the two brothers downing shots in the Pig-King, a saloon in Oregon City, Oregon. Charlie is a cold-blooded hothead; Eli, the garrulous narrator, is soft and dreamy. The year is 1858. The boys work as hired killers for the Commodore, a nasty loan shark/venture capitalist who uses them to dispatch deadbeats and scammers. They are about to embark for San Francisco to finish off a man named Warm who has developed a chemical process for discerning the gold dust in a miner's pan of dirt.

The journey begins well enough in the first twenty pages but then never finds its way out of second gear. We meet a variety of characters, all trotted out from the Absurdist Western stable—a mad dentist, a swindling mayor and his gang of savage trappers, a little girl who poisons a three legged-dog. There's even a tip of the hat to Jim Jarmusch's *Down by Law*—a character dispatches a baddie with the lucky throw of a paperweight. At times, I wondered if deWitt was trying too hard to grasp McCarthy's better work; at others, I wondered if he wasn't trying hard enough to deliver a passable Blazing Saddles laugh. The book never masters the hare-brained game it wants to play and win—drawing the reader into a potentially serious work and then exploding that pretense with a groaning pastiche or a tiresome patch of chatty albeit clumsy dialogue that lets both the writer and the reader off the hook and in on the joke. It's the same formula that wins Quentin Tarantino rave reviews from film dweebs and hipsters the world over but leaves no lasting impression or legacy. No doubt Tarantino would be delighted to direct when they inevitably turn this thing into an equally fun but forgettable movie.

Guy Vanderhaeghe has no problem playing it straight. *The Good Man* is the third and final installment in his award-winning trilogy of Canadian Westerns. That in itself is quite a feat because CanLit, by nature, is not a hotbed of rawhide and gunsmoke. Vanderhaeghe long ago mastered the genre of historical fiction, using real-life personages and facts to revisit old territories with new perspectives. Yet *The Good Man* is a strange bird, admirable on its perch but lumbering in flight. Our hero, Wesley Case, is a rather hapless dude, estranged from a prim WASP mother who is off her rocker and a tycoon father who's too preoccupied with his Québécois paramour to be charitable to his son. Young Case lands a gig with the RCMP but turns down a plum commission, only to be assigned nasty scout work along the Canada-US border mere months after Custer's disastrous Last Stand. In the end, Case meets Sitting Bull and we see two men from different planets forced to deal with a common alien force, the Americans and their strange and terrible ways.

My baseline, sad to say, for historical fiction is George Fraser MacDonald and the indelible Flashman. Forgive me, then, if at certain times in this book I wished Vanderhaeghe's characters exuded more shady and libidinal tendencies. More than once, I found myself yelling, "Shuck her down, shuck her down!" at a character mired in a lugubrious session of pitching woo.

Still, this is a big book from a national treasure. Vanderhaeghe is an author who believes that his readers can find real value in the dime store where a good story well told is, given today's marketplace, a priceless commodity.

Les enfants sans paradis

Réjean Ducharme; Will Browning, trans.
Miss Take. Talonbooks $16.95

Hélène Rioux; Jonathan Kaplansky, trans.
Wandering Souls in Paradise Lost. Cormorant $21.00

Reviewed by Dania Sheldon

In *The Inferno*, canto 13, Dante and Virgil arrive at a forest of gnarled, black, poisonous trees containing the tormented souls of suicides, forever sundered from their bodies: "it is not right for any man to have / what he himself has cast aside." Nearly seven centuries later, Christianity remains unequivocally opposed to self-murder, making the basic premise of Réjean Ducharme's novel *Le nez qui voque* (rendered as *Miss Take* by translator Will

Browning) even more provocative within the context of deeply Catholic Quebec in 1967 when it was published.

The sixteen-year-old narrator Miles Miles and his fourteen-year-old friend Chateaugué run away to Montreal and make a suicide pact to avoid having to become adults: "I don't want to die at the end of my rope, exhausted. I want to die joyful, laughing out loud, vigorous, triumphant." They live as brother and sister in a rented room across from Notre-Dame-de-Bon-Secours Chapel: "The Virgin Mary, who stands on the roof of the chapel and holds out her arms to the sailors and the longshoremen, turns her back on me." Shunning and shunned by society, they drift through the days, smoking and drinking until their money runs out.

On the surface, very little happens in this book, yet it is an exhausting read. The relentless wordplay begins with the equivocating title and bullies the reader through to the final, brutal page. Miles Miles is thoroughly unlikeable—manipulative, misogynistic, self-absorbed, and often cruel to Chateaugué, whose only failing is her unswerving loyalty to him. Yet he permits brief glimpses of his inner torment that render him dimly comprehensible: "Something within us is captive and stifling . . . this thing attached within us that suffers like an eagle fastened by its foot to the cement of a sidewalk." Ultimately, Miles Miles' self-love is either his salvation or his downfall, depending upon one's perspective.

Forty-four years after *Le nez qui voque* won the Governor General's Award for French fiction, Browning's is the first English translation, and it is easy to see why: tackling Ducharme's writing is a Herculean undertaking. Yet Browning aims to translate all nine of Ducharme's novels, "thereby expanding access to his wonderful, quirky, inventive prose." He is rendering Canadian literature a unique service by opening Ducharme's work to anglophone readers.

Montreal, four decades later, is also one of the settings for another book peopled with characters variously adrift. *Âmes en peine au paradis perdu* (translated by Jonathan Kaplansky as *Wandering Souls in Paradise Lost*) is the second book in Hélène Rioux's planned tetralogy, "Fragments of the World." All of the characters are in some sense "wandering souls at the gates of paradise," yearning for love they have lost or have never found.

With deft artistry, Rioux interweaves the several storylines that she began in volume 1, *Wednesday Night at the End of the World*. Each narrative takes place on the spring equinox, and she combines this synchronicity with imagery, echoes, and wordplay to create a multilayered palimpsest effect—traces of material from earlier in the book, or from the first volume, shimmer through at sometimes unexpected moments.

The book does not shy away from the myriad aspects of existence that can leave us feeling betrayed by the spectre of hope. A family is destroyed when the thirteen-year-old daughter runs away and then vanishes. A young woman's dreams of happiness are annihilated when her lover dies in a car crash. Searing loneliness leaves its scars soul-deep. Life—"Is it just?" the narrator demands.

At the same time, Rioux blends this pathos with lyricism, whimsy, and humour, reminding me of British writer John Lanchester's view that "life is tragic in structure but comic in texture." The twelfth chapter encapsulates this perspective. In "Nirvana, at some point in eternity," we find a bitterly indignant Dante. Heaven, it turns out, admits anyone who "endure[s] forever in the memory of humanity"—meaning that the Marquis de Sade is one of Dante's eternal compatriots. (But, observes the narrator, "let's be honest, without a nutcase like the Marquis de Sade, say, eternity would be a tad boring.") Even worse, Beatrice remains eternally married, and Dante now doubts the existence of God. "You tricked me," he accuses Virgil. "But I did it," claims Virgil, "for the cause of poetry."

Perhaps paradise exists only in our imaginations. But perhaps, as some of the characters claim, "imagination is a form of truth." In any case, wandering through Rioux's prose is a delightful way to search for glimpses of paradise, truth or both.

Passionate Ellipsis

Kate Eichhorn
Fieldnotes, a Forensic. BookThug $18.00

Meredith Quartermain
Recipes from the Red Planet. BookThug $18.00

Meaghan Strimas
A Good Time Had by All. Exile $18.95

Reviewed by Sarah Dowling

To write a review of three seemingly unrelated books is a daunting proposition, no matter how delightful reading them for their own merits may be. Stylistically distinct, drawing upon largely unrelated discourses, and created across disparate locations, it seems nearly impossible to yoke together Meaghan Strimas' *A Good Time Had by All*, Kate Eichhorn's *Fieldnotes, a Forensic*, and Meredith Quartermain's *Recipes from the Red Planet*. However, there are some connections. Each of these works engages with narrative forms: narrative poetry, ethnography, and flash or sudden fiction. Each touches upon the poetics of witness, approaching the discourse cautiously. Each is highly acclaimed, so to consider these texts together is to paint in broad but thin strokes a portrait of contemporary Canadian poetry.

Shortlisted for the ReLit Award, *A Good Time Had by All* is Strimas' second collection. Reviews and jacket copy emphasize its grittiness: we begin on a park bench, the speaker sitting next to someone "pissed drunk at noon & stinking of piss / & booze, heavenly booze." As these lines suggest, the poems do not provide testimony, exactly. Instead, rendering a common and even mundane perspective, they blunder past moments of horror, overwhelmed by sadness: "Hear my misery / skip across the lake." Many of the speakers seem—intentionally, of course—unaware of the depth of their own feeling. In this way, Strimas' title is somewhat ironic: the speakers almost insist that a good time *was* had by all, even as they recount terrifying events that suggest otherwise. A child drops toys down the hole her father punched in the wall; news reports about Robert Pickton's farm are revisited in vivid detail. The most striking images in these poems are bleak and sad, but Strimas' vintage slang adds levity even as it suggests the speakers' implication in everyday tragedies.

Eichhorn's *Fieldnotes, a Forensic* is also a second collection, and it too focuses on numbed central characters. Eichhorn brings together an anthropologist and an archivist, recounting their relationship through the detached minimalism of field notes and the technical cues of a teleplay. Sharing the same tiny apartment, though not always at the same time, the two meet sporadically to work through the classic lesbian trifecta of conversation, journaling, and sex. The anthropologist rails—somewhat self-righteously—against the celebrity anthropologist Kathy Reichs: "She hasn't kept up with developments in the field, but it's the writing I take offense to." For her part, the archivist also collects details; through studied reference to the question-and-answer interview format, Eichhorn pits one mode of collection against another, satirizing and sincerely questioning claims to objectivity. Beautifully designed by the good folks at BookThug, *Fieldnotes, a Forensic* was a finalist for the 2011 Governor General's Award for poetry.

Quartermain's *Recipes from the Red Planet* is the fourth volume in BookThug's Department of Narrative Studies series and it straddles the boundary between prose poetry and flash fiction. Illustrated by the renowned feminist artist Susan Bee, *Recipes* pays homage to Jack Spicer's Martian poetics: the poet is merely a conduit for language, which she receives like a radio signal from elsewhere. In this poetics by dictation, the red planet's language reconfigures our planet entirely; in turn, the Martian language is reconfigured by the Earth's specificities. Attention to language sometimes implies otherworldly detachment, but in her review of *Recipes*, Camille Martin explains that Quartermain's "ludic impulse is also intimately intertwined with the political." Local history bobs up to the surface so that rich wit and playful excess always land upon a clear object: "Would you like to touch my stove—everything's on the back burner. My oven's almost new. I had a bun in it once. I called a repairman. He said he'd fix it if I wore my hair ever after like Betty Crocker." *Recipes* was a deserving finalist for the BC Book Award for Fiction.

Taken together, these three works suggest the generic and discursive range as well as the vivacity of contemporary Canadian poetries. Representing a lyric tradition, a new mode of queer feminist experimentation, and West Coast cross-border exchange respectively, they demonstrate the diverse means by which contemporary poetry engages in public debate, passionately and elliptically.

Hidden and Exposed in BC

Daniela Elza, Peter Morin, Al Rempel, and Onjana Yawnghwe
4 Poets. Mother Tongue $18.95

Jo Hammond
Edge of the Sound: Memoirs of a West Coast Log Salvager. Caitlin $24.95

Betty Keller
A Thoroughly Wicked Woman: Murder, Perjury & Trial by Newspaper. Caitlin $19.95

Catherine Owen
Seeing Lessons. Wolsak & Wynn $17.00

Ursula Vaira
And See What Happens: The Journey Poems. Caitlin $16.95

Reviewed by Reece Steinberg

It wasn't until halfway through Jo Hammond's book that I could appreciate what, exactly, log salvaging entails—the dangers, unbearable working conditions, and constant uncertainties are beyond what I had imagined. This memoir is the picture of an unusual career and a slice of time in the recent past of British Columbia's Sunshine Coast. Hammond leaves England for Western Canada, escaping negligent parents only to find phantoms of her family haunting her through her abusive, alcoholic husband. As she becomes a part of the small community in a then-undeveloped area of the Sunshine Coast, she sheds her husband. Through a mutual love of a wild, simple life, and listening to old LPs, she develops a strong friendship and eventually relationship with a quiet older man who has spent his life salvaging logs that have been lost or dumped during a storm.

Hammond becomes the first woman to salvage logs in the area, and through the descriptions of the physical challenges and mishaps on the job, she speaks of fragments of her life and the difficulties she has faced, as well as the unusual and good times. Her voice as an early West Coast feminist is most interesting when she shares stories of a captivating way of living, unknown to most people. Descriptions of her romantic life are flat and uninspiring, but fortunately the rest of the book provides sufficient motivation to skim through the less-successful parts.

Another Sunshine Coast author, Betty Keller, writes of early-twentieth-century Vancouver, centring on Esther Jones and Theresa Jackson, a mother and daughter who run a boarding house and gently scandalize the community by living without husbands. The women, initially accused of evading rent, quickly become murderers in the eyes of the public when Theresa's recently returned husband turns up dead. Sensational news coverage sways public opinion as well as the courts. From their quiet, private lives, they are thrust in to the public eye, with their images splashed across the front of daily newspapers. The story is based on a historical case and features many important figures of the time. Lawyers, judges, and newspaper staff are depicted in sidebars, with photographs and a brief description. Though the story takes place before the First World War, the themes are contemporary: the influence of mass media on the public, the legal system's frailty and corruption, and the misogyny the two women face.

Jelly fish, owl bones, and fingerprints: this is wild British Columbian poetry, and it's unforgiving and graphic. Catherine Owen writes an interpretation of the life of Mattie Gunterman (1872-1945), a passionate photographer and camp cook. The poems are thick with BC flavours, textures, and names; they reek of cedar and salt water, and set a tone for Gunterman's work. Sandwiched by Owen's poetry are journal entries, letters, and of course photographs taken by Gunterman. These bring a storyline, facts, and a voice to balance the poetry's account of her life.

The first in Ursula Vaira's book of three long poems is inspired by her participation in Roy Henry Vickers' VisionQuest canoe voyage to raise awareness of addictions and funds for an all-nations recovery centre. She is aware of her perspective as a "Caucasian civilian" and also as the only woman in the canoe. This poem focuses on traditional practices of the different nations the voyage takes them to, as well as the addictions, policing, and legal systems imposed on Native people. The comforts, discomforts, and dangers of the journey play a prominent part as well—poached salmon and twelve-foot swells. Prose scattered among the poetry explains events of the journey and stories that Vaira witnesses. The second and third poems are also about journey, though the second focuses on inner travel. Vaira examines her life from a remote cabin in the northern Rockies. In the final poem, the author uses her kayak trip from Port Hardy to Zeballos to depict the northern landscape and Vancouver Island. Many islands, capes, and other land and sea features have their own small chapter in the poem. Overall, the poems are distinct slices of Vaira's life, unmistakeably rooted in the West Coast.

In *4 Poets*, Daniela Elza writes with space as much as with words. Liquid pauses spread throughout the page, preventing the eye from darting to the next word. It's impossible to read "   a rum bottle breaking   next to my ear" without vivid images exploding from the words.

Peter Morin writes about the Tahltan language, about his search for how to tell the land's stories, and about teaching and talking with Native youth about their shared and distinct cultures and languages. He ties these themes together with an overarching struggle for decolonization. His words are straightforward, personal, warm, and instructional; this is poetry that people can read without caring that it's poetry. Wild areas, rock radio, and semis come together to approximate Prince George, poet Al Rempel's home. It makes perfect sense to read a poem about birches and hydro men, about campfire trash and yellow pollen in an interpretation of his northern city surroundings. Onjana Yawnghwe's poems speak about her experience of moving to the BC lower mainland from Chiang Mai, Thailand. She touches on themes familiar to many children who move to Canada while still learning English.

Postcards from Home

Gary Geddes
Swimming Ginger. Goose Lane $17.95
Gary Geddes
The Terracotta Army. Goose Lane $14.95
Brian Henderson
Sharawadji. Brick $19.00
Ken Norris
Asian Skies. Talonbooks $17.95
Reviewed by Louise Young

There has long been a fascination in Western poetry with Eastern influences, and the four volumes of poetry reviewed here confirm that literary representations of otherness remain a key facet of Canadian poetic identity. Who we are and what we can learn in relation to distinct world cultures brings a new sense of meaning in how we identify and situate ourselves as family members, as social entities, as workers, as dreamers, as achievers, as heroes, as adversaries.

A winner of the Commonwealth Poetry Prize and the Lieutenant Governor's Award for Literary Excellence, Gary Geddes offers us a unique perspective on two of China's most treasured pieces of historical art. Geddes' accessible poetic style brings to life a rich array of characters inspired by a blend of history, culture, myth, and imagination. Geddes describes the feeling of being spoken to by his creations that come to him whilst he is writing and demand that their stories be told. As a result, his two most recent collections offer the reader a point of entry into the inner workings of old China by bringing to life a thronging diversity of voices tinged with both creativity and lore.

