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Articles, *continued*

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Donna.Chin@ubc.ca
Production Staff: Matthew Gruman
Jennifer Lin
Beth Veitch
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Editorial

Reading, Writing, Texting

Margery Fee

I was wondering if you had any books.
Any *what*?
Books. Y'know—about so big and full of words arranged in a specific order so as to give the effect of reality?
You mean DVDs?
—Jasper Fforde, *Thursday Next: First among Sequels*

Thursday Next is a Jurisfiction agent in the Book World; here she is at Booktastic!, a bookshop in the "real" Swindon, UK, looking for a book. Four years after *Thursday Next* was published, its fiction seems more and more like our reality. First the small, quirky purveyors of a specialized range of new books went under to the giant stores (Women in Print vanishes, Chapters rises), and now the chains that mainly sold remainders are on their way out (Book Warehouse is going out of business in Vancouver). The UBC Bookstore recently tried to change its name to UBC Central, because, as the manager put it, "we sell so much more than books," but this proposed name change touched a nerve with booklovers (the same nerve that was touched when the old library became a new learning centre). We are now making our visits to used bookstores in a haze of nostalgia, certain that these dim and messy sanctuaries run by eccentric bibliophiles will soon be replaced by sparkling coffee shops with bad pastries.

And yet, these coffee shops, in their early incarnations an important site for the emergence of what Jürgen Habermas called the "public sphere," are now filled with students and would-be writers linked to a new public sphere by the

Internet. The force that is closing real bookshops is at the same time creating a broader and different space for reading, literary comment, and many other forms of social connection. Now communities are forming world-wide. Despite the scams, viruses, and porn, many of these communities do manage to make progressive social changes, which is why bad governments work hard to repress social media.

All in all, it's exciting to be around when the mainstream communication technology is in a period of rapid change, for good or evil (or, as I'm forever trying to get my students to consider, maybe both). Not only are the media that transmit and produce text shifting, but so are what can be called reading technologies—or, if you like, literary-critical methodologies. Franco Moretti has been called heretical because he argues that close reading of the literary canon provides a limited view—"it's a theological exercise—very solemn treatment of very few texts taken very seriously." Instead, he argues for "a little pact with the devil: we know how to read texts, now let's learn how not to read them" ("Conjectures"). Instead of "close reading," the new technology permits "distant reading," reading that mines textual data for patterns that would be otherwise undetectable: his book, *Graphs, Maps, Trees* (2005) begins to tackle how this process might unfold. Although he dramatizes this move as "a pact with the devil," researchers have always used whatever tools they could to make arguments. Early concordances, painstakingly compiled by hand, modelled one of the most useful tools for literary analysis, and were quickly adapted for computers. My dissertation analyzed literary criticism written between 1890 and 1950 about the notion of a Canadian national literature; it took me years of reading to notice recurrent themes that I would have found faster if all those texts had been easier to find and search. I still have my handwritten notes—hours of peaceful labour now rendered nearly obsolete—Early Canadiana Online will get through all of this material soon enough. Recently I searched two massive novels by John Richardson, *Wacousta* (1832) and *The Canadian Brothers* (1840), for all references to Pontiac, Tecumseh, Indians, etc. (And yes, I *have* read them both in the usual way!) Such simple word searching is a productive exercise, to be sure, but the mere tip of the iceberg in Moretti's eyes. His interest in world literatures and the *longue durée* means that he is interested in devising ways to use computers to see, for example, how literary genres or the use of free indirect discourse emerge and decline in various literary traditions.

Like data mining, periods of technological change render visible what we formerly did not, perhaps could not, notice. Only recently did I learn

what a codex is, which I am treating as an indication of the invisibility of the dominant form of narrative transmission rather than as a personal failing. Now formerly neglected aspects of books, such as the ways that readers mark them up, are under scrutiny (Jackson). Book history came to Canada in the six-volume *History of the Book in Canada* project, completed in 2007, perhaps another indication that Minerva's owl flies only at dusk. Attention is now also turning to the future, to making digitized and "born-digital" material accessible and to providing new tools for analyzing it. The Canadian Writing Research Collaboratory / Le Collaboratoire scientifique des écrits du Canada has been funded to establish an online infrastructure for literary research in and about Canada. And Canada has been the site for many other path-breaking ventures in the digital humanities. The resources these projects are providing and the critical approaches they are modelling will help link researchers and help them take the best advantage of new technologies.

Books of fiction and poetry are a strange mix of object, market commodity, and narrative. More attention could certainly be paid to the impact of paratextual elements such as blurbs, cover art, typography, binding and paper, as well as to marginalia, sales, copyright law, etc. However, our primary focus on the narrative makes sense—this is what matters most to most of us. So how much does it matter that fictional narratives and poems are now travelling to us in new ways? The reading of print, unlike speech, has to be taught and reinforced with children, who often prefer to be watching something brightly coloured on a screen. Does the decline of the bookshop and the rise of YouTube spell disaster? Books leave a lot for the imagination to fill in; surely that's good? But of course, films are also "good to think with." There is a reason that most literature departments also teach film and cultural studies. Nor do I want to imply that people will ever stop reading for pleasure. This risks creating a "moral panic," which places intense focus on one group as a danger to the social order, usually a group that is easily demonized, like non-reading teenagers. Nor should we assume that reading and literacy practices of the kinds we are familiar with are or should be a universal technology or cultural practice. Although theorists like Walter J. Ong have made claims for print literacy that equate it with civilization, progress, and science, it is now possible to conceive that there have been many sciences and many cultures, each with different ways of preserving and communicating knowledge.

What people work at remembering are culturally important narratives: the ways they have done (and do) this take many forms. Nor do all oralities work in the same way (see Carlson, Fagan, and Khanenko-Friesen). The form of

orature most familiar to literary scholars in English is the "bard and formula" oral epic, practiced by Homer and in many other European traditions. The singer produced stories on the fly by putting together formulae, that is, useful bits of narrative that fit the rhythmic requirements of a line or part of a line. "Rosy-fingered dawn" served nicely to mark the passage of time, for example. But Athabaskan storytellers remember stories by using abstracts that can be expanded for audiences that don't know the story (children and cultural outsiders), or shrunk for expert audiences (Scollon and Scollon). Now literary scholars are moving into a field formerly dominated by anthropologists in order to read the textualized orature of storytellers such as Harry Robinson (Okanagan) and the great Haida storytellers, Skaay and Ghandl, retranslated and retextualized by Robert Bringhurst.

Less well known are the different literacies used in the New World, in part because they were not recognized as writing. The Mi'kmaq, the Cree/*nêhiyawak*, the Ojibwe/Anishinaabe, the Inuit, and other Indigenous groups adopted syllabic and other writing systems as soon as they were introduced by missionaries. Father Christian Leclercq noted the existence of Mi'kmaw hieroglyphics on his arrival in 1677, and indeed, it has been suggested that syllabics may have proved so successful because they built on extant Indigenous writing systems (Edwards).

Thus, when I see someone in the Skytrain casually hanging on with one hand while busily texting with the other, I marvel at the speed with which we adapt to complex new technologies that allow us to "talk," to read, and to write about reading. Then I get out my paperback.

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Lost and Found

We are delighted to announce a new section of *Canadian Literature* called "Lost and Found" that will introduce little-known documents of literary interest, digitizing, tagging, and archiving these on our website. If the document is a long one, we will publish only the introduction in our print issue, but put the document itself on the website, where it will be openly accessible. In this issue, Mary Chapman presents a short news story written by Sui Sin Far (Edith Maude Eaton [1865-1914]). We welcome submissions to this section.

Basil Frederick Stuart-Stubbs (1930 – 29 May 2012)
We pay tribute to his life full of accomplishment. The eighth University Librarian at UBC and tireless supporter of Canadian letters, he was one of the founders of *Canadian Literature* and its first circulation manager.