In *Swimming Ginger*, Geddes crafts a collection of poetic performance pieces, based on scenes from the Qingming Shanghe Tu scroll, a twelfth-century painting depicting an ancient Chinese cityscape. By drawing the reader into the world of the figures in the painting, Geddes makes the case for those liminal voices in history that have hitherto remained silent and unidimensional, giving them a depth and texture that reaches beyond the painted realm. The narrator of "The Storyteller" puts it best when he says that "vernacular was music to my ears." Divided into segments punctuated with photographs of the beautiful scroll, *Swimming Ginger* juxtaposes three versions of experience: the cacophony of tradespeople, merchants, and artists who dwell in the imagined city; the musings of Zhang Zeduan, believed to be the creator of the original scroll; and a section that writes back to the traditions of Qu Yan, the ancient Chinese poet.

A common theme that emerges from Geddes' "contributors" is a cynicism around received notions of hierarchy transmitted through religious, political, and industrial institutions. For his characters, the romance of ascetic spirituality collapses under the weight of daily life and the responsibility of meeting the basic needs of food, shelter, and survival. As "The Perfect Son" prepares himself for "an hour or two of Confucian / mumbo-jumbo, all that antiquated, / crap about filial responsibility. / Trouble is, I believe it, am living / proof of its efficacy," we see the push-pull effect that city life brings to rural traditionalism. Geddes' vision of the scroll is a reality in which "[f]arm implements / are more likely than court odes / to touch hearts." *Swimming Ginger* reanimates one of China's most iconic artifacts and infuses it with irreverence, gently poking fun at the fantasies of ancient Chinese culture that we might otherwise be wont to adopt. In answer to such fantasies, Geddes creates an earthy, vibrant, and altogether more pragmatic account of lives lived in twelfth-century China.

Geddes' other recent poem sequence, *The Terracotta Army*, was inspired by a 1981 visit to China, where he and a group of Canadian literary talents toured the formerly closed country. Geddes was deeply struck by the terracotta figures and found that, after his return home, he was visited by what he calls the "insistent but disembodied voices" of the unnamed, unstoried figures lurking behind the clay renditions. Using a fixed nine-couplet structure, the lines of the poems neatly stack up like the endless lines of warriors and yet, within this uniformity, rich and unboundaried characters emerge.

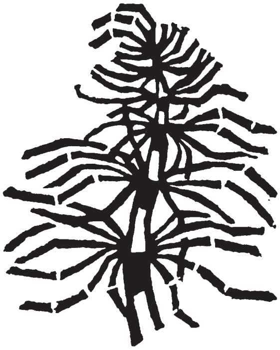
The narrators of poems such as "Charioteer," "Spearman," "Lieutenant," and "Paymaster" map out three of the main catalysts behind *The Terracotta Army*: the futility of warfare, the struggle for individuality, and the mercurial figure of Lao Bi, the potter who crafted the army. Old Bi, as he is affectionately known, emerges as a gifted, arrogant, and humorous sage who, like Geddes, brings the terracotta army to life whilst simultaneously lamenting the inevitability of loss through war. In perhaps a nod to "Ozymandias," "The Chaplain" speaks of the impermanence of existence, in which "[t]he only certainty, even under the earth, / is change, whether it be cosmetic, paint / flaking away down the muted centuries / or something more violent that destroys the form / itself, icons of public and private selves." He consults Lao Bi, expecting to shock him, but "[o]nly our vanity is monumental, the potter said, / and that, too, can be broken." In *The Terracotta Army*, art has the power to write humanity into existence and yet, in Geddes' grounded and lyrical world, it is ultimately as delicate and frail.

In search of another version of Asia, Ken Norris' poetic travelogue, *Asian Skies*, is the final volume of poetry in his creative trilogy that has previously explored the rich literary soils of Europe and the Caribbean Sea. With Dante's *Divine Comedy* in his physical and narrative luggage, Norris traverses the vivid terrains of Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Nepal in search of a version of paradise hidden within the bustling contradictions of old and new Asia. *Asian Skies* reads as accessibly as a series of postcards from a friend and yet Norris' vernacular hits its mark every time. With pinpoint accuracy, he reflects on the commodification of the East, the cloud of romance through which Western eyes tend to view Asia, and the transactions Norris himself makes as traveller, consumer, father, lover, spiritual seeker, and poet. He notes in "Patong Beach" that his quest to hold a mirror up to Asia results repeatedly in rediscovering himself, as saturated idylls throng with familiarity: "The European tourists dive in to the waves / And make them ordinary."

The skies of the collection's title heave with the unpredictability of tropical rainstorms, whilst also offering the promise of amnesia, washing away the squalor of industrialism and the stains of personal regret. Norris explores his relationship with aging and mortality through the lens of travel ("Morning," "Sherpa," "The Journey," "Last Ascent"), noting that the journey through Asia inevitably leads him back to himself.

If Norris's vision of place is situated firmly within the home of the self, Brian Henderson's latest collection of poems, entitled *Sharawadji*, casts its net into more hidden spaces. Henderson's four-part collection takes as its title a term used to describe an "oriental style" in which an appreciation of artistry develops beyond the realm of meaning or context. *Sharawadji* is a series of sharply contoured poems that juxtapose past and present, natural and chemically engineered, reality and imagination, love and loss. Inspired by Janek Yerka, the Polish painter of surreal and fantastical landscape art, Henderson conjures his own impressionistic scenescapes that both exude and elude definitions of place. In "Twelve Imaginary Landscapes," images of post-apocalyptic devastation are laced with the loneliness of survival: "Every day I go looking for it through the convoluted syntax of / booby-trapped alleys and streets, smouldering grey oxides of / rubbish heaps, derelict factories, warehouses, landfill mews."

Nestled within the volume's jarring cadences, the section entitled "Night Music" traces the journey of grief and loss. Portraits of the decline of the narrator's mother in hospital are juxtaposed with the idylls of happier days in poems such as "The Ruthie Tree," "Well," and "The Answer." The simple beauty of the past ("the September light pausing on the limit of summer") is contrasted with the present landscape of human frailty ("your skin a geography / of purple continents"). By continually decontextualizing place and time, Henderson writes into existence a space that holds together multiple contradictions and layers of meaning—a space as simple and familiar as the surrounding images are disorienting and circumspect. Access to this space comes in exquisitely fleeting moments and, amongst the "booby-trapped" alleys of the book's linguistic cityscapes, we find the *sharawadji* of the title.



Trans-atlantic/lations

Paula Ruth Gilbert and Miléna Santoro, eds.
Transatlantic Passages: Literary and Cultural Relations between Quebec and Francophone Europe. McGill-Queen's UP $34.95

Luise von Flotow, ed.
Translating Women. U of Ottawa P $39.95

Reviewed by Nicole Nolette

The prefix "trans-," according to the *OED*, means "across, through, over, to or on the other side of, beyond, outside of, from one place, person, thing, or state to another." Marked by the similarity in their titles, *Translating Women* and *Transatlantic Passages* are two scholarly collections of essays that speak to such crossings in gender, language, literature, and culture.

The goal of *Transatlantic Passages*, a clever grouping of essays, literary excerpts, interviews, and images, is to "make this project a unique and compelling Francophone extension of the burgeoning field of Anglophone transatlantic regional studies." In this, the editors are highly organized and highly successful. The book is comprised of five sections: "Women's History and Passages across the Atlantic," "European Cultural Influences in Quebec Writers," "The Theatrical Space of Exchange," "Franco-European Immigrant Voices in Quebec," and "Contemporary Art Forms and Popular Culture." Each section, which begins with an excerpt from Gail Scott's *My Paris* and includes either images or words (some of them in English for the first time) from the artists discussed, efficiently opens up a specific field of discussions on transatlantic exchanges between Quebec (and sometimes other parts of French Canada) and francophone Europe (France, Switzerland, and Belgium).

The section focusing on women includes a contribution by Patricia Smart on the autobiographical writings of four women from religious orders on their transatlantic migration to New France in the seventeenth century. Monique Proulx uses writing as a Québécois *flâneuse* through the muddled literary time and space of Paris. Chantal Maillé examines the links between French and Quebec feminisms to conclude that, except in literary studies, Quebec feminism has long taken its lead from French feminist theory, though as a form of double oppression (one of gender and nation); as a result, it has been slow to recognize differences in power relations between women. Excerpts from Nicole Brossard's *Je m'en vais à Trieste* serve to illustrate Quebec's literary feminist movement.

In the section on Quebec writers in Europe, Patrick Coleman innovatively compares Mordecai Richler's and Hubert Aquin's stays in post-war Paris to point to institutional differences in francophone and anglophone literary systems. Karen McPherson continues to read Aquin (*Prochain épisode* and *Point de fuite*), but as a Swiss palimpsest in Nicole Brossard's *La Capture du sombre*. Switzerland, another country with "minority status and sovereignty issues," becomes a distant version of Quebec. For Lorna Irvine, Gail Scott's narrator in *My Paris* is a Benjaminian *flâneuse* in Paris and Montreal, whereas for Karen L. Gould, in the novels of France Théoret, the characters' transatlantic readings of Hugo, Sartre, and Gheorghiu play in their coming of age as female subjects. Following the female gaze to "rethink fundamental concepts of national identity," Patrice J. Proulx considers the transatlantic reconceptualization of Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes* in Lise Gauvin's *Lettres d'une autre* and Chahdortt Djavann's *Comment peut-on être français?* Louise Dupré writes of her experience being taught by a French nun as a child in Quebec's Eastern Townships.

In the section on theatre, Louise H. Forsyth explores the links between Marie Cardinal's biography of transatlantic crossings and her translations of myths and theatre. Jane Moss, addressing the manifesto "Pour une littérature-monde en français," contends that the reception of Quebec plays in francophone Europe still depends on a certain "distinctiveness and alterity, to efface those differences would be to undermine the appeal of these postcolonial performances."

Listening to Franco-European immigrant voices in Quebec, Mary Jean Green focuses on the history of Régine Robin's autobiographical fiction from the figure of the *flâneuse* to the cybernomad. Susan Ireland's article suggests that Naïm Kattan and Alice Parizeau "form part of the growing community of authors who have made the transatlantic journey themselves and have used it as the focus of their literary works." Werner Nold's account of such a journey from Switzerland to Quebec for a career in cinema ties in nicely with Rachel Killick's contribution on three figures of the *demoiselles sauvages* in the films of Léa Pool (one from a short story by Corinna Bille, one in the film adaptation of Bille's work by Pool, and one from Gabrielle Roy).

Bonnie Baxter opens the last section with reflections on her long-time transatlantic print collaboration with Jean Paul Riopelle, including several photos of Riopelle working. François Morelli pursues this line of thinking about his own *in situ* artistic creations during overseas trips to France, where he bartered a meal for a wall drawing. Alisa Belanger reflects on the evolution of the artist's book in Quebec, a genre that is equally influenced by the French and American traditions. Her focus on Claude Beausoleil, Hélène Dorion, and Denise Desautels reveals a shared insistence on "complicité between contributors." Brian Thompson and Guy Spielmann's contributions on the circulation of cultural goods share common preoccupations about differentiation from and assimilation to the French norm. While Thompson writes about the history of song, from La Bolduc, Félix Leclerc, and Robert Charlebois (whose "Ce soir je chante à l'Olympia" is included as well) to Pierre Lapointe and Céline Dion, Spielmann laments the lack of acceptance of a Québécois difference in television programs and comics. He does note, however, the widespread popularity of *Têtes à claques* in francophone Europe as a "harbinger of a new era" of cultural exchange.

Transatlantic Passages itself forms a kind of crossing/translation from the francophone subject matter to an anglophone audience. *Translating Women*, on the other hand, engages with a particular intersection, or crossing between feminism and translation. In her preface, Luise von Flotow suggests that this intersection, which produced a considerable amount of scholarly material in the 1990s, needs to be revisited in light of the "current ideas about the contingent, performative aspects of gender identity and the discursive construction of gender in social and subjective contexts." The link between performance theories of gender and translation, however, sometimes appears too implicit in the articles collected; the organization of the book, as well, seems less thought out (no sections here) than loosely connected by a sometimes contradictory conception of "women" translators, authors, or characters.

Alison E. Martin offers a fascinating portrayal of early nineteenth-century British women translating botany to "demonstrate publicly the range of their reading and knowledge, as well as to draw attention, self-reflexively, to the process of translation and to their place in it." Nineteenth-century Russian poet and translator Karolina Pavlova, according to Tom Dolack, used translation as "a means of social commentary, but also as a vehicle for transcendence." Anna Barker notes that another poet and translator from the same period, Helen Maria Williams, "engages in a complex negotiation of identity politics both through the translation and through the eventual reciprocation of acquired and perceived alterity in her own writing." If these historical encounters in translation showcase it as a space for women's agency, Madeleine Stratford's intervention on Susan Bassnett's "life exchange" with Alejandra Pizarnik warns us about the possible dangers of "manipulative" tactics in translation practice, especially if these tactics are not publicized with the published product.

Such concerns around editing practices, history, and translation recur in Luise von Flotow's article on West German journalist Ulrike Meinhof and in Anna Bogic's work on the English version of Simone de Beauvoir's *Le Deuxième Sexe*. In a reverse translation movement, Anne-Lise Feral finds that the American-style feminism of *Sex and the City* failed to be properly imported into France because of the ideological work of dubbing into French. For her part, Valerie Henitiuk questions the effects on Western readers of a perpetually gendered framing of Sei Shōnagon's translations.

Some articles make the case for choosing gender as a creative and translative position. Pilar Godayol traces a feminine cultural genealogy between five Catalan translators "and the symbolic mothers they have translated": women authors from other cultures who inscribe the feminine into their works. Similarly comparing the translations of Emily Dickinson's poetry into French, James W. Underhill finds that even if her best translator were a woman, this quality is not attributable to a feminine rewriting, but rather to a sense of orality. Carolyn Shread situates the intersection between feminism and translation as formative in the continuous constitution of the feminist translator herself.

Other contributors choose to explore translation more metaphorically, as a carrying across. Sandra Bermann thus speaks of Adrienne Rich's poetics, where translation as "re-vision" figures as a space for a poet's transformative energy. Kate Sturge argues for conceptions of migration and ethnography as translation in Ruth Behar's *Translated Woman*. After reflecting on the crossings of French and American theories of gender, Bella Brodski raises a new intersection of study—the one between *genre sexuel* and *genre littéraire*.

While it points to various stimulating fields of study, *Translating Women* is of interest more for its individual contributions than as a collection; perhaps the reader is also expected to engage in a similar crossing towards—and across—the subject matter.

Repeating Stories

R. W. Gray

Crisp. NeWest $17.95

Paul Yee

The Secret Keepers. Fitzhenry & Whiteside $12.95

Reviewed by Sam Knowles

These books illustrate the extent to which accolades won and works published are not necessarily automatic indicators of superior writing. Paul Yee has been publishing since the 1980s, winning the Governor General's Award in 1996; *The Secret Keepers* is the latest of two dozen books—fact, fiction, novels, poems, and writing for children—listed on his website. R. W. Gray has come to publication more recently: although his biography describes him as an author, poet, and screenwriter, it concludes with "*Crisp* is his first book." Yet it is the debutant whose narratives are a resounding success, shimmering and muscular by turns, while Yee's work is often clunky and stilted.

The Secret Keepers starts promisingly: a date stamp fixes the narrative at the time of the 1906 San Francisco earthquake, and the addition of "Wednesday, Early Morning" injects urgency as the fourteen-year-old narrator is thrown from his bed, plunging readers into the narrative with a force that echoes Jackson Leong's physical upheaval. This impetus is not maintained throughout, however, as the narrative relies on cliché and synonym, and the dialogue lacks urgency: Jack is "disturbed [from] his sweet dream" to find that "every church bell in town [is] ringing: bonging, pealing, tolling and dinging," and his elders have conversations that lack veracity, carefully explaining to each other that in this time of trouble they "need to pray. Offerings at the temple go straight to the gods." Statements like these—and numerous later descriptions of Chinese beliefs about the afterlife, which structure the narrative—read more as explanations to the reader than credible snippets of conversation.

This is a feature of Yee's writing, as he does not wear his undoubtedly extensive knowledge of Chinese San Franciscan history and culture lightly. Too often, an interesting point—like the assertion that young Chinese Americans avoid crossing "Chinatown's . . . border streets: [Broadway,] Powell, Kearny and California" for fear that "white boys would hurl rocks" at them—is followed by a clumsy introduction of historical description into the narrative, such as the exchange between Jack and his uncle about nineteenth-century Chinese American immigration: "'Some of these old men have lived here for fifty years, ever since the gold rush. They haven't seen their wives or children who still live in China.' 'Why don't their families come here?' 'The US laws say they cannot.'"