Richard Brock

Body/Landscape/Art
Ekphrasis and the North in Jane Urquhart's *The Underpainter*

From its opening paragraphs, Jane Urquhart's novel *The Underpainter* (1997) signals its engagement with, and subtle problematization of, the iconic wilderness aesthetic of the Group of Seven. It does so primarily by exploring a particular representational process central to this aesthetic, by which human bodies are consumed by and rendered into landscape. This process is epitomized by a detailed description in the novel's prologue of "a large, human-shaped peninsula of rock, known as The Sleeping Giant" (2):

> This unconscious granite figure is famous. In the summer, tourists driving the gorgeous north shore of Lake Superior stop their cars and stare across Thunder Bay at his reclining body. Passengers who have travelled on the Trans-Canada train can bring his physique to mind long after mountains and prairies have faded from memory. He is twenty miles long, this person made from northern landscape, and, in 1937, no roads as yet have scarred his skin. According to the Ojibway, who have inhabited this region for hundreds of years, he was turned to stone as punishment for revealing the secret location of silver to white men greedy enough to demand the information. He will lie forever obdurate, unyielding, stretched across the bay. (2)

The introduction of the figure of the Sleeping Giant this early in the novel suggests that it will play a central role in the narrative that follows. It is referenced only occasionally in the remainder of the book, however, and functions instead to hint at an alternative narrative to the one that actually unfolds—the story of a cold, emotionally detached artist who travels north every summer to paint Lake Superior from its north shore.

The narrative suggested by the Sleeping Giant is the colonization of already occupied land by white settlers and the capitalist exploitation of its resources as viewed from the perspective of the Ojibwa. While the Ojibwa myth attributes the Giant's rendering as landscape to an Indigenous cause—a punishment for sharing Aboriginal-owned resources with colonizers—the novel's primary concern is with the broader causality of the Giant's condition: the practices of colonization and resource exploitation that precipitated his betrayal. The passage makes a direct link between these enterprises—explicitly linked elsewhere in the novel to artistic representations of the North, in one of many echoes suggesting the works of and critical responses to the Group of Seven—and the narrative "erasure" of the Giant, enacted through his metaphorical subsumption into the landscape. The Trans-Canada train and the "scarring" of the Indigenous body-as-landscape by the building of roads are thus presented as hostile encroachments, becoming metonymic of the injuries inflicted on Indigenous peoples by white settlement. In beginning with this narrative of the Ojibwa (who are conspicuous by their absence in the remainder of the novel), Urquhart signals its function as a frame for what is to follow—a troubling and unsettling backdrop to the novel and the practices of artistic representation it depicts, and an implied reference point for a subtle counter-discursive revision of the narratives underlying these practices.

Urquhart's novel is narrated entirely in the first person by its protagonist, the fictional American landscape artist Austin Fraser.[1] Austin's narrative is punctuated by frequent ekphrastic passages in which he describes paintings from various stages of his career, including the *Erasures* series, whose composition makes up the novel's "present" and spurs Austin's recollections. Ekphrasis, the literary depiction of visual art, is the primary figure I want to discuss in this essay: my reading here operates within a paradigm that I have elsewhere termed an "ekphrastic methodology" for reading postcolonial literatures and cultures (Brock, "Framing Theory"). Using the term ekphrasis metonymically as well as drawing from its common (and specific) usages in the analysis of interartistic representation, such an approach interrogates imperialist scopohilia by exploring, for example, the complicities between what Henri Lefebvre terms "conceived space" (361)—a "geometric" conception of space epitomized by the detached, "objective" viewing eye constructed by linear perspective in visual art—and the proprietorial colonial gaze. As a reading strategy that locates the intersection between temporal and spatial artforms as a site for negotiating the complex space-time problematics

inherent in postcoloniality, this methodology seeks in part to document instances of ekphrastic engagement with imperialist visual artworks, locating in their temporalizing impetus a counter-discourse to colonial spatiality. Such work is especially important in Canada, where settler-national claims to already inhabited land have historically been staked in spatial terms, epitomized by an unmatched corpus of wilderness painting—dominated by Tom Thomson and the Group of Seven—that establishes the colonized space as empty and, through its use of the "rational," ordering logic of linear perspective, declares dominion over, and complete, objective understanding of, that space. In such a context, the capacity of ekphrasis, in James A.W. Heffernan's words, to "envoic[e] a silent object" (302) lends it the power to unsettle imperialism's enshrinement of its own cultural authority, revealing the narratives that lie hidden within its tidy constructions.

As practised by the Group and their associates, the landscape painting represents space devoid of time, a placeless void containing neither inhabitants nor their narratives, which therefore presents itself at once as empty territory for physical occupation and a blank page upon which the colonialist enterprise can inscribe its own history entirely untroubled by a temporality preceding its own arrival. For W.J.T. Mitchell, landscape art represents "something like the 'dreamwork' of imperialism, unfolding its own movement in time and space from a central point of origin and folding back on itself to disclose both utopian fantasies of the perfected imperial prospect and fractured images of unresolved ambivalence and unsuppressed resistance" (10). Crucially, this characterization of landscape representation underscores the collapse—or "folding"—of temporality which enables the landscape painting to depict its "perfected prospect"; just as importantly, however, it points to the traces of narrative which are imperfectly suppressed by this folding, and which might therefore be recuperated. My contention is that ekphrastic landscape depictions such as those found in Urquhart's novel represent a powerful means to such recuperation, an arena in which postcolonial narratives of indigeneity, conquest, resistance, and suppression are able to *unfold*.

Taking my cue from postcolonial, feminist, and ecocritical treatments of the Group of Seven's wilderness aesthetic, including its oft-cited erasure of Aboriginal presence from the landscape and its complicity with the exploitation and destruction of the very wilderness it celebrated,[2] I shall suggest that Urquhart's ekphrastic techniques enable her to critique this aesthetic at a formal as well as an ideological level, by inhabiting, so to speak, the frame of

the image, and thereby exposing the paradoxical and conflicting representational steps underlying its treatment of the wilderness. My reading does not diminish Cynthia Sugars' characterization of Urquhart—made in the context of a discussion of her earlier novel *Away*—as a writer whose staging of the "conflict between an assertion of a postcolonial cultural-national identity and an awareness of the colonizing implications of such nationalist assertion" is complicated by her "indulgence in a nostalgia for a certain kind of settler nationalism" (4). I am equally mindful, however, of Stephen Slemon's caution that the theorizing of settler-invader societies within a postcolonial framework remains radically incomplete unless it engages with the invariably compromised postcoloniality characteristic of the "neither/nor territory of white settler-colonial writing" (30). Like that of *Away*, the postcoloniality of *The Underpainter* is deeply ambivalent, critiquing the material consequences of colonialism while frequently participating in its discursive constructions—especially a discourse of Romantic self-identification between white settler and landscape. Shelley Kulperger's description of *Away* as "a kind of self-aware 'beneficiary narrative'" (77) seems an apt one to apply to *The Underpainter.* Urquhart addresses her own complicities, but addressing them does not automatically absolve her.