In spite of these shortcomings, and some inaccuracy in dates of birth given towards the end, Yee's novel grows into an engaging detective story. Gray's text possesses even more of such narrative drive, an impressive achievement in a collection of short stories like *Crisp*. The author balances perfectly the opposing pressures of writing a short story collection, neither presenting a group of scattered, disconnected stories nor enforcing a too-weighty overarching narrative. Recurring, slightly altered images give an ethereal sense of déjà vu without overpowering readers with an excess of coincidence: seaside locations, rain, parents fighting, broken relationships, trailer park lives, and young brothers comforting each other all return at various points. These images are spared the contempt of familiarity by their careful presentation; Gray's background in poetry is in evidence here, as one littoral story begins with the poised line, "[t]he sky gasps open and the rain falls askew."

The way in which lives are presented in—moulded through—language is important to Gray. The title story, before its spiral into magical realism, opens with the mundane yet shocking event of a seven-year-old's father being struck by lightning and, in the words of the boy's younger brother, "burnt to a crisp." The narrator runs towards his father's corpse, yet does so not only to witness his father's death, but also "partly to get away from the word '*crisp*'" (emphasis added). This connection between the actuality of language and the physical world runs throughout these tales, finding a resolution in the final story, as the narrator muses on the physical attributes of his lover, a circus contortionist: "Contortionists are well written, Ben thinks. Each muscle succinct. A body written not as a question, but as an answer."

This echoes Gray's earlier musing on the nature of the form itself, which speaks to the work of both authors: "Stories repeat themselves, a riddle looking for an answer." Paul Yee's story is told from a position of frustrating omniscience, rather than inquisitiveness; R. W. Gray's tales, in their combination of poetic and well-balanced repetitions and startlingly new imagery, are still looking for answers.

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Border-Crossing Debuts

Marlyn Horsdal
Sweetness from Ashes. Brindle & Glass $19.95

Elise Moser
Because I Have Loved and Hidden It. Cormorant $21.00

Latha Viswanathan
Lingering Tide and Other Stories. TSAR $20.95

Reviewed by Hannah McGregor

Lingering Tide may be Latha Viswanathan's first collection of short stories, but it nonetheless demonstrates the remarkable range and flexibility of her craft. Viswanathan has mastered the unexpected detail that spreads ripples across the otherwise calm surface of the quotidian. In "Eclipse," for example, a middle-aged husband addicted to habit and ritual stumbles across his wife watching pornography in the middle of the night, one hand "clutch[ing] at her gut as if the man punched as he thrust." Through this accidental encounter, she suddenly appears to him more fully: "Why had he not seen this, her agility, spanning continents, skipping oceans?"

Agile ocean skipping could just as easily describe the collection itself, which races from place to place, exploring without fetishizing movement itself. From an elderly man's return from New Jersey to Bombay with his wife's ashes, to a recent Laotian immigrant's recollections of childhood in a Thai refugee camp; from a white American woman's encounter with the reality of the foreign in Manila, to a Cambodian landmine victim's fantasy of skipping rope again, "skirt opening and closing like an umbrella, toes stabbing mud": these stories extend across the spectrum of human experience while maintaining the intimacy that often characterizes well-crafted short fiction.
The order of the stories, unfortunately, de-emphasizes the collection's most powerful feature. By opening with eight stories that focus on Indian characters and ending with four that go beyond autoethnography, the

collection misses an opportunity to render the perhaps more familiar narratives strange by intermixing the expected with the surprising.

Marlyn Horsdal's debut novel, *Sweetness from Ashes*, similarly pushes across borders, be they familial, cultural, or national. The death of a parent brings three siblings from Vancouver to Ontario to meet their estranged relatives, where they discover that they are related by marriage to a Ghanaian family. The novel's focus on the healing power of crossing boundaries has a clearly stated aim. Horsdal travelled to Ghana with *Canadian University Service Overseas* (CUSO) and has since started her own charity: the proceeds from *Sweetness from Ashes* will help to provide scholarships for girls to attend high school in Kumasi, Ghana. The novel feeds into this humanitarian mission through the repeated metaphor of the global family, culminating in the final chapters when a newly reunited multicultural family comes together to raise money for the same Kumasi high school. The novel's strongest points are the Ghanaian travel journals of Canadian characters, set in the 1950s and the present. Here, the narrative's didacticism works in its favour, while the tone of naïve excitement seems appropriate to the narrators' position. Unfortunately, neither of these narratives drives the novel's action forward, and both are precipitously dropped in order to return to the present-day action, where the same qualities sit awkwardly.

Because I Have Loved and Hidden It is also Elise Moser's first novel, but like Viswanathan, Moser is clearly a veteran in her trade. The novel begins with the same premise as *Sweetness from Ashes*: a family member dies, leaving behind untold histories that the survivors must struggle to negotiate. But Moser makes that struggle visceral through the sharply focalized voice of her protagonist. Julia is forty years old, has just lost her estranged mother, and her lover has gone missing in Morocco. Both of these losses prove themselves redemptive, leading to new or renewed connections with her living family and her lover's wife.

Watching the frightened, self-enclosed, and deeply analytical Julia gradually make herself vulnerable to the tenderness of those around her—and extend to them compassion in return—is a small but heart-wrenching journey, aided by the finely crafted smallness of Moser's language. Whereas Viswanathan emphasizes a core of human longing through a dazzling spectrum of settings, Moser expands the interiority of Julia's narrative outward to radiate through the urban space of Montreal. Staring at the back of a cab driver's head, it occurs to Julia "that she is sitting in this man's life"; walking down St. Denis, she thinks of Michel Tremblay and realizes that, "unknowingly, he inhabits her personal geography." The urban in this novel is anything but anonymous: "everyone has a history, currents running at multiple depths, the movements of which have created the visible surface." Julia is sensuously physical, and Montreal comes to life as the teeming space through which she moves, as vibrant and complex as those others that Julia gradually comes to know.

Écrire in two languages

Catherine Leclerc

Des langues en partage? : cohabitation du français et de l'anglais en littérature contemporaine. XYZ 35,00 $

Compte rendu par Catherine Khordoc

L'étude de Catherine Leclerc est déjà en train de faire ses preuves : l'ouvrage était finaliste au Prix du Gouverneur-Général dans la catégorie Essai en 2011, après avoir décroché en 2010 le Prix Gabrielle-Roy, décerné par l'Association des littératures canadiennes et québécoise. Et ce n'est pas étonnant, car cet ouvrage n'est rien de moins qu'impressionnant.

Dans la foulée des études sur le plurilinguisme littéraire, et plus particulièrement le plurilinguisme dans les littératures francophones et québécoise, déblayées notamment par des chercheurs tels que Lise Gauvin, Rainier Grutman et Sherry Simon, Catherine Leclerc ajoute à leurs conceptions du plurilinguisme en se penchant sur la question du « colinguisme ». Il ne s'agit plus d'examiner comment d'autres langues infléchissent la langue du texte, comment elles s'y inscrivent, explicitement ou implicitement, mais où domine, néanmoins, une langue principale. Dans son étude, Leclerc examine des œuvres littéraires dans lesquelles il n'est pas toujours loisible d'établir *la langue* du texte, mais où cohabitent au moins deux langues de manière à contester la notion de langue principale.

Dans cet ouvrage volumineux, comptant plus de 400 pages, il nous faut signaler avant tout l'envergure du premier chapitre, dans lequel Leclerc passe en revue et analyse les théories et approches liées au plurilinguisme du vingtième et du début du vingt-et-unième siècles. Ce chapitre, auquel est consacré environ un quart de l'ouvrage, présente un outil indispensable à tout étudiant et chercheur qui s'intéresse aux enjeux liés à la question de la ou des langues du texte. Il ne faudrait surtout pas croire qu'il n'y a que Bakhtine qui parle du plurilinguisme; d'ailleurs, si Bakhtine nous a légué un concept riche en potentiel herméneutique, ce n'est peut-être pas le chercheur qui nous fournit les meilleurs outils d'analyse, surtout pour l'analyse de textes littéraires contemporains, issus de situations postcoloniales, transnationales, multiculturelles, diasporiques et ainsi de suite. Leclerc éclairera les nuances qui distinguent des concepts certes apparentés, tels que l'hétérolinguisme de Grutman, la cohabitation des langues de Simon, la surconscience linguistique de Gauvin, et mettra en lumière la portée linguistique des théories de penseurs comme Deleuze et Guattari, Derrida, Régine Robin, Homi Bhabha, Édouard Glissant, François Paré, pour ne nommer que ceux-là. Bref, ce premier chapitre est incontournable pour l'étudiante ou la chercheuse qui s'intéresse aux enjeux linguistiques dans la littérature contemporaine : elle y trouvera les références principales, la terminologie, les différentes réflexions et conceptualisations, utiles soit comme point de référence à ces idées, soit comme point de départ avant d'entamer un nouveau projet de recherche.

Les trois chapitres qui suivent, tout aussi riches que le premier, traitent d'œuvres particulières, dans lesquelles plusieurs langues — notamment le français et l'anglais — cohabitent. Leclerc ne se limite pas à des ouvrages canadiens ou québécois : elle ouvre son analyse en posant son regard sur *Between* de Christine Brooke-Rose, l'auteure britannique connue pour son écriture expérimentale dans laquelle elle joue constamment avec la et les langues.

Passant ensuite aux écrivains canadiens et québécois dans les troisième et quatrième chapitres, Leclerc examine le manifeste *Speak White* de Michèle Lalonde, qui a déjà fait couler beaucoup d'encre, mais qui ne pourrait être absent de cette étude étant donné le caractère bilingue de ce texte, *Heroine* de Gail Scott et *Hellman's Scrapbook* de Robert Majzels — trois textes montréalais où cohabitent le français et l'anglais. Ces deux derniers sont en fait des romans « anglo-québécois », comme le fait valoir Leclerc, dans lesquels s'opère « un travail d'expérimentation sur les lignes de démarcation qui façonnent la communauté [québécoise] ».

Finalement, dans le dernier chapitre, Leclerc affronte l'écriture colingue de deux écrivains franco-canadiens, Patrice Desbiens de l'Ontario et Jean Babineau du Nouveau-Brunswick, qui font résonner les tensions qui existent entre le français, langue minoritaire, et l'anglais, langue dominante, situation où il est impossible d'envisager un revirement dans la hiérarchie.

Ce ne sont pas seulement les prix et honneurs qui prouvent la valeur d'une étude savante; les prix ne sont en fait qu'une reconnaissance de ce qu'est cette étude : sérieuse, rigoureuse, provocatrice et stimulante. Dans une écriture à la fois limpide et érudite, Leclerc parvient à nous offrir un ouvrage savant et lisible, qui se sert d'une terminologie spécialisée, précise et claire. Bref, il y a peu de doute que cette étude de Leclerc deviendra rapidement une référence incontournable.

Memory and Lyricism

rob mclennan
A (short) history of l. Buschek $17.50

Erín Moure
The Unmemntioable. Anansi $19.95

Stan Rogal
Dance, Monster!: Fifty Selected Poems. Insomniac $14.95

Reviewed by Matthew Hall

Erín Moure's new work is the third installment in an unfolding tale of memory, language, and the reliquary of history. E. M. arrives in Bucureşti, after burying the ashes of her mother in the Ukraine, where Elisa awaits her, centring Moure in her search for the nature of experience.

Moure's layered, hybrid materiality articulates an attempt to trace her mother's exile during the Holocaust. *The Unmemntioable* begins with Moure questioning the privilege of voice, the privilege of exemption, and explores the manifold of archaeological damage as a generational trauma that affects not only survivors, but also their progeny. "I come from nowhere," her mother exclaims. "Some people come from nowhere"; the poem seeks, with a syntactic primacy, an understanding of this location, of the time and condition of exile.

Moure's lexical cadences and spellbinding sentences sustain the narrative of exchanges and thefts between Elisa Sampedrín and Erín Moure. The contestation of the lyrical voice entails a rupture and a redoubling, challenging the reader with questions of bearing witness, inheritance, collective knowledge, and responsibility. The poem has a meditative trace structured on quotations from Celan, Descartes, and Agamben and represents an exploration of what propensity of the spirit might exist before speech.

As the reader is told: "Experience does not come out of the mind or imagination but from a deep and irrescuable need. It rents the entire person." Moure's is not a book that will sit idly upon the shelf, but a quest that enters and tears at the body.

Dance, Monster! should be credited for the editorial decisions that crafted a selection of poems demonstrative of the development of a unique poetic. Known for their idiosyncratic style and sardonic humour, Stan Rogal's poems confound expectations. The lines move in multiple directions, from ekphrastic and witty, to caustic and sensual; the contrastive space between the poems leaves the reader with no time for settling in. Each poem charts its own directions.

Like the poet Dean Young, Rogal demonstrates a perception and craft that turns the urbane into the erotic; pop culture references are jettisoned in the wilder currents of the tragic. From Einstein to Degas, Whitman to Rimbaud, the poems keep the synapses branching in a resplendent arcade.

Rogal's capacity is best demonstrated in the selections from *(sub rosa)* and *In Search of the Emerald City*. "Sub Rosa" and the poem's transformations and modulations develop an articulated, processional exploration of form and theme. The opening stanza from this collection reads:

> Beneath the rose begins a dark
> correspondence
> As congress between the red lion & the
> white lily
> Stretches one form towards the other.

The pattern that the poems create is daringly sensual and proudly lyrical. There is a focus on the embodied experience expressed through the communicative exchange of the sensual. At their best, Rogal's lines reveal a lurid particularity in the everyday: "The fiery red mandragora swells to monster fruit primed to spoon its bare reflection."

"I burn at both ends" seems a telling understatement from mclennan's latest book, *A (short) history of l*, a series of love poems based on the ghazal. mclennan's investigation into the history of love and the capacity of the individual to sustain and grow through love's negotiations and trials is uniquely tied to the lyric. Early on, he underscores the inquiry of the book:

> I am interested in how lyricism
> bonds itself to our molecules.
> the insistence of light against
> insistence of dark.

mclennan's poems work to explore the particularity of the moments in which the other becomes a part of oneself. "dictionary of touch" is one of the most profoundly lyrical and cadenced works in the collection, with an estranged sense of the capacity of love to open expansively to the meaning of small gestures. Through this poem, the idea of reciprocity and mutual understanding is incited:

> … we are shades
> of meaning, shadowing
> the other. the dictionary
> useless, for what
> we have figured out. what
> we already know.

The disparity between what we have learned and what we have to learn is part of the processional core of mclennan's new book, an avid exploration of the materials, the moments, the changes we undergo through love. mclennan's style courses through the collection; the thematic energy which he devotes to his poetic is exceedingly renewing. The poems are referential, meditative spaces in which the history of love is imagined through literary antecedents, subjective presences, and technological complexes and pits mclennan's love as testament to his development, personal and poetic.

Reclamation and Decay

Frank Macdonald
A Possible Madness. Cape Breton UP $24.95

Doug Harris
YOU comma Idiot. Goose Lane $29.95

Marko Sijan
Mongrel. Mansfield $19.95

Reviewed by M. Sean Saunders

Frank Macdonald's *A Possible Madness* tells the story of a semi-rural Cape Breton community struggling with the promise of much-needed prosperity and jobs versus preservation of the local environment. Lined up on the side of economic development are the community's mayor, the Nova Scotia government, and a dubious corporation called Resource Reclamations Limited. Opposing them is the novel's central character, David Cameron, who is the owner and editor of the community's weekly newspaper. Cameron is determined to discover what lies behind a secret coal-extraction deal struck between the two levels of government and Resource Reclamations.

Macdonald is adept at humorous portrayals of gruff, garrulous, small-town characters. Two standouts here are Ronald Macdonald—who wages a one-man campaign against the fast-food chain whose eponymous clown brings, he feels, both his name and that of his clan into disrepute—and Mrs. Big Sandy. The latter is a chronically (and comically) enraged termagant who terrifies everyone in the community (but turns out to be, perhaps predictably, a bit of a diamond in the rough).

The author's timely subject has the potential to reach beyond the novel's local setting to raise important questions concerning corporate and government ethics, the challenge of balancing ecological and economic concerns, and the role of the media and private citizens in the conversations and decisions arising from such questions. However, the novel does not realize this potential. Neither its important topic nor its comic characters are enough to sustain it in the face of certain shortcomings.

While the creative writing maxim "show, don't tell" is something of a cliché, it might profitably be applied to the rather flat, expository prose which makes up much of this work. I was particularly frustrated when such *telling* contradicted what the text was *showing.* For example, although we are frequently told that Cameron's two children are more important to him than anything else, such narrative assertions don't ring true when we are shown a man who gives virtually all his time to his work or to other relationships.

In addition, Cameron—along with the novel's other serious characters—is an underdeveloped cut-out who seems to exist chiefly in order to propel the narrative's exploration of the issues it raises. Consequently, it's difficult to become emotionally connected either to him or his cause.

Doug Harris' *YOU comma Idiot* is a very different kind of book, a blistering social satire set in Montreal, which frequently had me laughing out loud. It's also a tour de force of second-person narration. By the second sentence ("You're the kind of guy who rehearses a conversation fifty times in your head and then blows it when it's for real"), I found myself implicated in the insistent "calls into being" produced by the novel's unusual narrative voice; that is to say, it seemed, at first, as if the novel was supposed to be *about* me, unnervingly calling me into existence as its self-loathing protagonist. This is disconcerting, but is also an effective opening strategy. While it's soon clear that the "you" is not the reader, but drug-dealing layabout Lee Goodstone, his second-person voice nevertheless conveys the sense that this drifting loser is desperately trying to call *himself* into existence, or at least into an existence with more meaning than the one he's caught in; he no more wants to be who he is than the reader does. A related effect of this narrative style is that Lee always seems to be looking in at himself from the outside, never fully able to *be* himself.

Near the end of the novel, after Lee's life has been disrupted by a series of events that threaten media exposure of his drug dealing, he finally seems prepared to take responsibility for himself and his past. However, Harris saves the plot from mawkishness by reminding us that Lee, as likeable as he is in many respects, remains a significantly flawed person: the story concludes with Lee and an estranged friend becoming reconciled by inflicting a revenge beating on one of Lee's drug-dealing rivals. While satirical, this final image of masculine friendships being defined and sustained through violence is nevertheless a disturbing place to close.

Marko Sijan's *Mongrel* is even more disturbing in the links it draws between violence and unexamined masculinity (and between violence and race, and ethnicity, and nation, and homophobia, and misogyny, and arousal . . .). Sijan's novel is breathtaking in the seemingly effortless arcs it draws between, as just a few examples, high school bullying, the Holocaust, teenage consumption of pornography, hostilities between Serbs and Croats, sexually fetishized violence, American imperialism, and even Quebec politics and separatism. Furthermore, these connections sneak up on the reader, with the inextricably complex interrelations between such forces becoming evermore apparent and oppressive as the narrative grinds to its brutal conclusion. Perhaps *most* devastating, these larger, comparatively abstract concerns are revealed through the gradual unfolding of the interconnected, day-to-day lives of the novel's five separate multi-ethnic teenaged narrators and their friends, all of whom are high school students in Windsor, Ontario. Multicultural Canadian youths thus emerge as emblems of large-scale failures of human ethics and morality, both historical and contemporary, and as agents for the continued perpetration and perpetuation of such failures. This, of course, is not how we like to think about youth—or Canadian multiculturalism.

Sijan's novel is a remarkable achievement, a powerful and disturbing commentary on contemporary Canadian culture and on our sense of our place in the world. However, I cannot say I enjoyed reading it (and suspect I wasn't supposed to). Its characters are self-obsessed, ignorant, and self-destructive. As a whole, it is brutal, violent, and vicious. Read it at your peril.

The Past Revised

Daniel MacIvor

Bingo! Playwrights Canada $16.95

Vern Thiessen

Lenin's Embalmers. Playwrights Canada $16.95

Mary Vingoe

Living Curiosities or What You Will. Playwrights Canada $16.95

Reviewed by Denyse Lynde

Despite the trials and tribulations of Canadian publishers, particularly publishers of play-texts, Playwrights Canada has managed to come out with three handsome editions of recent works by Daniel MacIvor, Vern Thiessen, and Mary Vingoe. They may well be pleased by the result, as should we all.

MacIvor's *Bingo!* introduces us to five former classmates who come back together at their high school's thirtieth reunion. Each approaches the evening planning to erase the decades by remembering past high school dances and hijinks; adolescent drinking games must of course be repeated, just as who is actually at the reunion has to be surreptitiously checked out. The initial moments are almost embarrassingly funny. Watching three grown men pretend that the years have not passed is comical and almost painful. The same dual effect is created by the two women at the bar watching but trying not to watch, borrowing glasses to see but not to be seen—but the play does not rest here. MacIvor wants us to get to know these former classmates, creating five interesting characters who come together to reminisce and reconnect—drinking, recollecting, and sharing; a lot has happened over the last thirty years. *Bingo!* is an entertaining, thoughtful piece.

Very different is *Lenin's Embalmers* by Vern Thiessen, a fanciful take on how and why Lenin's corpse was preserved. Act 1 is set in January 1924 and by page 8, Lenin is dead and Trotsky has fled. Krasis and Stalin are determined, despite Lenin's request for no grave, no monuments, and no shrines, to preserve his body at any cost. And despite Lenin's warning, "Don't let that ignoramus Stalin take over. Trotsky is the future," Stalin manages to seize control. He and Krasis order two scientists, Boris and Vlad, to embalm the rotting corpse.

Thiessen has firm control of this material, and he creates a surprisingly comic take on this historical tale. Characteristic of this play is the return of dead Lenin, who in an almost vaudevillian fashion says to his wife at the close of act 1, "The joke's on me." The second act opens with the ensemble establishing the year, 1925, and becoming a line of peasants patiently waiting to see the corpse. Not surprising in this fantastic world, Lenin too is in the line! By this time, the body has started to rot and Vlad and Boris must again embalm the corpse. Their fee is of course outrageous but met.

The third play-text is Mary Vingoe's *Living Curiosities or What You Will.* Set in Barnum's American Museum in New York City in 1963, it is primarily the story of the almost eight-foot-tall Anna, a giant from Nova Scotia. Sent to assist her family financially, Anna joins the dwarf Henry, bearded lady Josephine, Siamese twins Chang and Eng, and the black albinos Alphonsia and Lucia to entertain Barnum's customers. It is a story of understanding, friendship, and camaraderie when the "Curiosities" find solace in secretly performing Shakespeare.

All three texts are beautifully produced and each has an impressive but appropriate cover design. All list first-production information. The texts of Vingoe and Thiessen each have a short production note and Vingoe's text has an introduction by Jenny Munday of the Playwrights Resource Centre.

Sous le signe de la mort

Catherine Mavrikakis

Les Derniers Jours de Smokey Nelson. Héliotrope 24,95 $

Compte rendu par Valérie Lebrun

Si *Les Derniers Jours de Smokey Nelson* semble rompre avec les textes précédents de Catherine Mavrikakis, ne serait-ce que par la multiplicité des voix et une trame plus classique, on n'échappe pourtant pas à l'envergure, à cette façon de « faire grand » sans jamais le prétendre, qui marque l'authenticité de sa voix dans le paysage littéraire. Or, bien que *Smokey Nelson* nous convie aux derniers instants d'une Amérique à la fois grande et cruelle, ce n'est pas pour ressasser les cartes de la fatalité. Le roman s'ingénie plutôt à repousser les limites de l'absurdité, faisant de quatre destins terriblement humains, le tableau funèbre d'une Amérique condamnée à l'ignorance de ses plus profondes blessures.

Depuis *Deuils cannibales et mélancoliques* où la narratrice disait que « la mort n'est pas faite pour les humains, elle est profondément ignoble, injuste et il faut prendre le parti d'entrer dans son jeu », on constate que l'univers de Mavrikakis n'est pas étranger à un certain imaginaire tragique. Dans *Smokey Nelson*, cette existence sous le signe de la mort s'amorce avec la voix tonitruante de Sydney Blanchard. Sydney, dont la naissance coïncide avec la mort de Jimi Hendrix, sillonne les États-Unis au volant de sa Lincoln Continental de 1966, à l'écoute des signes grandioses qu'on lui a promis dès « la nuit de [s]a naissance [où] la lune est tournée au rouge ». Dans l'attente d'une consécration digne de « Voodoo Child », il se demande si la mort ne l'a pas oublié, parce que même pour la vie, « cette garce », il ne semble pas avoir existé. De serveur à musicien, en passant par la supercherie de l'incarcération qui le liera au destin du mystérieux Smokey Nelson, Sydney ne comprend pas comment tous les « clins d'œil », « les coups de coude » et les « signes de connivence » qu'on lui a lancés ont pu le rendre tel qu'il est, à trente-huit ans, à « [s]e parle[r] seul ou [à] cause[r] avec Betsy . . . ». La présence de Betsy, la chienne toute aussi blanche et grosse que la Lincoln, fait vaciller avec brio les monologues de Sydney entre gravité et pathétisme, faisant croire à une sorte de brèche dans la solitude d'un homme condamné à errer seul, sous une étoile que l'on croyait bonne, mais qui, finalement, « était pas mal éteinte . . . ».

Survient ensuite la voix de Pearl Watanabe, une femme qui croisa jadis la route de Smokey Nelson, et dont la douleur continue de faire écho à une Amérique brisée par les mensonges et les contradictions. Bien que Pearl soit le seul personnage féminin principal, sa docilité et sa passivité n'ont rien à voir avec les narratrices précédentes de Mavrikakis qui, malgré une certaine mélancolie, étaient animées par un désir violent et charnel de lutter contre la mort. Or, Pearl irrite par sa nature « superstitieuse, et résignée ». Guidée par les mots de Deepak Chopra (« Si vous étiez témoin d'un miracle, seriez-vous capable de le reconnaître? »), celle qui s'est éprise le temps d'une cigarette de l'inconnu qu'était alors Smokey Nelson, est forcée d'admettre que « de ce hasard si grandiose, si terrible, elle n'avait pas pu faire grand chose . . . ». Il faut aussi entendre en Pearl la voix de Tamara, sa fille, dont l'intrusion dans le fil décousu de la pensée maternelle donne accès au spectre qu'elle serait devenue à la suite du fameux « rendez-vous » de 1989. La mère se voit alors doublement contrainte par le poids d'une nostalgie que les autres, dont sa fille, impuissante devant ses souffrances, perçoivent comme une existence « décalée, hors du temps présent ». Dans l'impuissance de renoncer au passé parce que grande est la peur que « la réalité [soit] infidèle au souvenir » se dégage la figure du « dernier témoin d'une histoire obsolète, d'un temps désuet » dans laquelle Pearl se confine alors qu'elle s'efforce, en vain, de « trouver un sens à la vie » et de « [se] persuader que les choses n'arrivent pas pour rien . . . ».

Si le roman, fragmenté en dix parties selon l'alternance des quatre voix narratives, est construit sous le mode de l'attente de la voix du condamné, que l'on réserve habilement pour la fin, il nous mène à la rencontre de Ray Ryan, ou plutôt à la voix de sa conscience qu'il a depuis longtemps cédée à Dieu. L'intervention sinistre d'un Dieu cruel et vengeur clamant que « [s]a guerre contre le mal est sainte » vient renverser de manière radicale le ton que donnent les autres personnages au roman. Ce Dieu que Mavrikakis réussit à rendre terriblement grinçant déploie sa force grâce à un discours d'un autre temps, dont les mots proviendraient des « États-Unis d'avant l'apocalypse moderne ». En plus d'instaurer une méfiance au-dessus du concert des voix d'une Amérique qui aurait depuis trop longtemps ignoré ses limites, ce changement de perspective montre que le Dieu de Ray Ryan souffre à son tour d'une nostalgie destructrice fondée sur la vengeance et le fantasme d'un « absolu du temps ». La loi du talion finira par épuiser le vieillard que sera devenu Ray, au point où sa propre douleur achèvera de lui anesthésier l'esprit, l'empêchant de réaliser que la cruauté sans limite de son Dieu était avant tout la sienne.

Malgré l'anticipation et l'angoisse liées au nom *Smokey Nelson* figurant au dernier chapitre, le mystère entourant le meurtrier ne répondra pas à cette soif de sang sur laquelle nous avait laissée Ray Ryan. S'opposera plutôt à la chaleur infernale que nous avait promis l'imaginaire d'un condamné à mort, le froid que ressent celui qui n'a jamais connu la neige. Avec Smokey Nelson, le lecteur est averti, voire happé : « il n'y aurait aucune vérité. Pas d'épiphanie. » Tel un tour de force, le silence comme ultime violence permet d'échapper, au dernier instant, à la hantise de la mort et à son incompréhension, puisqu'au fond, « la mort très, très probable serait tout de même un peu douce. Presque une amie. » Smokey Nelson ne se raconte pas d'histoire, et ne nous en raconte pas non plus. L'imminence de sa mort ne révèle pas davantage de secret en se gardant bien de faire du condamné le grand gagnant à cette parodie de la vie qu'est l'Histoire. Refusant, par la résilience, de se soumettre à l'espoir d'une quelconque délivrance, c'est la tête bien haute, vide des rêves absurdes sur le dénouement de son existence, que Smokey assume ses actes et qu'il accepte l'orchestration de son sort, aussi tragique soit-il.

Les Derniers Jours de Smokey Nelson témoigne avec dureté et intelligence de ces vies qui, bien que condamnées à l'oubli et à l'indifférence d'une Amérique instable et ravageuse, créent un univers où « l'angoisse du lendemain » côtoie de manière tragique « [l]e vide inimaginable, presque grandiose dans son insignifiance ». Bien au-delà d'un débat sur la peine de mort, le roman de Catherine Mavrikakis met en scène les aléas de l'espoir en ne prenant ni le parti du mensonge ou de la vérité, montrant une fois de plus qu'à ce jeu contre la fatalité, l'auteure n'a pas dit son dernier mot.

* * *

Mythical Worlds

Suzette Mayr
Monoceros. Coach House $20.95

Alexi Zentner
Touch. Knopf Canada $29.95

Reviewed by Gordon Bölling

Readers of *Monoceros*, Suzette Mayr's fourth novel, are in for an immediate surprise. "The End," reads the rather unusual title of the novel's brief opening chapter. At the close of the six-page section, Patrick Furey, or simply "the dead boy" as he is called here, has decided not to attend high school on this Monday morning and to return home instead: "Because he wants to be in charge of his own ending." Back there, the seventeen-year-old student will hang himself in his bedroom. He will not leave a note and will later be found by his mother.

In the sixty-odd chapters that follow, *Monoceros* explores the long-lasting consequences of Patrick's suicide for those around him: "This Tuesday. This Monday that refuses to end. Every day a stretch of endless Mondays." In contrast to recent non-fictional studies of grief such as Joan Didion's *The Year of Magical Thinking* and Joyce Carol Oates' *A Widow's Story*, *Monoceros* is not an account of one person's individual loss. Instead, Mayr is primarily interested in the ways in which the tragedy of Patrick's suicide quickly spirals outward and how it affects even those members of the school community who knew him only casually. *Monoceros* is based on a similar incident at a publicly funded Catholic school in Alberta.

Approaching the teenager's death from a variety of angles, Mayr explores the perspectives of classmates, teachers, school officials, and parents. The category "friends" is missing here because as a homosexual, Patrick does not have any real friends at St. Aloysius, a Catholic senior high school in suburban Calgary. He has a secret, on/off relationship with Ginger, a fellow student, but in the homophobic environment of St. Aloysius, this affair is doomed to failure. Mayr succeeds brilliantly in rendering the disturbing and stifling atmosphere that permeates every aspect of school life. Patrick, for instance, is subjected to physical violence, and he is the recipient of hate mail. Meanwhile, parents complain that their children are forced to read Timothy Findley's *The Wars*, a novel these parents classify as pornography. Of course, none of the principal characters is left unaffected by Patrick's suicide, but the ways in which they react to it differ widely. There are, for example, Walter Boyle and Max Applegate, who serve at St. Aloysius as school guidance counsellor and principal respectively. Passing as heterosexuals, they have been living in a relationship for more than a decade. Their concerted efforts to keep their secret life well-hidden from the school community are repeatedly rendered as comedy: "Monday, Walter decides to walk to work instead of taking the bus while the diapered and swaddled giant squalling baby Sir Max, His Royal Highness, the Sulking King of Coffee Tables . . . as principal of the school and so technically Walter's boss, drives away and onward to his special, reserved parking space at the school." In the immediate aftermath of Patrick's suicide, however, Walter and Max develop in different directions. Concerned first and foremost with outward appearances, Max is glad that Patrick did not kill himself on school property: "It's technically not a school issue." Walter, in contrast, examines his own dubious role in the suicide. Seeking the assistance of the guidance counsellor, Patrick had been met with nothing but "globs of canned therapy-speak." In the course of the novel, Walter not only questions the conservative values of the school, he also abandons his secret life with Max.

Other perspectives are provided by both of Patrick's parents, by his lover Ginger, by Mrs. Mochinski, his English teacher currently in the middle of a divorce, by Faraday, a classmate obsessed with her virginity and mythical unicorns, and by several others. All of these characters try to keep their lives together while simultaneously coming to terms with Patrick's death: "As the dead boy's mother, you wonder how you got here." The ease with which Mayr switches among thirteen points of view is admirable. She finds the perfect pitch and register for each single character. The necessary link between the individual chapters is provided by a fast-paced, often comical narrative and by a highly developed ear for rhythm. The most obvious example of this style is probably the novel's opening chapter itself, in which the decision to kill himself quickly ripens in Patrick. With several paragraphs starting off with a straightforward "because," "The End" is a staccato barrage of reasons why "the dead boy" wants to end his life.