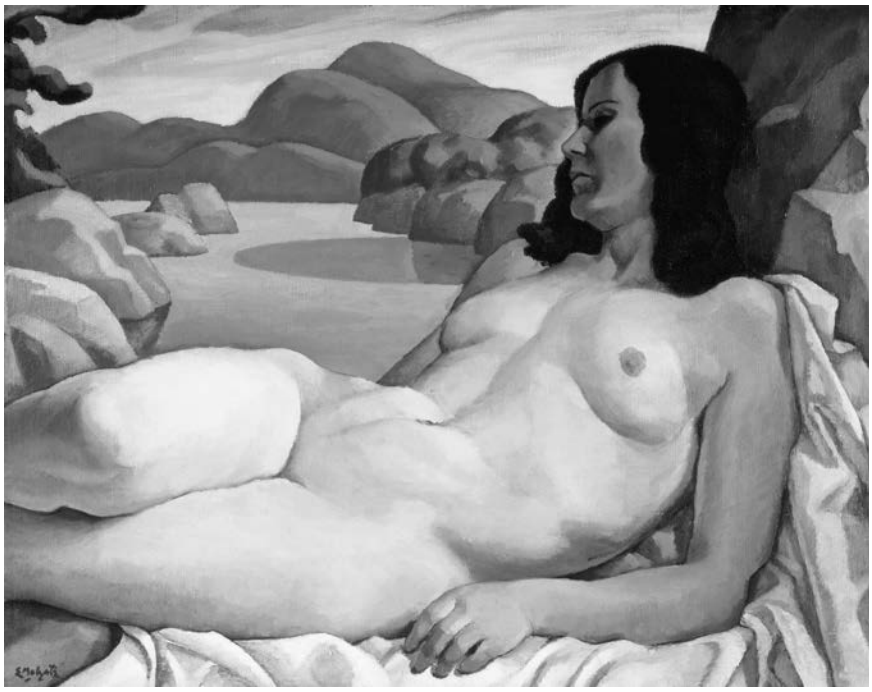
If the Sleeping Giant passage that opens the novel marks it as a "beneficiary narrative," the full significance of the iconography Urquhart employs is only slowly revealed through a series of episodes concerning body-landscape relationships, all of which implicitly or explicitly echo this opening figure of a body composed of landscape. Many of these episodes concern Austin's model and lover Sara, who lives in the northern Ontario town of Port Arthur (now part of Thunder Bay) to which he makes annual summer trips to paint the Lake Superior landscape. For the most part, Austin remains cold and cruelly detached—even abusive—in his relationship with Sara, though his detachment is undermined by occasional bursts of intense feeling. Austin's emotional attachment to Sara reaches its most intense point following a dream in which he believes she has drowned. He feels compelled to visit her, and climbs silently into bed beside her. He finds himself examining her body, and is moved and alarmed by his reaction to it:

> And now, late in the morning, the watery sunlight ran down and across the geography of her body as if she were lying in a bright, shallow river. Me swimming there beside her. I was not fully awake. I broke open in the face of this vitality, this brilliance, the shining strength of the beautifully constructed bones of her face. I could scarcely look at her. Finally, the room, my own body, my own language disappeared, and all I was able to do was say her name. (82)

Even as he is undergoing this unsettling emotional experience, he is already reconfiguring it in the spatializing aesthetic terms that more comfortably fit his terms of reference. By rendering it as landscape, Austin is able to respond aesthetically to the *geography* of Sara's body, rather than acknowledging her as a being with her own history and psychology—a *temporal* entity with whom a deeper emotional connection could be either possible or necessary.

The momentary strength of his attachment, which he finds deeply unnerving, and its neutralization by the imaginative submersion of Sara into "a bright, shallow river," recall Austin's earlier response to the death of his mother from scarlet fever: "In my child's mind, the colour of her disease was a band of red on the ice my mother spoke of, and I could see her, actually see her, move across it to the place where the ice turned from grey to black, until finally I could see her enter the inky waters of the Great Lake" (31). In both cases, the landscape becomes a kind of psychic repository for Austin, in which emotions and their accompanying narratives are consumed and suppressed. Austin's child's mind substitutes the narrative of his mother's consumption by the landscape for the traumatic one of her illness and death; the prospect that Sara's life might become a narrative in which he is intimately involved is similarly suppressed. Reflecting on his relationships with those who have played a significant part in his life, Austin acknowledges that he has suppressed all those narratives that threaten to involve him personally, and states that "[a]s I saw it then, each life I touched had found its focus and was existing in a kind of aftermath" (34).

These passages aid the characterization of Austin, portraying his devotion to art as pathology, existing at the expense of functional human relationships. When coupled with the overarching figure of the Sleeping Giant, however, they reflect a strikingly persistent trope in the novel: the consumption and erasure of human bodies and experiences into and by the landscape. This consumptive process becomes the primary site for what I have suggested is a sustained counter-discursive engagement with the Group of Seven's oft-criticized yet still massively influential wilderness aesthetic and nationalist rhetoric, as becomes evident when the above passages from Urquhart's novel are considered alongside two paintings by Group artists. Both Edwin Holgate's *Nude in a Landscape* (c. 1930) and F.H. Varley's *A Wind-Swept Shore* (1922) represent notable exceptions within the Group's wilderness oeuvre, signifying not only bodily presence but specifically the presence of those bodies whose absence I want to suggest defines the Group's wilderness: respectively, female and Aboriginal bodies.



Edwin Holgate, *Nude in a Landscape*. c. 1930. Oil on canvas, 73.1 x 92.3 cm. Collection of the National Gallery of Canada. © Estate of Edwin Holgate, Jonathan Rittenhouse, executor.

In Holgate's painting, an easy harmony appears to exist between the "topography" of the female nude—her breasts, hips, and thighs—and the features of the landscape—the hills in the background, the islands in the lake that dominates the middle distance—that mirror this topography. In Varley's painting, meanwhile, two (or is it three?) Aboriginal figures walk towards the foreground of an otherwise archetypal Group image. These paintings might therefore be read as proofs of the fallacy of the "erasure" arguments that dominate Group criticism by demonstrating that human figures—even Aboriginal ones—can and do exist within the prevailing wilderness aesthetic. Such a reading, however, belies the complexity of the relationship between these bodies and the landscape they inhabit. In both images, the figures are integrated into the landscape to the extent that they become almost indistinguishable from it. The figures are not so much in harmony with as in the process of being consumed *by* the wilderness scene, a consumption staged through the continual play of tensions between body, landscape, and body-as-landscape. The Aboriginal figures in

F.H. Varley, *A Wind-Swept Shore*. 1922. Oil on wood panel, 30 x 40.6 cm. McMichael Canadian Art Collection, gift of Mrs. E.J. Pratt. © Varley Art Gallery, Town of Markham.

Varley's painting are incongruous, aesthetically incompatible with the image in which they appear. They are travelling outwards, leaving both the land and the framed space of the image behind—perhaps forever. Even in this they are interrupted, however, as they are perpetually in the process of being placed under erasure *by* the land: the most distant "figure" could be either a human figure or a boulder. While Holgate's nude remains (for now) a little more distinguishable from the land, she too is threatened by erasure from, and consumption by, the land. As if expressly to separate her from the rocks upon which she reclines, she lies on a white sheet, which functions as a boundary marker between body and landscape. At the extremes of the composition, however, her body strays off the sheet and into direct contact with the rocks. Her body becomes indistinguishable from the land at these points, her flesh threatening to disappear into the light browns of the rock at the bottom left, while the dark shadow cast on the rock at the top right makes it impossible to tell where the landscape ends and the nude's black hair begins.