Patrick Furey dies at the novel's very beginning. In the final chapter, the world of St. Aloysius itself comes to an end as the unicorns of the novel's title stampede through the school building: "The school gored, broken, and now empty." In a surprising twist, Mayr here violates the basic assumptions of the genre of the realist novel, and I would assume that not all of her readers will be pleased with the narrative's outcome. Nonetheless, the vengeance enacted on Patrick's behalf by the mythological animals finally brings to a halt a perverted school system. Winner of the W. O. Mitchell Book Prize in the author's native Calgary and longlisted for the Giller Prize, *Monoceros* underscores Suzette Mayr's status as one of the major voices in contemporary Canadian fiction.

Alexi Zentner's novel *Touch* had its origin in the short story of the same title published in the Fall 2006 issue of the literary journal *Tin House*. Albeit in a different form, the story now serves Zentner as the opening chapter of his debut novel. The section still contains the haunting image of a girl trapped under the ice of the Sawgamet River. According to Zentner, this is the image that came to him first and led him to construct a larger story around it. The young girl breaking through the ice while skating is Marie, the sister of Zentner's first-person narrator Stephen. Not only does the young Stephen witness the death of his sister, he also has to stand by helplessly as his father loses his life while trying to rescue Marie. Three decades later, this tragedy continues to haunt Stephen: "Memories are another way to raise the dead." Now in his early forties, Stephen returns from Vancouver to Sawgamet, the remote village in Western Canada where he was born and raised. Here, his mother lies dying and Stephen, an Anglican priest, takes over the local church from his stepfather. This moment of crisis, in combination with the return home, forces Stephen to confront the history of his family, a history closely intertwined with the history of Sawgamet.

Spanning four generations, *Touch* chronicles the story of the village from the late 1860s to the Second World War. Indebted to the genre of the Canadian pioneer narrative, Zentner's novel tells of the hardships and privations of claiming the land. The descriptions of the early logging trade in British Columbia, for instance, are rich in detail. In contrast to classic pioneer memoirs, however, *Touch* as a work of fiction does not focus primarily on a realistic representation of the settlement experience. Like Joseph Boyden in *Three Day Road* and *Through Black Spruce*, Zentner skilfully sews mythical figures and legends into the fabric of his narrative. In the course of the novel, readers of *Touch* encounter a *mahaha*, which is a kind of snow demon, a *qallupilluit*, which is a sea witch, and other mythological creatures. In several interviews, Zentner makes use of the term "mythical realism" to clearly distinguish his appropriation of North American legends from the magical realism of Latin American writers such as Gabriel García Márquez and Isabel Allende. Ultimately, for the principal characters of Zentner's novel, a deep knowledge of the legends of Western Canada proves to be necessary for survival in the uncharted wilderness. Perhaps it is the measure of Zentner's success as a storyteller that the mythical and the realistic elements in *Touch* do not cancel each other out. The history of his birthplace, as retold by Stephen, is a blend of both worlds: "Sawgamet has changed. The darkness driven away. But, I tell my daughters, there are still parts of the forest that remain secret, places where the mountains can loom close upon us, where shape-shifters fly past us in the dark." In the narrative present of the 1940s, the line that separates wilderness from civilization is still precariously thin.

Apparently, Alexi Zentner is currently at work on a sequel to *Touch*. It will be interesting to see where his remarkable talent will carry him next.

La bataille du livre

Jacques Michon

Histoire de l'édition littéraire au Québec au XX^{e} siècle, vol. 3 : la bataille du livre 1960-2000. Fides 39,95 $

Compte rendu par Olivier Lapointe

La bataille du livre 1960-2000, troisième et dernier tome de l'*Histoire de l'édition littéraire au Québec au XX^{e} siècle*, vient clore cet ambitieux projet dirigé par Jacques Michon et auquel ont participé plusieurs dizaines de chercheurs et d'étudiants affiliés au GRELQ, le Groupe de recherches et d'études sur le livre au Québec rattaché à l'Université de Sherbrooke.

Michon et ses collaborateurs tracent dans cet ouvrage un portrait détaillé de l'évolution de ce secteur d'activité qui, comme le laisse entendre le titre du volume, fut marqué tout au long de la période ciblée par divers conflits lors desquels les éditeurs québécois durent monter aux barricades afin de défendre leurs intérêts dans « un marché dominé par le commerce de gros et dont la plus grande partie des revenus prov[enait] de la vente d'ouvrages importés ». Ce portrait, pour l'essentiel constitué d'analyses de trajectoires d'éditeurs regroupées selon diverses thématiques, fait intervenir un large éventail d'acteurs du milieu, des grandes maisons généralistes aux petites entreprises confidentielles, en passant par les éditeurs spécialisés en poésie, en littérature jeunesse, en littérature de grande diffusion et en littérature anglophone.
On y trouve aussi, en fin de volume, trois chapitres consacrés à des phénomènes étroitement liés au monde de l'édition littéraire soit la censure, la distribution et la librairie, de même que deux annexes. L'une, très brève, porte sur le livre de poche, tandis que l'autre présente une chronologie des politiques provinciale et fédérale du livre. De nombreuses illustrations et photographies, placées pour la plupart à la fin du chapitre auquel elles sont liées, viennent étayer les propos des chercheurs.

La période couverte par cet ouvrage regroupe deux phases de croissance du milieu du livre québécois. La première, qui s'est étendue du début des années soixante jusqu'au milieu des années soixante-dix, voit l'édition québécoise connaître un essor considérable favorisé par certains facteurs liés au contexte sociopolitique particulier que fut celui du Québec de la Révolution tranquille, facteurs qui se traduisirent par un accroissement significatif de l'interventionnisme étatique et une effervescence intellectuelle hors du commun. Cette dernière a suscité l'apparition de nombreuses maisons d'édition dynamiques et innovatrices qui se sont données pour mission la diffusion massive des nouveaux idéaux laïques, progressistes et démocratiques qui obtenaient à cette époque l'appui d'un nombre croissant d'intellectuels et de citoyens québécois. Cette phase de croissance, qui a aussi vu, dans le secteur de la distribution, s'étioler la domination des libraires grossistes et débuter le règne des distributeurs exclusifs, s'est achevée au milieu des années soixante-dix pour laisser sa place à un essoufflement généralisé du milieu du livre au Québec. Les ventes ont ainsi chuté de façon dramatique et plusieurs maisons d'édition ont été soudainement confrontées à d'importantes difficultés financières.

Afin de remédier à cette situation difficile, de nombreux éditeurs québécois ont, tout en tirant bien souvent profit des programmes d'aide à l'industrie du livre mis sur pied par les deux paliers de gouvernement au début des années quatre-vingt, adopté un virage commercial et investi des genres (*instant books*, romans grand public, traductions de best-sellers internationaux, etc.) auparavant réservés aux grandes entreprises étrangères. Ils ont ainsi pu s'attaquer à ces dernières sur leurs propres terrains. Les succès commerciaux remportés par ces éditeurs semblent malheureusement avoir favorisé une tendance à la concentration des moyens de production du livre québécois, tendance qui constitue maintenant l'un des principaux obstacles auxquels sont confrontés les éditeurs québécois indépendants.

Le troisième tome de l'*Histoire de l'édition littéraire au Québec* se caractérise par une cohérence structurelle, une unité de style et une lisibilité qui forcent l'admiration dès lors que l'on prend en compte la multiplicité des sujets traités ainsi que le nombre important de chercheurs impliqués dans la production de l'ouvrage. Ces derniers semblent, par ailleurs, avoir été sensibles à certaines des critiques qui leur avaient été faites à la suite de la parution des tomes précédents et ont, de fait, diminué de beaucoup le nombre de tableaux, de graphes et de statistiques qui alourdissaient quelque peu la lecture des deux premiers volumes. On eût tout de même apprécié un recours plus soutenu à l'analyse quantitative et aux données chiffrées. Quantité d'informations facilement accessibles auraient en effet pu être mises à profit de façon à donner de l'éditeur québécois de la seconde moitié du vingtième siècle un portrait encore plus achevé.

Cette réserve faite, nous croyons important de souligner une dernière fois, en guise de conclusion, la qualité et l'intérêt de cet ouvrage remarquable dont la lecture saura profiter à quiconque s'intéresse à l'histoire littéraire du Québec.

Raw Power

Leigh Nash
Goodbye, Ukulele. Mansfield $16.95

Lillian Necakov
Hooligans. Mansfield $16.95

Natasha Nuhanovic
Stray Dog Embassy. Mansfield $16.95

Robert Earl Stewart
Campfire Radio Rhapsody. Mansfield $16.95

Carey Toane
The Crystal Palace. Mansfield $16.95

Reviewed by Jim Johnstone

In 2010, Mansfield Press established an imprint to brand books acquired and vetted by poetry editor Stuart Ross. Including the title "a stuart ross book" is Ross' way to add to a publishing legacy that began with Proper Tales Press in the 1980s and has expanded to include a diverse cross-section of small press ventures. This review focuses on five very different trade collections that were edited by Ross over the past three years.

Robert Earl Stewart's *Campfire Radio Rhapsody* works best when its subject matter suits its bombast. "The Country Reporter," a six-part long poem that follows a newsman as he photographs accidents in a small town, is one such instance. Each section reads like a snapshot, and Stewart's winding lines allow him to shift adeptly between microscopic and macroscopic levels of detail to produce a sense of uncertainty and anticipation. His protagonist "capture[s] the farmer's sarcoma noses, / their cruel, wet, meat-speculating mouths— / an archive of their simple darkness," and as he does, the poem becomes an extended meditation on death from the perspective of a man whose life is shrouded in "a gorgeous oblivion." Unfortunately, the excess that makes "The Country Reporter" compelling muddles the rest of the collection. Take "A Moon Called the Moon," which is marred by redundancies such as "The tide raises all boats. / All boats rise with the tides. / Rising, boats; a moon." These lines strain to produce meaning through juxtaposition but ultimately fail to rise above the vista they describe.

In "Eye on the Prize," the poem that opens *Goodbye, Ukulele*, Leigh Nash asks, "Who / will hug a scavenger." It is a question answered over the course of the collection by combining lyric fragments to craft poems that read like collage. Nash excels when taking incongruous narrative strides. Her poems often shift abruptly, exploiting rhetorical devices to keep the reader off balance. She also has an eye for unsettling images, and similes like "clouds scattered / like wisdom teeth in a silvery bowl" and "A delicate bomb / ticked down like a mallet apologizing / to the sweet side of a bass drum," from the excellent "A Suit of Light," add depth to her observations and make *Goodbye, Ukulele* a compelling read.

Hooligans, Lillian Necakov's fifth full-length book of poetry, is equal to its title: raucous, daring, and playful. The most experienced writer in the quintet reviewed here, Necakov relies on an innate musicality to provide a cohesive through-line in her poems; her work is sparsely punctuated and propelled forward with sonic, rather than narrative, momentum. Among the standout pieces in *Hooligans*, "The Walking Debt" impresses with the subversive character of lines like "a hundred dark judgments fluttered / out of my incision / the distance we must walk / is in direct proportion to our trespass" and "The Burning Man" benefits from a jubilant inscrutability. When Necakov writes, "I am as dangerous as a burst fire hydrant" in "Secret Hanging," she does so with conviction.

Natasha Nuhanovic's *Stray Dog Embassy* is populated with unreliable narrators. The opening stanza from "Revolution in the Hospital" provides an example: "Nothing is wrong with me, / everything is wrong with the others, / in this country of mumbling iron beds / where hospital prisoners trade sheets warm as sunsets / for a journey through morphine landscapes." While the protagonist's egoism in this stanza could be used to distort meaning, Nuhanovic does little to exploit her delusion and "Revolution in the Hospital" devolves into a prescriptive take on institutionalization that romanticizes mental illness. The poem also suffers from flat diction and clichéd imagery, both of which prove symptomatic of the collection as a whole.

Finally, Carey Toane's debut, *The Crystal Palace*, mixes high and low culture to examine the evolution of human achievement, focusing primarily on the impact of the industrial revolution. Her work is more polished than that of Nash, Nuhanovic, or Stewart, and she displays a natural feel for rhythm and meter in poems like "The Lives of the Engineers" and "The Crystal Palace (Reprise)." While she is often bogged down by the trite nature of her subject matter—poems devoted to soft drinks, Google, and corn dogs lack the emotional character needed to extend beyond the surface of consciousness—Toane's work is consistently engaging and embodies the raw power of the Mansfield titles chosen by Stuart Ross over his tenure as poetry editor.

Black Chronicles

Donna Bailey Nurse

What's a Black Critic to Do II: Interviews, Profiles and Reviews of Black Writers. Insomniac $19.95

Dionne Brand

Chronicles: Early Works. Wilfrid Laurier UP $24.95

Ann Towell

Grease Town. Tundra $19.99

Reviewed by Pilar Cuder-Domínguez

These three books chronicle the lives and writing of black people in Canada in remarkable though different ways. Donna Bailey Nurse embarked on her project to "keep some lasting record of contemporary black Canadian letters" in 2003 with the publication of *What's a Black Critic to Do*. This second volume supplements the first by collecting interviews, profiles, and reviews scattered in publications between 2007 and 2011 in a structure already familiar to readers of her earlier book. While many of the works she discusses are by black Canadians, some are more loosely connected to the subject. However, all come together in a wide-ranging, reader-friendly whole that generally addresses questions of race and belonging. Whether she is discussing the work of Nobel Laureates Wole Soyinka and Toni Morrison or interviewing the BC writer Wayde Compton and the African Canadian poet and historian Afua Cooper, among many others, Nurse relentlessly interrogates the multifaceted engagement of the black writer with his or her time, place, and audience. In her introduction, Nurse pinpoints two events that have enhanced black Canadian letters since the first volume of *Black Critic*: the Calabash literary festival in Jamaica (to whose founders Nurse now dedicates this second book) and the publication of Lawrence Hill's *Book of Negroes*. Whether or not one agrees with Nurse, it is undeniable that black Canadian literature in the wake of the bicentenary of the abolition of the slave trade is not lacking in such groundbreaking events. The success of *The Book of Negroes*, winner of the 2008 Commonwealth Writers' Prize, has been followed very closely by that of Esi Edugyan's second novel, *Half-Blood Blues,* shortlisted for the prestigious 2011 Man Booker Prize. Both attest to growing international recognition and swelling audiences.

Although not featuring among the writers in Nurse's book, the Toronto poet Dionne Brand has played a major role in the development of contemporary black Canadian literature. Leslie Sanders had catered for interested readers in an edition of Brand's selected poetry published in 2009 under the title *Fierce Departures*, and she now writes the foreword for *Chronicles*, both under the auspices of Wilfrid Laurier University Press. The earlier book provided a way in for newcomers to Brand's poetry, collecting some of her best known work—like *No Language Is Neutral* (1990) or the Governor General's Award winner *Land to Light On* (1997)—whereas *Chronicles* turns to three volumes dating back to the early 1980s. Yet one can nonetheless identify in them the unmistakable voice and concerns of Toronto's best-loved black poet for, as Sanders knowledgeably argues, Brand's work "explores and chronicles how history shapes human existence, in particular the lives of those ruptured and scattered by New World slaveries and modern crises." Even though they do not constitute, strictly speaking, her earliest published poetry, they stand out as a period of experimentation with form, in which Brand tested out the classic epigram by way of Ernesto Cardenal and the lengthier, Neruda-inflexed canto. Sanders aptly points out the connections running through Brand's poetry as well as the persistent influences of several Caribbean and Latin American writers. *Chronicles of the Hostile Sun* contains some of the most powerful lines in the book, particularly in the sections dealing with the US invasion of

Grenada in 1983, where Brand lived while she was a CUSO volunteer involved in development work.

Finally, the notion of history also features prominently in Anne Towell's children's novel *Grease Town*, about the oil boom in southern Ontario in the 1860s. It is the story of twelve-year-old Titus Sullivan, a clever and enterprising child who builds a deep friendship with a black boy his age, Moses Croucher, and with an Irish teenager, Mercy Merriman. Towell's novel paints a lively picture of the oil town from the boy's perspective, in a manner fairly reminiscent in plot and characterization of Mark Twain's gift for telling stories of local import through the eyes of children. It starts out as an adventure story when an excited Titus travels with his elder brother to Oil Springs, but what appears as the land of opportunity turns into the land of inequality when the author pays careful attention to the often neglected presence of black people in these boomtowns, performing the hardest jobs for much lower wages and being the target of occasional racial violence. Titus experiences first-hand the ravaging violence of racism when a rioting mob torches the black settlement, beating and chasing away whole families. *Grease Town* imparts not only an engaging history lesson for young readers, but also a valuable lesson in showing that even a child can stand tall against racism, as Titus learns. While the novel occasionally veers towards the sentimental, it provides an engaging picture of the period while making clear that not everyone lived the oil boom of southern Ontario in the same way.