Far from disproving the common critical assertion that the Group's aesthetic is one based on representational erasures, these two paintings are unusual only in their demonstration of the *processual* aspects of these erasures. I read the Group's representational economy as drawing from notions of the First World War as a proving ground for the young nation (and specifically its men), and augmented by the characterization of Tom Thomson's death in the wilderness as its own kind of "war death." This economy relies upon the notion of the landscape as a warlike alter ego to the (white, male) artist-figure, who alone is equipped to match it in combat. This construction requires that the hostile wilderness defeat—and consume—the bodily traces of all other presences in the landscape, including traces of both Aboriginality and femininity, whose essentialized characteristics are taken on by the wilderness itself. The body (metonymic of presence, culture, and narrative) *becomes* landscape (symbolic of absence, nature, and pure spatiality). This strategy ensures that the Group's masculine, Eurocentric, settler-nationalist self-image is all that remains in the wilderness, as its lone, worthy adversary: all other narratives are "folded" into pure space where, safely domesticated, they can be romanticized as harmless attributes of the wilderness itself. What emerges is thus a dualistic system of gendering and racializing the land: the wilderness is *conceptualized* as white (aided by the persistent associations of snow and winter), male, and warlike, and subsequently—yet, in the landscape painting's "folding" temporal scheme, also simultaneously—*transformed* into a space that is Aboriginal, feminine, and passive.[3]

This dualistic construction, however, continually threatens to compromise the *wildness* of the wilderness, an attribute which is absolutely necessary to the trope of the artist-hero. In the first place, there is the impulse towards documentation, the paradoxical desire to articulate the artist's presence at the scene of a wilderness that is defined entirely by *absence.* For Jonathan Bordo, the Group of Seven's construction of wilderness is critically undermined by this tension between the aesthetic desire to deny human presence in the wilderness on the one hand, and "the *having been there* but also the *having to be there* in order to record as work one's being there" on the other (117). A resultant feature of many of the paintings, Bordo argues, is the presence of a subjective trace in the form of a "symbolic deposit" (117), most often realized in the anthropomorphic form of a foregrounded solitary tree. This body-landscape construction "frames," and hence domesticates, the wilderness space "by domesticating the nomadic in the wilderness thought

into a delimitable physical space, possessing qualities of wilderness. Taken together, the anthropomorphic and the architectural reduce wilderness to the condition of the park, a kind of real estate" (Bordo 120).

In recasting it as "a kind of real estate," the Group's paintings shift the wilderness closer to a familiar pattern of settler discourse in which newly discovered land is unambiguously feminine-gendered, represented as nurturing mother, a passive vessel of fertility that exists solely to sustain the masculine-gendered pioneer-settler. While the hostile, barren Northern wilderness eludes this kind of agrarian feminine gendering, Bordo's "wilderness park" is a more conventional settler landscape—a passive vessel whose mineral resources are laid open for male exploitation. Tellingly, Urquhart's ekphrastic narrative in *The Underpainter* seizes on the paradoxes Bordo identifies in the "wilderness park" construction, and makes them central to the novel's critique of the Group of Seven's school of nationalist landscape painting by repeatedly invoking the kind of erasures seen in *Nude in a Landscape* and *A Wind-Swept Shore*, and tracing them to the contradictory documentary impulses of her own white, male artist protagonist.

Urquhart's construction of Austin at once suggests and resists direct mapping onto the members of the Group of Seven. The depictions of Austin's character and artworks suggest various members of the Group at different times, but most often Lawren Harris: like Harris, Austin is able to pursue his art due to the wealth of his father, who, like Harris' father, has grown rich from the opportunities afforded the ambitious and resourceful capitalist by the new settler nation;[4] Austin, in common with both Harris and his novelistic foil, the real-life American artist Rockwell Kent, experienced the death of a parent early in life (Austin loses his mother, whereas the childhoods of both Harris and Kent were marred by the deaths of their fathers); the novel focuses on Austin's paintings of the north shore of Lake Superior, the site of many of Harris' most iconic works; and these works are themselves suggested at times, notably when Austin describes his preference for aerial perspective, and his painting of the horizon "in a crisp, possessive way, as if, having chosen to render it, I felt I must bring it up close for inspection" (130). Various trajectories within Austin's life also match those of Harris: Austin's career charts a Harris-like course from early "pastoral" watercolours (45), through an increasing tendency towards abstraction, to the near-total abandonment of realist forms, and his retreat south of the US-Canada border after his final abandonment of Sara mirrors the flight in 1934

of the recently divorced Harris and his second wife Bess (the former wife of Group biographer and devotee F.B. Housser) in the wake of their scandalous affair and marriage.[5] Most significantly, there is the title of Austin's last collection of paintings, which he assembles during the course of the novel. In having her character name his collection *The Erasures*, Urquhart underscores the significance of her recurring body-landscape consumption trope by linking it with perhaps the single greatest preoccupation of Group criticism. Cumulatively, her references to Harris and the Group strongly suggest an engagement with the representational strategies of these real-life artists. That other textual evidence resists a simple one-to-one relationship between Austin and any member of the Group does not diminish these links. Indeed, I want to argue that, on the contrary, it is precisely this uncertainty of reference which lends the novel its unsettling power.

The Underpainter signals its engagements with the Group of Seven's aesthetic by drawing links between Austin's aesthetic and emotional erasures and narratives of exploitation and colonization. This is best illustrated by paying close attention to a few pivotal pages, in which Austin makes an exception to his usual summer routine by remaining in Port Arthur into September. A dramatic metaphorical sequence is initiated by a disturbing sex scene—a near-rape—that occurs in an interlude in a painting session during which Austin has had Sara hold a particularly difficult pose for long periods:

> I lifted up the flannel nightgown she had hastily thrown over her and began to caress her legs, the body I had been so carefully rendering, pulling first one, then the other ankle towards me so that the limbs would straighten. I removed my own clothes and lay on top of her, stretching her arms out from her sides by grasping her wrists and finally, because my arms were longer, pushing the heels of my hands into her palms. After I had entered her, I clamped her legs shut with my knees, making sure every inch of her body was covered with my own, making sure she was immobile. I held her head still with the pressure of my mouth on hers, the weight of my torso making it impossible for her to arch her back. I couldn't see her at all. The only part of her body that was moving was her heart, hammering against her ribcage. (168)

The relationship between this troubling scene and Austin's artistic philosophy is revealed shortly afterwards, when Austin recalls his belief "that I was drawing—deliberately drawing—everything out of her, that this act of making art filled the space around me so completely there would be no other impressions possible beyond the impressions I controlled" (170). In all aspects of his relationship with Sara—sexual, emotional, aesthetic—Austin insists on total control, refusing to admit anything that might reflect a

capacity on Sara's part for agency, much less autonomy. The implications of this desire for control can be understood by considering it alongside the body-landscape translations at work in the Group of Seven's paintings, which the novel invokes not only by repeatedly referring to bodies as landscapes and vice versa, but also by suggesting a paradoxical relationship between presence and absence—analogous to Bordo's narrative of the "witnessed" wilderness—within Austin's desire for absolute possession of Sara. To possess Sara in the manner he desires is to have absolute control over every facet of her being so that he can render them all in paint (a making of art that is also a form of emptying, a "drawing out"); exercising this control, however, entails Austin's constant presence and *participation* in a relationship whose reciprocity he tries but fails to suppress. Austin confesses that "although I wanted every detail of her in my painting—her body, her ancestry, her landscape, her house— . . . I would have preferred not to be known by her at all" (170).

Immediately following these passages, the novel draws an explicit parallel between Autsin's aesthetic and violent sexual reductions of Sara to landscape and the body-landscape narrative of the Sleeping Giant. At Austin's invitation, Sara leads Austin on a walk "away from the lake, taking paths Sara had known since childhood, into the woods of The Sleeping Giant, the man mountain, the Sibley Peninsula. We followed swift-moving shining streams that Sara referred to, poetically, as the veins of the slumbering Gargantua" (172). The metaphorical equivalency drawn between streams and human veins in this passage recalls the watery imagery used in the earlier scene in which Austin experiences his unsettling reaction to "the geography of [Sara's] body," and the parallel is underscored by Sara's ambiguous comment that "[t]here is more than one way to visit the body of a man" (172). Initially, Austin recalls, he failed to understand the implications of this comment: "I thought the allusion was sexual, until she told me of the Ojibway legend that claimed the whole twenty miles of the human-shaped peninsula was the warrior Nanibijou, whose body had been turned to stone after he revealed to the European acquisitors the location of the sacred silver" (172). However, while the persona of Austin-as-narrator is often employed as a more self-aware foil for his younger self, in this instance the novel maintains an ironic distance between its metaphorical economy and Austin's narration: once he hears the Sleeping Giant narrative, Austin immediately assumes that his initial interpretation—that Sara has made a sexual allusion—is erroneous. Even the older, wiser Austin fails to appreciate the multiple layers on which Sara's oblique statement functions: as a comment on his sexual conduct,

his artistic practice, and the discourses and practices of colonial and ecological exploitation (united in the figure of the Sleeping Giant) with which they intersect.