Sense and Senselessness

Craig Francis Power
Blood Relatives. Pedlar $21.00

Maura Hanrahan
Sheilagh's Brush. Inanna $22.95

Reviewed by Heidi Butler

Craig Francis Power's perspective on contemporary St. John's and Maura Hanrahan's exploration of a 1920s outport community both examine the choices available to characters who feel they must make sense out of senseless situations. In doing so, these novels offer refreshing perspectives on themes popular in Newfoundland literature. The dark humour of *Blood Relatives* and the complex relationships among family and community members in *Sheilagh's Brush* help the novels avoid re-presenting tired narratives. Instead, they deliver compelling stories of survival and attachment.

In *Blood Relatives*, Power presents Charlie, a thirty-one-year-old custodian who attempts to reconcile his difficult relationship with his deceased father. Charlie feels alone in a community of social outcasts, including Sam, Charlie's gay brother; Eva, Sam's transgendered wife; Hank, Charlie's alcoholic friend; and Theresa, a local prostitute. The hopelessness and chaos in which Charlie feels immersed might easily overwhelm the novel, but Power skilfully uses black humour to highlight the absurdity of Charlie's life. Charlie's attempts toward a "normal" life will inevitably fail, as Power suggests that his characters will never form uncomplicated relationships or live easily ever after. Charlie identifies how inaccessible such a simple life is when, during a gathering at which the group attempts to conjure the spirit of Charlie's late father, he thinks, "I felt like I was at the beginning of some awful joke. So a gay Newfie, a transsexual Newfie, a terribly depressed Newfie, and two Newfie whores are holding a séance." This scene, like many others in the novel, leaves readers unsure whether Charlie's situation is tragic or funny. Ultimately, his life is simply absurd—a mixture of tragedy and comedy that charms even as it suffocates.

Hanrahan's *Sheilagh's Brush* also presents a theme familiar in Newfoundland literature: that of rural inhabitants pitted in a battle against the land and, sometimes, against each other. However, no simple choices are available for the people of Rennie's Bay; Hanrahan skilfully explores the ways in which characters can take responsibility for their actions and the extent to which they can survive uncontrollable tragedies. Protagonist Sheilagh Driscoll and her younger sister Claire Farrell are among a group of women who feel doomed to produce and raise large families at the expense of their physical and emotional well-being. Neither woman is presented as infallible; this is especially true of Sheilagh, whose relationship with her daughter Leah seems both endearingly protective and disturbingly possessive. Such depth is not always common in representations of outport women, but Hanrahan's characters are complex individuals who are often forced to make difficult choices. Only by controlling her reproductive decisions, and by supporting her sister in her choices, can Sheilagh remain in the town to which she feels strongly connected and can Claire pursue her dream of leaving the outport. Like Power, Hanrahan evokes Newfoundland's people and landscape without essentializing either and suggests that absurd situations are best endured by embracing others who pursue the meaning hidden in senselessness.

"always reconstructing"

Sina Queyras

Autobiography of Childhood. Coach House $19.95

Reviewed by Maia Joseph

"In order to make you understand, to give you my life, I must tell you a story," the character Bernard reflects toward the end of Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*, "and there are so many, and so many—stories of childhood, stories of school, love, marriage, death, and so on; and none of them are true. Yet like children we tell each other stories." Bernard, the storyteller among *The Waves*' six primary characters, goes on in this moment to express his desire "for some little language such as lovers use, broken words, inarticulate words." But Sina Queyras—who has engaged extensively with Woolf's work in her poetry, and whose first novel, *Autobiography of Childhood*, seems to listen and respond to Bernard's words—has made the surprising move, for a poet, of turning *toward* narrative. As the title suggests, Queyras attends in her novel to that most deeply rooted yet always shape-shifting story, that story which is "always reconstructing as we remember" (as Queyras puts it): the story of childhood. She also explores the story that so often refuses to be a story, that most threatens to leave us broken and inarticulate: the story of death.

Author of four poetry collections, editor of an anthology of Canadian poetry, and a popular and respected poetry blogger, Queyras has proven herself an important generative force in Canadian and international poetry circles. In reflections for The Poetry Foundation on her turn to the novel, she has emphasized her interest in the form's capacity for entering the thoughts and experiences of others, and for offering "not necessarily replications of reality, but versions, slices, illuminations." The novel form allows her "to see what gets in [people's] way and how they handle it."

In *Autobiography of Childhood*, Queyras illuminates the lives of six members of the Combal family—siblings Therese, Guddy, Jerry, Bjarne, and Annie and father Jean—on the day that Therese dies of cancer. The family members are all grown, dispersed, and in many ways deeply disconnected, having never fully recovered from the death of another sibling, Joe, in childhood. Queyras has described *Autobiography of Childhood* as "perhaps" a poet's novel; and certainly its multi-perspectival and serial qualities, as well as Queyras' interest in the "why" of action in the text, place the book in the tradition of the Canadian poet's novel as defined by Ian Rae in his recent study *From Cohen to Carson: The Poet's Novel in Canada*. Dividing her novel into six sections and focalizing the narrative through the perspective of each character in turn, Queyras explores how the characters remain "tethered" to their childhoods through the stories they tell about it and how their stories inflect their experiences and relationships with each other. The power of these stories, in Queyras' account, makes childhood an almost palpable presence accompanying the characters as they move through their adult lives. By setting each childhood story alongside those of siblings and parents, Queyras is able to foreground the stories' limits and fissures and to show how they emerge in intimate relation to others.

Autobiography of Childhood can, as I indicated at the outset, be read as a return to and renovation and resituation of Woolf's work. The novel resembles *The Waves* in its attention to the interlocking lives of six characters, and also, structurally, in the brief interlude sections that Queyras uses to divide the main sections of her text. In her attempt to articulate the form and feel of childhood memories—their highly sensual, embodied, and emotional qualities—Queyras also works in similar territory to Woolf's autobiographical "A Sketch of the Past." And in making a lost loved one an organizing force in the experiences of her characters, Queyras remembers not only *The Waves*, but also *To the Lighthouse* and *Jacob's Room*. But while Queyras returns to Woolf's work in her novel, *Autobiography of Childhood* is decidedly distinctive and contemporary. Queyras attends carefully to the way that a combination of social forces, family experiences, and apparently innate personality traits shapes each of her characters, informing how they respond to a range of situations, from job demands in an increasingly unstable labour market to the death of a sibling. Emerging from working-class roots, the Combals each face the limited options and precariousness in their lives differently, sometimes deepening and sometimes fraying connections with each other as they do so.

While *Autobiography of Childhood* is primarily concerned with the bonds between members of a family, it is also about the love for—and loss of—a city. The novel is especially timely in this sense, coming as it does during a period when, as poet and critic Jeff Derksen has observed, public and private stakeholders are increasingly championing and relying on our love of the city as they promote projects and forms of urban change that are not necessarily in our best interest. Queyras approaches the idea of loving a city with the criticality that Derksen encourages, highlighting the social and economic conditions which make this love difficult, complicated, and, for some, impossible.

Set in Vancouver during the period leading up to the 2010 Winter Olympics, *Autobiography of Childhood* highlights not only the city's natural beauty and progressive spirit, but also the rampant real estate speculation and periods of intensive redevelopment that have punctuated Vancouver's history, the lack of affordable housing, and the limited job market. The character Guddy, who left Vancouver for graduate school knowing she would probably never be able to return, aches for the city. Her brother Jerry, relegated to a basement suite in the suburbs, hates the city and the greed that, for him, it represents. Therese—having hung on until she finally found her way off a housing waitlist and into a subsidized apartment—loves Vancouver defiantly, even though her decision to stay restricts her career options. Just as Queyras' characters have developed their stories in relation to each other, so too has the city shaped those stories. Queyras treats this connection with the same sensitivity and perceptiveness that she devotes to family ties, bringing the city alive through a series of small but potent details in her characters' thoughts and reminiscences. Such dedicated attention to people in place makes *Autobiography of Childhood* not only a powerful portrait of a family suffering in the wake of loss, but also a vital contribution to urban literature in Canada.

La littérature québécoise, versant mâle

Lori Saint-Martin
Au-delà du nom : la question du père dans la littérature québécoise actuelle. PUM 34,95 $

Victor-Laurent Tremblay
Être ou ne pas être un homme : la masculinité dans le roman québécois. David 36,00 $

Compte rendu par Benoît Trudel

Si les chercheurs en littérature au Québec ont su approfondir les études féministes et les recherches sur la femme, le travail sur la masculinité en est encore au stade du défrichage. Difficile alors d'imaginer deux chercheurs mieux en mesure de manier la bêche que Lori Saint-Martin et Victor-Laurent Tremblay. Reconnue notamment pour ses travaux sur le féminin en littérature, Saint-Martin nous livre avec *Au-delà du nom* un ambitieux aperçu du personnage paternel et des rapports parfois complexes qui le lient aux autres personnages. Tremblay, pour sa part, était déjà reconnu pour ses analyses de la masculinité avant de faire paraitre *Être ou ne pas être un homme*, un vaste survol du phallocentrisme au Québec.

Pour accomplir ce survol, Tremblay s'inspire des théories de l'imaginaire (Durand) et de la tradition de la psychanalyse (Freud, Lacan), sans compter René Girard et Éric Gans chez qui il puise beaucoup. À un niveau fondamental, l'ouvrage privilégie le passage de l'homme de son état naturel à son état culturel, d'où serait issu le cadre imaginaire qui perdure aujourd'hui — c'est-à-dire tout ce qui est rites, lois et différence sexuelle. Et c'est suivant cette différence sexuelle que le masculin serait devenu synonyme de pouvoir. Le premier chapitre du livre s'avère une admirable synthèse des études queer. Tremblay explique en quoi les manifestations sociales entre humains peuvent être liées à la libido, laquelle n'est plus uniquement synonyme de pulsion sexuelle. Dès lors, le désir mâle se précise en un désir de se distinguer de tout ce qui est perçu comme faible et féminin — une tendance qui est loin d'être révolue et qui n'échappe pas à l'imaginaire québécois. Pour en faire la démonstration, l'analyse du corpus remonte aux origines et couvre la littérature québécoise jusqu'à aujourd'hui. Dans certaines œuvres en particulier (dont notamment *Jean Rivard* de Gérin-Lajoie), la lecture de l'homosocial est loin de manquer de pertinence. Le mélange des théories queer, féministes, de l'imaginaire et de l'intertextualité, et de l'analyse de la figure de l'étranger est on ne peut plus approprié et porte à conclure aux bienfaits d'une multiplicité d'approches. L'étude de Tremblay est très complète, recouvrant dans autant de chapitres les cinq thématiques que sont le nationalisme patriotique, la guerre, le sport, le néonationalisme et la relation père-fils. Les pages sur la féminisation de l'idéal patriotique dans certains romans du dix-neuvième siècle ne manqueront pas de convaincre; tout comme, d'ailleurs, l'évolution des structures masculines dans les romans de la guerre. Le lecteur profitera aussi de la présentation historique et théorique de l'élément examiné (le sport, la guerre, etc.) au début de chaque chapitre.

Saint-Martin prend en quelque sorte le relais de Tremblay en se penchant sur la figure du père; alors que lui en discute dans son dernier chapitre, elle y consacre tout un ouvrage. Or ce dernier s'avère d'emblée plus accessible. Une certaine souplesse de l'analyse aura comme effet d'admettre que la représentation du père se caractérise par sa multiplicité; c'est ainsi qu'elle se métamorphose et résiste à la catégorisation. L'excellent esprit de synthèse de l'auteure lui permet, dans une première partie théorique, de passer en revue de façon limpide les écrits sur le père dans les domaines historique, sociologique et psychanalytique. L'étude proprement dite de la représentation du père est divisée selon la perspective. Une première partie relève ainsi les réactions face au père dont notamment, dans une vulgarisation remarquable, le procès du patriarcat par les féministes québécoises. Une analyse du père incestueux est précédée de la confrontation entre une vision féministe et une vision psychanalytique de ce tabou. Si, sur près de 150 pages, la lecture des romans s'attarde du côté des enfants-victimes au détriment de la figure du père proprement dite, il reste que certains chapitres brillent — celui, par exemple, sur le personnage de la fille qui désire tuer son père. La quatrième partie de l'ouvrage est recentrée davantage sur le personnage du père, sur son refus de procréer et sur son désir empêché d'être père. On découvre ensuite que si la mère se trouve souvent exclue au profit de la relation père-enfant, le deuil de l'enfant aura l'effet d'exacerber les confrontations entre les deux parents. La discussion sur les narrateurs qui font état de la beauté de la paternité est d'un intérêt tout à fait particulier; comme le suggère Saint-Martin, la notion de paternité et celle aussi de masculinité sont nuancées dans ce type d'œuvre. L'auteure va jusqu'à conclure, dans le premier des trois derniers chapitres, que la littérature québécoise nous donne une nouvelle version de ce qu'est un père. Un bon père, s'il rompt souvent avec la norme (voire la loi), aime ses enfants et entretient de bonnes relations avec eux — à tel point que ce sont eux, avec la mère, qui ont l'autorité de juger de la qualité de la paternité. Les deux derniers chapitres relèvent, d'une part, les personnages paternels qui s'éloignent du fait féminin, repliement dans lequel ils entrainent leurs enfants, et, d'autre part, l'évolution sociale mise en scène par la fiction où le père joue un rôle qui dépasse le stéréotype.

Certains lecteurs seront peut-être mal à l'aise vis-à-vis des approches adoptées par Tremblay et Saint-Martin; les notions de patriarcat, de phallocentrisme et de castration symbolique requièrent une certaine adhésion théorique. Pour quiconque y souscrit, cependant, ne serait-ce que la durée d'une lecture, l'expérience ne manquera pas de richesse. Dans les deux cas, un nombre étonnant d'œuvres littéraires est passé en revue : plus de cinquante œuvres étudiées par Saint-Martin, presque trois cents titres mentionnés dans la bibliographie de Tremblay. Cette richesse fait des deux ouvrages non seulement d'excellents livres de référence, mais aussi des outils indispensables pour soit accroitre ses connaissances du corpus québécois, soit mettre à jour — et en doute — ce que l'ont croit savoir.

Posthuman in Waterloo

Robert J. Sawyer
Wake. Penguin $13.50

Robert J. Sawyer
Watch. Penguin $13.50

Robert J. Sawyer
Wonder. Penguin $13.50

Reviewed by Rick Gooding

Since the early 1990s, Robert J. Sawyer's reputation for writing science fiction with a distinctly Canadian sensibility has grown both domestically and abroad, and his work has won nearly a dozen Aurora Awards in Canada as well as a Nebula and a Hugo south of the border. Although Sawyer is best known for speculative fiction aimed at adults, his recently completed WWW Trilogy occupies the place where science fiction and young adult literature intersect. As *Wake* opens, mutant network packets are spontaneously rearranging themselves in increasingly complex ways, giving rise to an artificial intelligence in cyberspace. Meanwhile, Caitlin Decter, a blind fifteen-year-old math prodigy from Texas, is beginning a new school year in Waterloo, where her father has taken a position at the Perimeter Institute. The unusual nature of Caitlin's blindness, essentially a communication problem between eye and brain, makes her a promising candidate for an experimental implant that shunts impulses from her retina to servers in Japan, where the information is decoded and then sent back to her optic nerve. Caitlin's unique connection to the world wide web allows her first to perceive cyberspace visually and then to detect and communicate with the emerging intelligence, which she names Webmind. Part coming-of-age story and part contemplation on the nature of selfhood in a posthuman world, Sawyer's trilogy chronicles Caitlin's maturation, her changing relationship with Webmind, and the utopian effects on the global village of an ever-expanding artificial intelligence.

As one would expect of a trilogy spanning nearly twelve hundred pages, the main narrative spins off numerous subplots. Chinese freedom bloggers vie with government officials to control web access to the Western world, an American surveillance agency works to destroy Webmind in the name of national security, and around the world hackers mysteriously begin disappearing. Plot elements that don't relate directly to Webmind's emergence and salutary effects on world order explore selfhood in ways that trouble familiar liberal-humanist assumptions about the centrality of human experience. In the most notable of these, Hobo, a chimpanzee-bonobo hybrid, begins creating representational art and then demanding the right to determine his future. The other main concern of Sawyer's trilogy, Caitlin's emergence into adulthood, weaves together Caitlin's attempts at understanding her autistic father, achieving détente over religious and cultural disagreements with her friend Bashira, and venturing into the world of adult sexuality with Matt, her first boyfriend.

Much of Sawyer's work is at least peripherally concerned with differences between Canadian and American culture. In choosing a displaced Texan as the main focalizer, Sawyer gently defamiliarizes Canada for Canadians, while underscoring for American readers the distinctiveness of Canadian culture. Sawyer's concern with his American readership is also evident in the way hot-button social issues are treated: the sensibility is that of a left-of-centre Canadian, but the examples are overwhelmingly American. The action is set against the backdrop of the autumn 2012 presidential campaign, and although American political figures aren't named, many are clearly recognizable. Proposition 8 is seen through the eyes of Hobo's keeper, Shoshana Glick, who lives in San Diego with her same-sex partner, and Caitlin's mother often finds herself discussing the moral and legal dimensions of abortion and, more generally, Republican legislative attacks on women's reproductive rights.

As these preoccupations suggest, Sawyer's novels belong to the "hard," philosophical tradition of science fiction in which simple characters discuss big ideas. It's a mode likely to appeal to young readers' burgeoning political and philosophical awareness, though much less likely to engage them seriously in questions of identity formation. Caitlin is a preternaturally mature sixteen-year-old, so self-assured and well adjusted that, except for a statistical preoccupation with when she should lose her virginity, she seems to have little growing to do. Minor characters tend to be introduced formulaically—a name, a brief physical description, a character trait or two—and they are rarely as interesting as the ideas they explain. There is much talk of Zipf plots, Shannon-entropy scores, and game theory, and readers familiar with Katherine Hayles' work will find themselves in familiar territory in the discussion of cellular automata and Stephen Wolfram. Even the Monty Hall problem—probably the most widely explained probability puzzle of all—is trotted out yet again, though adolescent readers encountering it for the first time are unlikely to mind.

One limitation of such fiction is its stylistic and formal conservatism. There are none of the bewildering perceptual distortions that make Gibson's *Neuromancer* or its young adult counterparts like M. T. Anderson's *Feed* genuinely important contributions to the genre. Sawyer never fully succeeds in communicating Caitlin's disorientation at suddenly becoming sighted, and the problem of representing unfamiliar modes of subjectivity becomes intractable in the representation of Webmind, the only first-person perspective in the trilogy. As Webmind emerges into awareness, he (it's troubling how blithely posthuman entities are gendered) is presented as fully in control of language, even though at first he invokes complex concepts only to say he has no understanding of them. Representing non-human states of consciousness is of course a perennial problem for science fiction writers, but Sawyer is so deeply embedded in traditional modes of representation that he attempts no serious solutions.

And yet the trilogy is very readable. The pacing is deft, and Sawyer juggles and connects the many plot elements with aplomb. Some narrative strands—one relating to the Chinese freedom blogger Sinanthropus, and another to "the Hoser," a bully and possible sociopath that Caitlin knows—disappear for very long spells, but Sawyer inevitably returns to them, almost always to good effect. Nonetheless, the series exhibits some of the common liabilities of science fiction aimed at adolescents. Caitlin and her friends are too empowered for their age, and the Hobo plot takes a turn that is, from the perspective of older readers, simply implausible. The formulaic ending is also likely to disappoint some, but the long narrative arc and Sawyer's balancing of the personal, political, and philosophical will strike most as more than adequate compensation.

Vivre à l'ombre du mal

Élise Turcotte

Guyana. Leméac 20,95 $

Compte rendu par Krzysztof Jarosz

Montréal, visiblement à l'époque actuelle. Ana emmène de temps en temps son fils, Philippe, petit garçon qui se remet difficilement de la disparition de son père, Rudi, chez une jeune coiffeuse, Kimi. L'enfant se sent très bien en contact avec cette guyanaise au cœur simple et pleine de sagesse. Un jour, cependant, on apprend qu'elle s'est suicidée. Ana entame une enquête, soupçonnant à juste titre que le salon *Joli Coif* où officiait Kimi n'était qu'une couverture pour le trafic de drogues auquel s'adonnait Winston, le présumé fiancé de la jeune guyanaise. On n'est toutefois pas dans un polar classique, même si les crimes présents, passés, vécus et connus à travers les médias envahissent de partout Ana, elle-même victime d'un viol brutal en 1978, commis presque simultanément au massacre de la secte de Jim Jones à Jonestown, au Guyana : 913 adeptes retrouvés morts le 18 novembre 1978. L'histoire d'Ana et celle de Kimi se répondent ainsi en écho, celles de femmes violentées, avec, pour toile de fond, le meurtre collectif de Jonestown, que son instigateur, le fondateur de la secte, voulait faire passer pour un suicide. Le Guyana serait donc un pays emblématique du mal, du racisme, de la violence politique, mais aussi et surtout du mal infligé aux femmes qui sont en dernier ressort les cibles favorites et en quelque sorte naturelles de chaque type de violence. Mais Montréal elle-même n'est-elle pas la scène d'actes d'une brutalité atroce, même s'ils sont beaucoup moins fréquents qu'au Guyana? Évidemment, lorsqu'on cherche la filière « tiers-mondiste » du mal qui a tué Kimi, on remonte facilement à ses compatriotes installés dans la métropole québécoise, mais ce qu'Ana a connu, c'est un garçon tout à fait blanc et tout à fait « civilisé », Sheldon Clark, qui le lui a infligé. Un soir qu'ils étaient seuls dans un parc, Sheldon, ce garçon mystérieux entouré d'une aura romantique de barde, qui jouait si bien de la guitare, lui « a cassé un bras quand [elle a] voulu l'empêcher d'enlever [s]es souliers, puis [s]es jeans ». Sorti de prison, le même Sheldon rôde autour d'Ana qui « avai[t] presque réussi à réinventer [le bonheur] avec Rudi et Philippe ». Ensuite, il disparaît miraculeusement. On devine que c'est Rudi qui s'est chargé de le supprimer, avant d'être lui-même, quelques années plus tard, emporté par une leucémie. Désormais, Ana et Philippe doivent affronter un deuil qu'ils partagent tout en essayant de cacher l'un à l'autre leur incapacité de s'en remettre. C'est un peu tout cela qui explique pourquoi Ana (dont la mère était d'origine polonaise : information gratuite ou piste menant à l'enfer de l'histoire polonaise, heureusement coupée à temps?) entreprend son enquête. Car si l'on vit tous à l'ombre du mal, comme ne cesse de nous le rappeler Élise Turcotte, chaque fois que c'est possible il faut le combattre, ne pas permettre qu'il demeure impuni. Chaque fois que c'est possible, car si on peut (et doit) s'improviser justicier illégal et clandestin, comme Rudi qui débarrasse la surface du globe d'une crapule visiblement incurable, on ne peut rien contre une leucémie ni contre un mal à grande échelle, comme le meurtre à Jonestown. Cette dernière tragédie nous met sur une autre piste : celle d'un besoin d'amour et de confiance dont abusent les méchants. Finalement, aussi bien les adeptes de Jones ont de leur propre gré rejoint les rangs de la secte dirigée par un fou qu'Ana est venue, confiante, vers Sheldon, apprendre à jouer de la guitare et sans doute attirée par son charme mystérieux qui s'avère maléfique. Comment vivre à l'ombre du mal, avec la conscience du mal qu'on a subi? Comment se remettre d'un deuil qui a scindé notre vie en un avant rempli de bonheur et d'espoir, et en un après, quand on continue à vivre avec la conscience que le mal existe et qu'il peut ressurgir à tout moment? Comment se prémunir contre le mal qui est dans certains hommes, quand l'aspiration au bonheur consiste à s'ouvrir aux autres, à leur faire confiance? Telles semblent être les questions que pose Élise Turcotte dans son récent roman. Celui-ci fait d'ailleurs écho à ce qui la préoccupe aussi dans son dernier recueil de poèmes, *Ce qu'elle voit*, dans lequel elle entonne un chant funèbre en souvenir de nombreuses jeunes femmes victimes de Ciudad Juarez. Blaise Pascal dit que par toutes sortes de divertissements l'homme cherche à oublier qu'il est mortel, mais Pascal postule qu'on oublie le divertissement pour se tourner vers Dieu. Élise Turcotte ne propose pas le recours facile à la consolation divine. Même si elle parle surtout de femmes, avec son extrême sensibilité au mal, elle nous tire de notre anesthésie quotidienne pour nous faire affronter notre condition humaine, qu'elle sait extraire de la plus pacifique quotidienneté d'une société repue et hautement civilisée, tout en défendant le droit de vivre comme si le mal n'existait pas. Art difficile que seule peut-être une femme peut réussir, consciente de sa vulnérabilité qui fait d'elle la victime exposée à chaque violence, mais aussi consciente qu'elle est source et gardienne de la vie, la bougie que toute brise peut éteindre mais qui, tant qu'elle brille, ne cesse d'éclairer les ténèbres.

Peripheries of Fear

Gerry Turcotte

Peripheral Fear: Transformations of the Gothic in Canadian and Australian Fiction. Peter Lang $90.71

Reviewed by Daniel Burgoyne

Gerry Turcotte's *Peripheral Fear* is a collection of essays published separately in the 1990s. This work engages two important questions. First, if the Gothic is rooted in medieval revival, why does it play such a prominent role in colonialist writing of Australia and Canada? Second, how can a single genre negotiate both the imperatives and anxieties of colonialism and remain relevant to postcolonial literature?

Key to answering these questions is Turcotte's claim that the Gothic is a "topical index" of eighteenth-century change and conflict in Britain, including colonialism, global trade, and large-scale transformations of industry, social class, and belief. He emphasizes how writers take liberties with the antiquarian interest in the medieval that dominated early revival architecture and fiction. These liberties accrete the medieval with a macabre fascination with death, ghosts, and landscape aesthetics such as the picturesque and sublime, effectively displacing the Gothic from an interest in history and producing more metaphorical explorations. In writers like Ann Radcliffe, the "spurious" historical setting is used "to measure the limits and weaknesses of her own 'civilized' world." By the early nineteenth century, the Gothic genre was already flexible enough to articulate the experience of colonial settlers.

Turcotte observes how the disturbing and transgressive potential of British Gothic fiction had a tendency to fail, to recuperate the danger it posed. I think of Matthew Lewis' *The Monk*, where the supernatural at first disturbs and destabilizes but subsequently affirms the legitimacy of the church by authenticating Satanic damnation. Turcotte argues that colonial Gothic differs because the landscape and the danger confronted by settlers is not merely imagined. The openness and disturbance of the Gothic make it an apt genre for articulating colonial experience, but the New World setting intensifies the openness and disturbance because it can't be narratively recuperated.

One possible limitation with this analysis is that the Gothic is too generic: if "the very nature of colonial literature is predicated upon a notion of incompleteness, and displays a preoccupation with identity," perhaps the ambiguities of the Gothic can accommodate any colonial literature. Thus, I appreciate Turcotte's analysis of Frances Brooke's *The History of Emily Montague* and Henry Savery's *Quintus Servinton*, which shows that early colonial writing doesn't encompass the fear and disorientation characteristic of the Gothic. Nevertheless, I continue to wonder about the flexibility of Gothic as a genre label, especially with regard to postcolonial writing.

The emergence of Gothic taste in Canada and Australia during the early nineteenth century offers a vivid historical instance of how the genre is bound up in colonialism. By the 1790s, the Gothic was an accepted architectural style that was progressively adopted in Canada and Australia to signify Britain. This inversion of Gothic alterity corresponds with shifts in colonial Gothic that anticipate later postcolonial critiques and subversions. Drawing on what by now seems like a textbook reading of how Freud's idea of the uncanny informs analyses of the Gothic, Turcotte engages nineteenth-century novels, including John Richardson's *Wacousta* (1832) and James De Mille's *A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder* (1888). He shows how in these novels "fear of the familiar can come to surpass that of the unfamiliar."

As Turcotte observes, there are obvious limitations created because the book is a collection. For me, one example is raised by the analysis of the Gothic in Marian Engel's *Bear*. As part of this analysis, he turns to Julia Kristeva's work on abjection in *Powers of Horror* in order to show how women writers use the female body to appropriate the Gothic. While this use of Kristeva makes sense, I wonder why the abject, which provides such a companion and alternative to Freud's uncanny, is not applied to the other works that he discusses, specifically colonial Gothic. For instance, what is De Mille doing with abjection in *A Strange Manuscript*?

This book offered me a clearer sense of Turcotte's tripartite model of the Gothic that accounts for the progression from Old World Gothic, epitomized as "decaying heritage," to New World Gothic, characterized by risk and wonder, to the emergence of postcolonial Gothic that re-appropriates the genre in order to counter colonialist assumptions. In general, this triadic model helps explain how the Gothic can articulate unease or anxiety—a failure and re-inscription of colonialist models—while simultaneously working subversively to question the sufficiency of colonialist frameworks.

Peripheral Fear pioneered exploration of the Gothic outside of European and American literature, and it remains relevant as a point of departure for those working on colonial and postcolonial Gothic.

Suits: The Role of the Intellectual in Henry Kreisel's *The Rich Man*

Katherine Shwetz

Henry Kreisel's 1978 essay "Language and Identity" narrates Kreisel's process of learning English, an emotional experience in which he "learned at once, and in a very practical way, how closely linked identity is to language" (121). Kreisel's interest in language and communication is dealt with extensively in his 1948 novel *The Rich Man*, which centres on Jacob Grossman, a Jewish immigrant living in Canada and a longtime employee of a suit factory. *The Rich Man* follows Jacob's sole visit to his family in Vienna, one that he feels compelled to take despite the high cost of the trip and his relative poverty. Ashamed of his failure to achieve economic success, Jacob spends the majority of his life savings on extravagant gifts for his family and a white suit for himself. The impractical suit becomes a kind of costume for Jacob, as he begins to masquerade as a wealthy man on the trip over and maintains the illusion in front of his family in Vienna. Jacob's desire to preserve the appearance of wealth partly motivates his purchase of a modernist painting entitled *L'Entrepreneur* from Tassigny, a young painter who uses a modernist rhetoric that is difficult for Jacob to understand. Jacob's facade of wealth has serious repercussions when tragedy strikes his impoverished family in Austria: Albert, the idealistic young husband of Jacob's sister Shaendl, is suddenly killed and the rest of Jacob's family turns to him for financial support that he cannot provide.

The most significant communication barriers in the novel are related to ideology and education: Kreisel's characters struggle to communicate across what are essentially class barriers marked by access to modernist intellectual discourse. The already-marginalized characters struggle to communicate with one another, and their linguistic blockades mirror the impasse in ideological communication. Gramscian ideas about organic and traditional intellectuals speak to anxieties about education and the cultural roles that educated people take on in *The Rich Man*. The figures of modernist intellectuals in the novel—ranging from Tassigny the painter to Albert the intellectual to Shaendl—struggle to communicate their ideas to characters such as Jacob and his brother-in-law Reuben, who are less invested in the radical culture of the day. As a new and threatening hegemony begins to change their world, the modernist intellectuals in *The Rich Man* find themselves in increasingly perilous situations that are only exacerbated by their inability to adequately communicate. All of the Grossmans' political views and social goals are tied to their Jewish identities—Kreisel wrote *The Rich Man* after the threat of Nazism had become a reality, and the danger of being Jewish in Vienna prior to World War II underlies the actions of all the Jewish characters. Despite the radical and anti-fascist sentiments held by Albert, Tassigny, Koch, and Shaendl, these intellectual characters are (for the most part) constrained by ideas of traditional intellectualism that block them from adequately sharing their radical ideas—their inability (or unwillingness) to become more organic as intellectuals prevents them from creating the social movement depicted in their art and discourse. Of all the modernist intellectuals in the text, Shaendl is the only one to transcend these barriers and enter a kind of Gramscian organic intellectualism, a change impacted by the restrictions and conditions of her gendered identity. The inaccessible communication style employed by the modernist intellectuals negates the radical potential of modernist thought, as the opaqueness of modernism's message alienates it from a wider audience, thus aligning modernist thinkers with a hegemonic intelligentsia.

In his *Prison Notebooks*, Antonio Gramsci distinguishes between his ideas of organic and traditional intellectuals: organic intellectuals are emergent—or "elaborated"—from an upcoming social group, while traditional intellectuals are people who participate in a hegemonic and historically sanctioned structure of intellectual activity. Gramsci writes that traditional intellectuals "represent a historical continuity uninterrupted even by the most complicated and radical changes in political and social form" (7), but that this vision of historical continuity is false and merely covers up the hegemonic framework in which traditional intellectualism functions. Organic and traditional intellectuals have very different relationships with the wider public—the organic intellectual, as emergent *from* or aligned *with* this social group, is able to both participate in and communicate with society at large, while the traditional intellectual's association with current and past hegemonies bars them from successful dialogue with others. Steve Jones' observation that Gramsci's ideas of organic intellectualism hinge on the ability to "actively participate in practical life" (85) resonates with characters in Kreisel's text.