These parallels form the crux of the novel's counter-discursive engagement with the Group of Seven's wilderness aesthetic. Austin's various renderings of Sara as landscape are linked to the exploitation of Aboriginal-owned mineral wealth by the figure of the Sleeping Giant, a man transformed into landscape as a result of colonialism and its devastating ecological impact. The Sleeping Giant hence forms the central metaphorical figure around which Urquhart structures a set of equivalencies, between aesthetic and sexual violence, colonial and ecological exploitation, and the Group of Seven's body-landscape constructions. In the novel's closing pages, these parallels are finally, and briefly, acknowledged by Austin himself, as he reflects, in terms that mirror his one-sided relationship with Sara, on his one attempt to paint the peninsula: "It was the shape of The Sleeping Giant I wanted to fit into one of my paintings; neither its natural nor its supernatural history interested me. My father and I had both exploited this landscape—differently, it's true—but we had exploited it nevertheless" (327).

This passage makes explicit the novel's metaphorical unification of the paradoxical mode of witnessing characteristic of the Group of Seven's wilderness paintings and Austin's emotional abuse of Sara, whose history he similarly rejects. In positioning Austin and Sara's relationship as central to her engagement with the Group's aesthetic, Urquhart takes a critical stance that is at once settler-nationalistic, ecofeminist, and postcolonial, and therefore both strategic and complicit. Strategic because, in unifying the metaphorical and literal colonizations experienced by a white Euro-Canadian woman, the Indigenous Ojibwa and the land itself, Urquhart is able to engage counter-discursively with colonial discourses and practices without claiming to speak for socio-political positions not her own; complicit because, by allowing her own subject position of white womanhood to stand allegorically for the profound dispossession of Canada's Indigenous peoples, she marginalizes the experience of literal colonization in favour of metaphorically "colonial" tropes and thus undermines the status of "beneficiary narrative" from which her novel principally derives its moral authority.

Without minimizing the problematic aspects of Urquhart's conflations, I want to continue to focus on how their strategic aspects enable a counter-discursive engagement with the Group of Seven's aesthetic that displaces

the established discursive connotations of its body-landscape translations. Metonymic of this engagement is a reversal of the prevailing body-into-landscape transformation enacted by a pivotal episode in which Austin decides to salvage his relationship with Sara. Hoping to atone for his past sins by finally allowing himself to form an intimate attachment to her, Austin leaves Sara a note informing her that he wishes to meet her at the hotel in Port Arthur. Austin watches from his hotel bedroom window as Sara approaches, slowly becoming distinct from the snow-covered figure of the Sleeping Giant "like a fugitive cell that had broken loose from the stone architecture of his body" (330). As she advances, hour by hour, Austin is confronted with the exact reverse of what up to now has been his imaginative strategy: he has continually sought to bury emotions, narratives, and human experience in the landscape; now, with Sara's emergence *from* it, he must confront all that he has suppressed. Faced with the enormity of this realization—that "I, who had previously been so restrained, would now engage in such blatant exposure that when I was finished she would have the entirety of my life in her possession" (331)—Austin flees in terror, leaving Port Arthur, Sara, and Canada behind for the last time. It is, significantly, this realization of the ultimate impossibility of possessing without being possessed, of witnessing without being witnessed, that precipitates Austin's final retreat from Canada, metaphorically uncoupling the Group of Seven's representational economy of narrative suppression and erasure from the constructions of settler nationhood with which it remains closely associated in public discourse. In its function as a repository of Austin's suppressed emotions and narratives, the landscape of the North functions, just as in the Group of Seven's wilderness aesthetic, as the artist's double or alter ego. In Urquhart's ironic reinterpretation, however, it is the artist's emotional inadequacy, rather than his heroism as combatant, that is reflected in the landscape. Narrating from his old age, Austin concedes that all of his canvases are to some degree unsatisfactory: his paintings of Sara are, as his friend Rockwell Kent tells him, "as cold as ice" (261), because, as in his landscape paintings, he has merely "painted [himself] over and over" (178).

Urquhart's choice of the impulsive, tempestuous Rockwell Kent, the real-life American artist fictionalized in *The Underpainter*, as a foil for Austin is a fascinating one, exploiting the novel's carefully drawn parallels between Austin and Lawren Harris and shedding additional light on both its strategic and complicit elements. In her book *A Distant Harmony: Comparisons in the Painting of Canada and the United States of America*, Ann Davis compares

the northern landscape paintings of Harris and Kent, which bear a remarkable visual resemblance to each other. Positioning both Harris and Kent as figures who—like the fictional Austin Fraser—"straddle the fence that divides realism from symbolism in the history of North American art" (103), Davis identifies a shared visual vocabulary of "isolated and simplified sculptural forms" and "severe, monumental compositions conveying the impression of a magnificent, lonely grandeur" (126). The northern canvases of these two artists, Davis argues, would at times be virtually indistinguishable but for what she identifies as the key difference between them, "Kent's ofttimes propensity to focus, within the immensity of nature, on man" (107). Davis explains this key difference with reference to the differing philosophies and motivations underlying the artists' respective works: the art of the staunch socialist Kent, she argues, was "humanistic in both its aims and its orientation" (107), while Harris' "unending search for the spiritual ideal" contributed to the increasingly stylized forms of his empty landscapes, and finally to his total abandonment of realism (126).

Davis' detailed comparisons are extremely convincing, and provide ample explanation for Urquhart's construction of a straightforward opposition between Rockwell's *joie de vivre* and the ascetic devotion to form and composition shared by Austin and Harris. However, it is arguable that Davis and Urquhart—the latter by implication—overstate the differences between the aesthetics espoused by Kent and Lawren Harris. It is true that, in line with Davis' argument, those of Kent's landscape paintings where human figures are absent—such as *Admiralty Sound: Tierra del Fuego* (c. 1925)—are almost mistakable for the Lake Superior canvases of Harris or his fellow Group member Franklin Carmichael. The simplified, rounded forms of Harris and Carmichael are much in evidence, as—strikingly—is Bordo's foregrounded tree, as a blasted, gnarled organizing feature. To a viewer more accustomed to the Group's works, therefore, encountering a painting like Kent's *The Trapper* (1921) is an uncanny experience, its human figure giving the impression that an alien presence has found its way into one of Harris' works. Yet Kent's more humanistic vision of landscape—like Urquhart's—is a highly romantic and ultimately ethnocentric one that, if it transcends the austerity of Harris' aesthetic, remains heavily dependent on it. The human figures in Kent's landscapes (even the Indigenous figures that populate his Arctic paintings) draw heavily from the quasi-mythic, neoclassical imagery found in his celebrated illustrations of *Moby Dick* and his poster art: they are celebrations of an indomitable American spirit, epitomized by the figure of

the worker who in turn embodies the ideals of Enlightenment humanism—the very ideals, in other words, that European imperialism sought to export to the New World. No less than for Harris, for Kent the North is a space in which the colonizing male's spiritual inheritance of the land is established.