This distinction between traditional and organic intellectuals pervades Kreisel's novel as the figures of modernist thought struggle to convey their social messages, yet constantly find themselves unable to do so. Modernism in the novel is connected to political and social activism, echoing the link between the "cultural front" and modernist thought identified by Michael Denning. In *The Rich Man*, the intellectual characters function not only as modernist "artists," but also as proponents of social change within the wider modernist project. While Tassigny's art and rhetoric mark him as the most obviously modernist figure, Albert, Koch, and Shaendl are also figures of modernism in *The Rich Man*. Jacob, for instance, notices the similarities between Tassigny and Albert—as he listens to Albert speak, Jacob observes that "there was something about [Albert] that reminded Jacob of Tassigny. His voice, when he was agitated, had the same driving intensity as the Frenchman's" (89-90). This explicit connection between Albert, the most intellectual of the characters, and Tassigny, the most obviously modernist figure, reaffirms the link between the kinds of intellectual activity that Albert and Koch participate in and the art that Tassigny makes, grounding characters such as Albert in a wider modernist tradition.

In *The Rich Man*, the modernist project is intimately connected with social activism. Koch says that "every book should be supplied with a bomb" (188), connecting intellectual objects (and their related activity) to potentially explosive change. All of the intellectual figures in the novel speak at some point to their desire for social change: Tassingy describes his motivations behind painting as similar to that of a "prophet" (51), telling Jacob that "I do not paint pictures so people will hang them up to decorate apartments. . . . So long as

I have always told the truth, the way I see the truth" (51)—a different understanding of art than Koch's, but still one that connects modernist intellectual work to a social commitment to change or "truth." At the Grossmans' dinner table, Albert reveals his connection to political and social change by asking how he could "afford not to take an interest in politics when it is a matter of life and death" (89). And Koch, forced into hiding for his political goals, still believes that it is possible for a person to be raised "in *full consciousness*, and [soar]. He has cast out the tyrants that oppress [sic] him before, and he can do it again" (187; emphasis added). The languages of social activism and modernism mix in *The Rich Man* to produce a discourse that is inherently contradictory: the marginalized men (and woman) who speak this language of modernism and social change in *The Rich Man* are alternately censured for their intellectual debt to hegemonic structures and yet barred by factors such as religion or gender from the actual powers of hegemony. The liminal state of the modernists in the text—particularly Albert and Shaendl—puts them in a difficult position as far as Koch's urging to "cross over" goes: the difficulties of reconciling their political position at all makes achieving "full consciousness" problematic.

While Greenstein argues that "the voice of reason in characters such as Albert, Koch, and Tassigny penetrates the facade of false rhetoric while innocent victims like the other Grossmans remain deaf to the language of reality" (274), the "voice of reason" of these characters is not always comprehensible. While Albert and Koch discuss "echoes of *Wilhelm Tell,*" Jacob "sat there, listening, trying to understand" (187). Albert, Koch, Tassingy—and I add Shaendl to this group—do see through much of their contemporary surroundings and discuss the need for social change more seriously and insightfully than the rest of the characters, but they are not always heard outside of their own closed circles. Despite their insights, the ideas of the intellectuals do not actually *reach* the Grossmans, nor indeed anyone else who is not a part of a distinct intellectual community. Conversations between Albert and Koch, while illuminating, nevertheless are more discussion than persuasive debate. Shaendl, however, eventually finds a way to transcend the debilitating and hegemonic language that so impairs Albert, Koch, and Tassigny and finds a way to participate in practical life as a kind of organic intellectual.

After Tassigny's failed attempt to explain *L'Entrepreneur*, Jacob asks, "[E]f you don' stand here to explain me these t'ings, how would I know?" (50). Jacob, perhaps unwittingly, speaks directly to the heart of the intellectuals' difficulty with communicating in *The Rich Man*: unless the traditional intellectuals are willing to communicate in a way understandable to a wider audience—effectively, to become more organic as intellectuals—then the messages that modernist projects such as *L'Entrepreneur* are supposed to communicate will go unheard. Albert, as the novel's most obviously traditional intellectual, struggles to communicate with everyone around him. Albert's time at university and his academic language aligns him with traditional intellectual communities, and his very language betrays his complicity with hegemony. When Albert first meets Jacob, the older man notices that Albert is "different from the rest of the family. . . . Jacob noticed the quality of his language. He could not easily fit him into the picture [of the family]" (87-88). Reuben describes Albert as "a great, great talker" (138), but acknowledges that he is "not a practical man. He knows about philosophy and about literature, and about this and that, but all put together are not worth ten groschen" (138). Albert, Reuben says, "didn't speak so we could all understand what he said. . . . [H]e was talking with big words and nobody knew what he was saying" (137). Albert's connection with a traditional intellectual framework bars him from coherence with the Grossman family.

The interactions between the intellectual and non-intellectual members of the family speak to wider issues about communication. Albert cannot (or refuses to) identify with the Grossmans, shouting at his sisters-in-law Manya and Rivka and Shaendl's mother Sarah that they are "just a bunch of ignorant fishwives" (102), failing to recognize or respect the traditions from which these women respond. Rather than seeking to understand someone like Manya and attempting to create a dialogue about social change, Albert responds with frustration and derision. Albert has such difficulty communicating that it causes him physical distress: when he is trying to ask Jacob for a loan, Albert becomes so flustered that "the words stuck in his throat. His eyes began to water and everything blurred and swam before them. . . . Coward, he thought. Pride and shame, hell! Why should everything always roll onto Shaendl's shoulders?" (200). The Grossmans, in turn, see Albert as an outsider: Manya wryly comments that he "should be a prime minister" (94), Jacob is "aware that Albert was different from the rest of the family" (87), and Sarah thinks that Albert has "made [Shaendl] a stranger to the family" (120). Albert's allegiance to the structures of traditional intellectualism, marked by his language, bars him from entering into meaningful dialogue with the very "masses" that he once hoped to change. However, despite Albert's talk that "the tragic thing [in society] is that few people really care" (188), he has given up without even really trying to persuade anyone differently.

Koch is slightly different from Albert or Tassigny—an exiled journalist working as a clown, Koch's life has a degree of performativity and barrier-crossing communication. While Koch's clown performances do not explicitly convey modernist ideologies or messages of social activism, his willingness to take on the *role* of clown as a means to interact with a wider public situates Koch as a slightly more effective communicator than Albert. Koch's fantasy life reveals the lingering barriers that prevent his full transformation into an organic intellectual: while Koch's willingness to be a clown and to establish communication is a good attempt to break through this linguistic barrier, his fantasies about being part of the "white slave trade" (185) reveal an otherwise unacknowledged kind of alliance with hegemonic structures. Through Koch, Kreisel creates a modernist who *wants* to reach the people, but is unable to fully see through the hegemonic structures that once legitimized him.

If organic intellectualism is defined by a productive and reciprocal engagement with community, then by the end of the text, Shaendl is the only one of the modernists to enter into such dialogue. As the most intellectually dynamic character in the text, Shaendl moves from a relatively traditional form of intellectualism into a period of change, ultimately emerging in the final scenes as someone beginning to embody an organic intellectualism. While discussing their deceased father with Shaendl, Jacob actually talks about the political climate and its grim reality—Shaendl tells Jacob that she is "glad [their father] died when he did. I'm glad he didn't live to see Hitler come to power," and Jacob "wasn't shocked to hear her say that because the thought had occurred to him too" (175). Jacob realizes that on many matters Shaendl thinks "like Albert thinks" (175), but he can still talk with her about serious matters, such as the anti-Semitism he experienced in Canada. As with Albert, Jacob's first meetings with Shaendl include a focus on her voice—Jacob notices, for example, that his youngest sister's voice is "much more cultured than that of the others" (74), but unlike Albert, Shaendl's intellectual activity does not prevent her from communicating with her family. As the plot of *The Rich Man* unfolds, Shaendl is increasingly aligned with a more organic model of intellectualism, in opposition to the actions of her husband.

Early in the novel, Shaendl is presented as disengaged from her family and unable to communicate her views to them. Sarah, for example, cannot understand why Shaendl married Albert, and indeed, feels that Shaendl "sometimes . . . is very happy and sometimes she is very unhappy, but [Sarah doesn't] know why. Shaendl doesn't tell [her]. It is all Albert's fault" (119). Shaendl's connection with Albert, the most traditional of the intellectuals in *The Rich Man*, is seen as the key to her disconnection from her family. Sarah feels that "Albert has made [Shaendl] a stranger to the family" (120).

After Albert's death, Shaendl undergoes a transformation hinted at earlier in the text. When Albert wants to ask Jacob for money, for example, he finds himself characteristically unable to communicate with Jacob, and thinks to himself in frustration that it is always Shaendl who must speak the right language and find ways to successfully navigate life—to quote again Albert's anxiety, everything seems to "roll onto Shaendl's shoulders" (200). This, combined with the fact that Jacob and Reuben are better able to speak to Shaendl than to her husband, foreshadows Shaendl's later transformation into an organic intellectual. Between Shaendl and Reuben, for example, there is a makeshift line of communication—Shaendl says that when she "was unhappy, Reuben was the only one I could come to. He seemed to understand. . . . We don't see eye to eye on many things, but that never made any difference to him" (178). The moment at which she communicates most clearly is after finding out about Albert's death. "I'll work," (292) Shaendl says to Jacob, and Jacob suddenly has a breakthrough, crying out that his "eyes have been opened, but [he] can't do a thing" (293). In this moment, where she has finally broken through to Jacob, Shaendl is the one figure who believes Jacob's confession of poverty; her intellectual tendencies have transformed themselves into a more organic model that enables her to not only understand and believe Jacob, but—crucially—to also leave behind the problematic languages of traditional intellectual activity and to communicate in a more accessible way. Shaendl achieves what Albert, Koch, and Tassigny cannot: the promise of successful communication with wider society.

Shaendl was never a full member of the traditional intelligentsia: as evidenced by her lack of college education and reaction to *La Bohème,* Shaendl was always unable to crack the androcentric hegemony that so closely guarded tenets of traditional intellectualism. She was caught in a liminal position: although she was *connected* to traditional intelligentsia, her gender and family history prevented her from fully participating. Karin Gurttler's arguments that the exile experience is the "generative principle" for male characters in *The Rich Man* (294) also applies to Shaendl's role as an intellectual woman in the text. Exiled both from traditional intelligentsia and the conservative world of her family, Shaendl eventually finds a middle ground. As an organic intellectual, she finds a mediating identity between her intellectual identity and her affinity for the world of her family.

Despite all of their professed agendas of social change, the figures of traditional intellectualism in the novel—Albert, Koch, and Tassigny—are ultimately unable to communicate their radical ideologies to the very people that need to hear them. Even Reuben, whom Shaendl describes as sympathetic, is unable to comprehend the modernist rhetoric of men like Albert. For Kreisel, however, the radical desires of these characters are not enough. For the modernists to really create change in their worlds, they must be able to communicate with a wider audience. The dangers of refusing to become an organic intellectual are plain: clinging to the structures of traditional intellectual activity renders the modernist figures in the text inaccessible and, ultimately, useless. In a sense, the death of Albert, the arrest of Koch, and Tassingy's removal to Paris speak to their inability to cross this boundary into a more organic model of intellectual activity: their inaccessible messages and hegemonic ties eventually lead to their removal from Kreisel's social system entirely.

Kreisel is not, however, dismissing modernism: Tassingy's painting does actually elicit a reaction—the characters in the novel respond to it, even as they fail to understand it. Modernist art and thought has the *potential* to effect the kind of social change it so often speaks of, but *The Rich Man* challenges the inaccessible discourse of modernism, pinpointing the lack of communication as a barrier to social transformation. For intellectual theories to be successful, Kreisel's text suggests, it must be accessible to the Manyas and Reubens and Jacobs of the world. Inaccessible language not only bars the modernist project from creating social change, but actually unwittingly links modernism to a repressive hegemony that works against many of the social views allied with modernism in the novel. While Jacob throws Tassigny's painting out of a train window in the closing scene of the book, it is Shaendl's model of organic intellectual activity that has had the greatest impact on him and creates the biggest inner change: as Jacob rides in the train, he experiences a sense of tragic unity with the other characters. In a moment of self awareness and full consciousness, Jacob acknowledges in an imagined conversation that he "told a lie when he said he is a designer. . . . He is poor like us all" (296).

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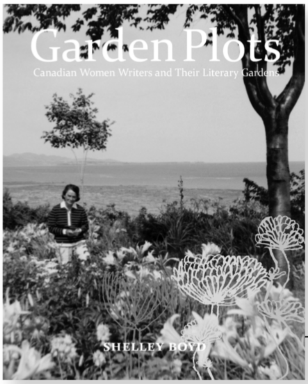
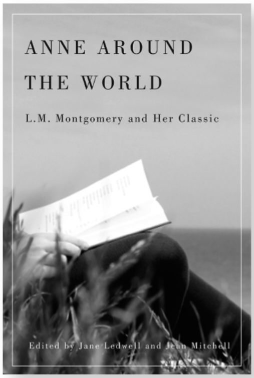
Reviews

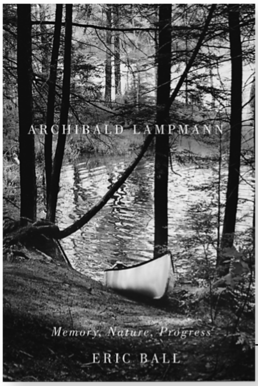
Gordon **Bölling** lives in Bonn. Daniel **Burgoyne** teaches at Vancouver Island University. Heidi **Butler** lives in Fredericton. Alessandra **Capperdoni** teaches at Simon Fraser University. Pilar **Cuder-Domínguez** teaches at the University of Huelva. Amélie **Dorais**, Olivier **Lapointe**, and Valérie **Lebrun** live in Montreal. Sarah **Dowling** teaches at the University of Pennsylvania. Timothy **Dugdale** lives in Windsor. Ilana **Finkleman**, Weldon **Hunter**, Joel **Martineau**, Reece **Steinberg**, Marilyse **Turgeon-Solis**, and Louise **Young** live in Vancouver. Rick **Gooding**, Maia **Joseph**, Judith **Saltman**, and M. Sean **Saunders** teach at the University of British Columbia. Neta **Gordon** teaches at Brock University. Margo **Gouley** and Jim **Johnstone** live in Toronto. Matthew **Hall** lives in Saskatoon. Jennifer **Hardwick** teaches at Queen's University. Christoph **Irmscher** teaches at Indiana University. Krzysztof **Jarosz** teaches at Université de Silesia. Catherine **Khordoc** teaches at Université Carleton. Sam **Knowles** lives in Leeds. Marie **Lo** teaches at Portland State University. Denyse **Lynde** teaches at Memorial University. Hannah **McGregor** teaches at the University of Guelph. Nicole **Nolette** teaches at McGill University. Christine **Otis** teaches at Université Laval. Megan **Ruttan** lives in Kitchener. Dania **Sheldon** lives on Gabriola Island, BC. Benoit **Trudel** teaches at Université de Hearst.



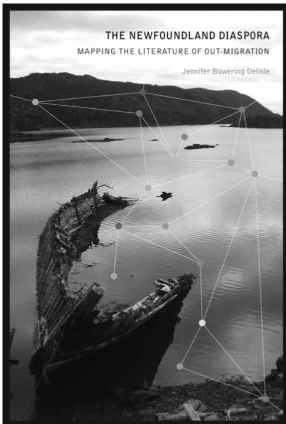
Garden Plots
Canadian Women Writers and Their Literary Gardens
SHELLEY BOYD



ANNE AROUND THE WORLD
L.M. Montgomery and Her Classic
Edited by Jane Ledwell and Jean Mitchell



ARCHIBALD LAMPMANN
Memory, Nature, Progress
ERIC BALL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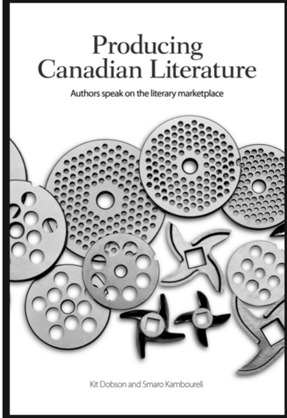
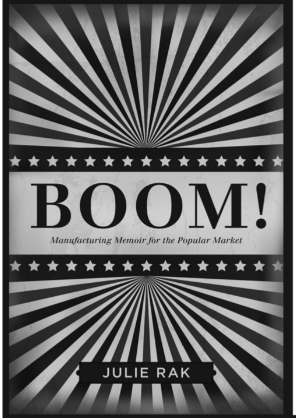
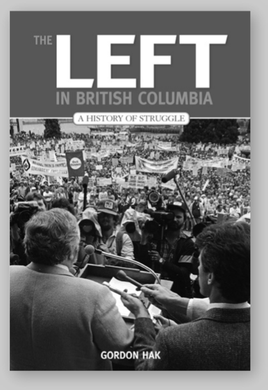
Jennifer Bowering Delisle


Producing
Canadian Literature
Authors speak on the literary marketplace
Kit Dobson and Smaro Kamboureli


BOOM!
Manufacturing Memoir for the Popular Market
JULIE RAK


THE
LEFT
IN BRITISH COLUMBIA
A HISTORY OF STRUGGLE
GORDON HAK