While Kent's conception of the Northern wilderness—like Urquhart's—is deeply bound to both Eurocentric and settler-nationalistic discourses, it maintains a vision of harmony (albeit a harmony underscored by proprietary claims) between the land and its inhabitants, eschewing the Group's combative narrative and therefore also situating itself in opposition to the ecological exploitation in which the Group's aesthetic is implicated. Notwithstanding the common ideological ground shared by Kent and the Group of Seven, therefore, *The Underpainter* strategically occupies the principal site of *difference* between them—Kent's socialism set against the Group's unabashed enthusiasm for capitalist expansion and development in the North—to underline the complicities between the Group's aesthetic of erasure and the enterprise of resource extraction. After their first meeting, Austin and Rockwell spend an evening of heavy drinking together, which culminates in Rockwell leaving Austin on a park bench with a "crudely lettered sign" pinned to him: "'Do not disturb me,' it read. 'I am a landscape painter and my father is a capitalist'" (141). While at one level this scene represents a good-natured prank cementing a new friendship after the bonhomie of the previous evening, it also underlines the irresolvable differences between the anthropocentric bias of Rockwell's art and the exploitation and narrative suppression that characterize Austin's—a telling parallel with Davis' comparisons between Kent and Harris. The link between erasure and exploitation is made explicit by the novel's exploration of Austin's working method on the symbolically central *Erasures* series: his underpaintings depict the narratives that he has appropriated from acquaintances, friends, and lovers, but that are literally and metaphorically erased by subsequent layers of glaze. The contrast between Austin and Rockwell Kent is thus part of a decentring strategy that realigns the Group of Seven's wilderness aesthetic with exploitation and repression rather than the spiritually pure asceticism with which it is associated in the writings of Harris and F.B. Housser. The wilderness continues to function as alter ego to a white male artistic consciousness, but, in Urquhart's revision, it is no longer a valiant combatant but a repository for the narratives which might reveal the artist's fundamental inadequacies.

The novel's ekphrasis liberates these narratives from their psychic repository, hinting at the incompleteness of the erasures effected by Austin's

mode of Northern representation, and therefore also by the real-life modes which are implicitly referenced in it. If such recuperative aims provide ample reason for the novel's employment of ekphrastic modes, however, such an expository impulse *within* its frame of confessional first-person narration remains puzzling. It is repeatedly suggested that the narratives the novel recovers from its still images are wrested from a reluctant Austin, and are a source of immense pain to him: "I want none of this" (47), he insists, emphatically, of the flood of memories that continually torments him. Urquhart offers few clues as to where this confessional impulse—away from the entombed spatiality of the past, and *towards* the temporality with which Austin's art is imbued by Urquhart's ekphrases—might originate within Austin himself. If he displays considerable guilt at his treatment of various figures from his past, this is continually offset by his misanthropy, which seems entirely undiminished in his attitude to his housekeeper Mrs. Boyle.

A consideration of this paradox at the structural heart of the novel—a series of confessional narratives from a character who seems incapable either of confession or repentance—reveals another dimension of the novel's multifaceted critique of the Group of Seven's wilderness aesthetic. It focuses our attention on the only possible remaining source of the ekphrastic impulse from within the frame narration, namely the ultimate failure of Austin's strategies of narrative suppression. That Austin's artistic strategy of obscuring his underpaintings with layers of translucent glaze may not be entirely successful is hinted at in his "premonitions of pentimenti . . . , those ghosts of formerly rendered shapes that the artist has intended to paint out forever. In the future, I feared, they would rise to the surfaces of my pictures like drowned corpses, bloated and obscene, regardless of glazes or the number of layers of zinc white, titanium white, and lead white I applied to the canvases" (181). This fear appears to have been realized when Austin complains that "[e]ven though there is nothing in me that wants to court the past, it fills my mind, empties my painting" (9). Pentimenti are a constant threat to Austin—particularly in his autobiographical *Erasures* series—because of the existence of images from his own life in his underpaintings, themselves resulting from a desire to document the episodes that they represent. This impulse, seemingly in direct contrast to the near-pathological strategies of suppression on display elsewhere, is evident in Austin's first encounter with Sara, when, "watching her, her unselfconscious grace, I wanted to interrupt the task [of sweeping], to add my own presence to the image" (14).

Symbolically, the technique Austin employs in the *Erasures* series reflects the fundamental conflict upon which all of his works are predicated, between documentation and suppression. Austin's *Erasures* series provides an unusually literal illustration of the way in which the impulse towards documentation, the artist's desire to record his presence at the scene, can exist in direct conflict with the representational system by which the work is conceived, potentially drawing unwanted attention to the suppressed narratives which underlie it. The systems of representation at work in the *Erasures* thus present an identical paradox to that inherent in Bordo's "wilderness park," which, of course, is itself intimately concerned with the politics of erasure.

The origin of the novel's ekphrastic impulse, then, is situated in the moment at which the artist asserts his own presence into the ostensibly "unwitnessed" scene, a moment of irresolvable conflict and paradox. By inserting her ekphrastic representations into this moment, Urquhart is able to subvert the artistic strategy of narrative suppression and its resulting aesthetic erasures, restoring the narrative presence of elements that would otherwise exist only in the form of "underpaintings" within Austin's representational systems. The wider implications of the novel's critique, however, are determined by Urquhart's management and foregrounding of its intertextual references to the Group of Seven's paintings. She achieves this effect through the strategic manipulation of what John Hollander has termed "actual" and "notional" modes of ekphrastic representation (209)—the former referring to works of visual art that exist in the real world, the latter to fictional artworks. Urquhart's negotiation of the relationship between these types of ekphrasis is best understood with reference to the "subdivisions" of Hollander's categories offered by Peter Barry in his essay "Contemporary Poetry and Ekphrasis," where he proposes the subdivision of actual ekphrasis

> into "closed" and "open" variants. In the closed type, [the text] makes it explicit that it is not speaking about a real, witnessed event, but about what is seen [in the image under discussion]. In the "open" type, by contrast, the object of the ekphrasis is presented "unframed," and so could be taken as a description of (say) an actual scene, rather than a pictorial representation of that scene. (156)

At times, the parallels between Austin and Lawren Harris encourage the reader to view the descriptions of Austin's landscape paintings as "open actual" ekphrases: real-world referents are never explicitly identified, but the iconic status of the Group's landscapes means that they are likely to be called to the minds of readers as the implied references to them accumulate. I have been arguing, of course, that it is not only the framed spaces of

Austin's artworks that constitute concealed instances of actual ekphrasis: in their engagement with a highly specific set of representational practices peculiar to the Group's wilderness aesthetic, the recurring body-landscape constructions of both Sara and the Sleeping Giant function as entirely unframed "open actual" ekphrases.

If the "open actual" elements of Urquhart's ekphrastic representations serve to highlight the intertextual relations between the novel and the paintings of the Group of Seven, these relations are countered even as they are suggested by a number of factors that refute a simple relationship between Austin's paintings and those of the Group. The fact that Austin is not Canadian, but American, is the most immediately obvious of these factors, and one that seems strongly to discourage a reading of him as representative of a collective renowned for its nationalist affiliations. In addition, a handful of passages that directly reference the Group confirm that its real-life artists, like Rockwell Kent and Austin's teacher Robert Henri, are alive and working in the novel's fictional world, meaning that there is no allegorical "gap" with regard to the Group which could simply be filled by Austin. Such refusals of the associations that are strongly suggested elsewhere in the novel resist straightforward readings of Austin's works as even "open" actual ekphrases, seeming to place them instead within the notional category. In this context, Barry's subdivision of notional ekphrasis into "fictional" and "conceptual" variants is especially significant. Fictional notional ekphrasis "is presented in entirely 'realist' terms—it has (for instance) a fictional artist and a fictional provenance . . . it just hangs on the wall and people look at it, and sometimes talk about it and what it depicts" (Barry 156). Conceptual notional ekphrasis, meanwhile, is "markedly different," having "'supra-realist' characteristics which no real art object could have" (156). At first glance, it seems obvious that Urquhart's depictions of Austin's paintings belong firmly to the "fictional" category: the novel contains detailed descriptions of the provenance of the works, of their display in various galleries and collections, and of critical responses to them.

Yet on closer inspection of the passages that describe the *Erasures* canvases, a reading of them as entirely realistic begins to feel overly simplistic. There is a definite shift in the novel from ekphrastic depiction that is undoubtedly of the "fictional notional" variety to that which seems to display what Barry terms "supra-realist" qualities. The first instance of detailed ekphrasis in the novel describes a (proposed) painting which can be visualized relatively unproblematically by the reader:

> Tomorrow I will begin the underpainting for my next picture. I will paint Sara, the inherited house, the fist of Thunder Cape on the horizon, the frozen lake, her hands, the Quebec heater, the slowly fading fires. I will paint the small-paned window, the log walls, a curtain illuminated from behind by winter sun, the skein of grey I never saw in Sara's hair. Then carefully, painstakingly, I will remove all the realism from it, paint it all out. (15)

In sharp contrast to this is the novel's final ekphrasis, a lengthy description of a "painting" which eludes visualization entirely—as a realist work or even an abstraction—containing an implausible combination of elements including "the look on my father's face the afternoon he knew that he was disappearing into wealth," "Sara's skin glowing in the yellow light emanating from a thousand autumn birch leaves," "hills and trees, gold-leaf birches, skies and lakes and distances," and "all the possibilities that we believe exist in alternative landscapes" (339-40). The shift from "fictional" to "conceptual" notional ekphrasis introduces an increasingly insistent element of metafiction into the ostensibly realist narrative. Attention is increasingly drawn to the fact that the depictions of Austin's paintings—in particular the *Erasures*—are symbolic rather than realistic constructions, a fact which inevitably causes the reader to return to seeking the signified of the novel's ekphrases in its intertexts, and to readings of them as "open actual" ekphrastic depictions. In its self-conscious manipulation of intertextual references, the novel creates an irresolvable tension between readings of its ekphrases as "open actual" and "conceptual notional."

The sophistication and subversive possibility of this ekphrastic slippage become evident when considered alongside Neta Gordon's more straightforward interpretation of Urquhart's use of ekphrasis in her article "The Artist and the Witness: Jane Urquhart's *The Underpainter* and *The Stone Carvers*." In contrast with the reading I have offered here, Gordon identifies Urquhart's ekphrastic mode as purely "notional," arguing that "[i]n writing the visual, [Urquhart] explores the distance between witness and artist, and then the distance between art and its witness" (71). Gordon's discussion of ekphrasis amounts to a half-paragraph aside in an essay that focuses on the components of *The Underpainter* relating to the First World War, and as such devotes little space either to landscape depiction or to uses of the visual.[6] There is, however, an important relationship between Gordon's identification of Urquhart's ekphrases as unambiguously notional and her wider argument that *The Underpainter* represents a move "away from self-conscious fictionality" (3), which eschews the referential play underscoring "postmodern pastiche" in order to stage a conflict between the artist and

the witness to historical events, with the latter representing the ultimate index of veracity. I have been arguing that, on the contrary, the landscapes depicted in *The Underpainter* place witnessing *itself* into crisis, and that it is the artist's ambivalent relationship to the act of witnessing that is continually foregrounded in order to disrupt the wilderness image's naturalization of the figure of the absent witness.

Identifying the ambiguity of Urquhart's ekphrases, then, is key to recognizing—in opposition to Gordon's reading—the extent to which *The Underpainter* participates in the postmodern conventions of metafiction and referential play as a counter-discursive strategy. The tension and referential uncertainty created by the continual and irresolvable slippage between "open actual" and "conceptual notional" ekphrastic modes are crucial to the novel's engagement with constructions of Canadian settler-national identity. The slippage between these two ekphrastic modes disrupts the settler-nationalist mythos of the Group's paintings in two opposing yet complementary ways. It simultaneously foregrounds the histories of exploitation and suppression to which the Group's aesthetic of emptiness and the establishment of an "essential" Canadian settler nationhood are inextricably tied *and*, through Austin's American nationality, disrupts the established links *between* the Group and "Canadianness."

Characteristic of Urquhart's broader ambivalence regarding the discourses of settler-nationalism in *The Underpainter*, the implications of this decoupling are ultimately left uncertain: while the novel's perpetually unresolved ekphrases effect a wholesale deconstruction of nationalist *form*, aligning the capitalist, exploitative, and suppressive forces of the Group of Seven's wilderness aesthetic with *Americanness* leaves the door ajar for the re-entrance of a recuperative *Canadian* settler-nationalism, shorn of its less desirable qualities. While this may represent, according to taste, a disappointing equivocation or a richly productive blueprint for a responsible articulation of cultural nationalism, what is less ambiguous is the novel's displacement of the combative, masculine narrative at the centre of the Group's representations of North from its prominent position within discourses of Canadian nationhood, allowing the haunting, half-buried lives, stories, and peoples at its periphery to surface. In the wake of this decentring, fragmentary suggestions of alternative stories, like those of the Sleeping Giant, are allowed to rise to the surface of Urquhart's novel like the pentimenti which strike such fear into Austin.

Through its foregrounding and exploiting of its own intertextuality via the innovative use of notional and actual ekphrasis, Urquhart's novel provides an

instructive illustration of the critical potential of ekphrastic representation as a mode of engagement with technologies of imperialist representation, but, more than this, underlines the interconnectedness of the formal, aesthetic dimensions of such media and their ideological content. Without transcending the complicities of its own subject position, a novel such as *The Underpainter* is capable of imaginatively inhabiting the very moment of production of non-narrative modes of imperialist representation, and, by highlighting the instant in which temporality is arrested—or "folded"—in the spatial plane of the visual art object, to at least begin to "envoice" those whose narratives have been suppressed by it. Beyond the formal play with which ekphrasis has traditionally been associated—and beyond even the postmodern self-referentiality with which more recent interventions such as those of Heffernan and Barry have increasingly identified it—lies a genuinely radical critical potential which, in refusing to leave the entombed artifacts of imperialism buried, carries the potential to unearth—or "unfold"—some of the colonial enterprise's best-concealed narratives.

NOTES

1 I follow the convention throughout of referring to fictional figures (including Austin) by first name and real-world figures (such as Lawren Harris) by surname. In the case of Rockwell Kent, who exists both in the real world and the fictional world of Urquhart's novel, I thus maintain a distinction between Rockwell (the character) and Kent (the artist).

2 There is an extensive body of critical work documenting the problematic aspects of the Group of Seven's empty wilderness aesthetic, especially with regard to the representational erasure of the land's Aboriginal inhabitants and complicity with capitalist exploitation of its resources. For a wide selection of excerpted essays, plus an excellent overview, see O'Brian and White.

3 For reasons of space, I have found it necessary to state a number of contentious arguments about the Group's representational economy (especially with regard to its construction of gender) as if they were established facts, or at least supported by a broad consensus. I differ significantly from the still prevailing view that the Group's wilderness aesthetic is characterized by an unambiguous feminine gendering of the land consistent with agrarian settler discourse elsewhere (see, for example, Mackey; Grace). I argue in detail for my own position in my essay "Envoicing Silent Objects: Art and Literature at the Site of the Canadian Landscape."

4 Lorna Jackson identifies this parallel with Lawren Harris, though not the others I have outlined, in her review of *The Underpainter*.

5 I am indebted to an anonymous reviewer at *Canadian Literature* for drawing my attention to this commonality between Austin and Harris.

6 The present essay, of course, does just the opposite, focusing solely on the novel's engagement with wilderness depictions and not on its war components. While the novel's

First World War narratives are fascinating and complex in their own right—and might in a longer piece add a further dimension to my reading of the Group of Seven's combative wilderness aesthetic as heavily inflected by Great War iconography—length requirements restrict my focus here to the most direct engagements with the Group and their art.

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Clay McCann

build me down just to tear me up

the Mary-Anne Apts.

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1BR Stanley marine 1BR Jay and Jim newborn 1BR Vais, Ahal
electrician pot plant colic, maternity leave, TV teacher, medic
pigeons asthmatic truck driver (love affair) pregnant BBC1
gamer bipolar jogs spaghetti wolf tapestry lamb vindaloo
ceiling/floor/mice/mice/ceiling/floor/ceiling/damp/rotten/damp/ceiling
bachelor Margaret 2BR Pat & Siobhan Pride bachelor vacant
Graves widow shy Parade planners guitar workmen horse
tea Duke Ellington students Hootenanny FNB -hair plaster lath
food bank pension bike racks gay marriage strip club lunch
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Laurie Kruk

"Double-Voicing" Family in Findley's Short Fiction

Pinking the Triangle, Drawing the Circle

Timothy Findley's fiction has been the subject of much attention focusing on its feminist, or even "queer,"[1] interrogation of sexual identities and gender roles, but his short stories have been curiously neglected. Susan Billingham has addressed the four Minna and Bragg stories by focusing on the use of the washroom as a locus of gay sexuality. She has raised questions about Bragg's own sexuality and, behind the character, about Findley's own arguably conservative views on men and women. I would like to introduce the possibility of a "campy," double-voiced reading of "Bragg and Minna" and "A Gift of Mercy" from *Stones* (1988) and "A Bag of Bones" and "Come as You Are" from *Dust to Dust* (1997). While feminist and gay studies have proven to be fertile grounds for Findley study, camp remains more elusive or untheorized.[2] In an attempt at definition, David Bergman points out four areas of agreement. First, camp is a "style that favours 'exaggeration,' 'artifice,' and 'extremity'" (4-5). Second, it is in tension with popular, commercial, and consumerist culture. Third, it is best recognized or created by those outside the cultural mainstream. And fourth (of special relevance here): "camp is affiliated with homosexual culture, or at least with a self-conscious eroticism that throws into question the naturalization of desire" (5). Despite the appealing concision of this classification, Bergman acknowledges that camp remains a contested idea, both political and apolitical. Fabio Cleto insists that "framing camp as queer suggests [that it is necessary] to deconstruct, to question, puzzle and *cross* these binary oppositions" (23). Cleto goes on to point out an intriguing "convergence between the camp scene and Bakhtinian carnivalesque, for

the two share hierarchy inversion, mocking paradoxicality, sexual punning and innuendos, and—most significantly—a complex and multilayered power relationship between the dominant and subordinate (or deviant) . . ." (32). Allying "camp" with "the gay [if not queer] sensibility," Jack Babuscio summarizes camp as combining irony, aestheticism, theatricality, and humour (19-20).

Bakhtin's carnivalesque and Babuscio's camp both inspire my argument that Findley incorporates a camp discourse, mode, or attitude in his fiction precisely as a facilitator of "double-voicing" within a broader political context; that is, a camp(y) mode of writing also supports feminist-inspired critiques of patriarchy and class hierarchy. Through a camp-inflected use of parody, irony, and theatricality, I argue, these short stories double-voice the traditional family in two ways: linguistically, by constructing the focalizer's "hybridized" speech and "dialogized" perspective (to borrow Bakhtin's terms) in an ironic critique of sexual/social hierarchies, and narratively, by "pinking" the erotic triangle in a parody of patriarchy, masculinity, and heterosexuality. Such a parody is more than self-reflexive, for it makes room for the possibility of what I call "circles of community," liminal spaces[3] where alternate agents of care or mothering appear. In this envisioning, "mothering" is reconceived as a non-gendered proffering of preservation, nurturance, and witnessing[4] which tests social boundaries by making room even for the suggestively marginal or monstrous.

Heather Sanderson first pointed out Findley's use of the erotic triangle in *The Wars,* arguing that the triangle of Robert, Taffler, and Barbara D'Orsey—and less obviously, Robert, Harris, and Barbara—allows the sexually ambiguous Robert to safely channel his desires for another man through a woman.[5] She draws on Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's theory that

> male-male desire . . . [is] intelligible primarily by being routed through triangular relations involving a woman. (*Epistemology* 15)
>
> While homosocial desire means more than homosexual desire, the cultural structuring of the homosocial bond between men ensures that the homosexual end of the continuum of male relations is suppressed by the homophobic denial enforced in compulsory heterosexuality (Sanderson, "Robert and Taffler" 84).[6]

I do not disagree with Sanderson's persuasive argument about Findley's sexually ambivalent hero, Robert Ross. However, by presenting Bragg as a homosexual married to a woman while openly involved with a male lover, Findley parodies or "pinks" the erotic triangle to question, rather than sustain, the patriarchal status quo as expressed through homosocial desire

and the exchange of women as sexual/social capital. For as Judith Butler argues, "the parodic repetition of 'the original,' . . . reveals the original to be nothing other than a parody of the *idea* of the natural and the original" (31). In the case of Bragg, Minna, and Col, the ideological constraints of middle-class marriage and procreation are knowingly undone, in an attempt to meet the desires of all three members of the triangle. In analyzing the "pink triangle" of Bragg, Minna, and Col, I will begin with the stories from *Dust to Dust*, published in 1997, which, although written later than those in *Stones*, published in 1988, deal with an earlier period in his characters' lives. This decision is in keeping with Findley's "revival" of these characters, almost a decade later, and will perhaps shed light on how the older writer is in dialogue with his *own*, younger-self's version of the triangle.

Perhaps because they share a writing vocation as well as a home, in both "A Bag of Bones" and "Come as You Are" Minna and Bragg share the focalizing role, loosely alternated over the thirteen or fourteen story "chapters." Yet an omniscient voice stands behind both, offering the perspective of an implied author. For instance, the opening sentence of "A Bag of Bones" reads: "Tuesday—and as always, Minna's disgruntled sighs could be heard throughout the house as she made her way from bedroom to bathroom, kitchen to dining room. . . . *Well*, she would say aloud, *let's go*" (83). The adverbial aside, "and as always," provides a stylized, ironic observation on a particular writer's routine as she determinedly begins her week of work; it could be also seen as an example of narratorial (passive) "double-voicing" where (implied) author-writer and character-writer are joined in their shared initiation of, yet suggested resistance to, story-work (see Morson and Emerson 148-50). *And as always* in Findley, the sanity/insanity tension is thematically foregrounded since both Minna and Bragg are writers who manage their "rage" (Bragg) or "demons" (Minna) precisely through their shared dedication to the page. Minna in particular writes because she is at war with the "silence" she sees behind the eyes of her Queen Street "crazies" ("A Gift of Mercy" 51). She wants to provide them with a "witness," as she says in the earlier story; by doing so, she is opening the circle of community to those often excluded or silenced within society, while escaping the trap of Rosedale "ladyhood" ("Bragg and Minna" 11).

Stylistically, these later Minna and Bragg stories are dominated by theatrical dialogue between Bragg and Minna, Bragg and Col, mixing pungent profanity with literary eloquence. These two stories also show the older writer's more comfortable embrace of explicitly "campy" double-

voicing, especially through the exchanges of Bragg and Col minus Minna, the would-be mother. Irony is utilized as a mode of cultural interrogation, along with a writerly impulse towards punning. Minna's discourse is earthy, edgy, angry, unafraid of contradiction and her "double-voicing" enacts class, as well as gender, subversion. For just as she uses (and abuses) her mother's cherished furniture and glassware in her writer's office, working amid the "heirloom Georgian silver, the Spode, the Sheraton chairs and the Adams sideboards" ("A Bag of Bones" 83), she ironizes her class consciousness to undermine social and gender norms in her own version of hybridized discourse. For instance, musing to Bragg on evidence of a historical infanticide, the bag of bones discovered in their neighbour's house, she imagines a dialogue between "the woman next door" and her father, husband or mother. Somewhere between 1910 and 1928, she remarks, "'*I've been repapering the bedroom.* The bathroom. The living room. . . . UPSTAIRS—DOWNSTAIRS—AND IN MY LADY'S CHAMBER! BURYING BABIES!'" (92). Shouting out her parodic nursery-rhyme attacking middle-class hypocrisy, Minna, laughing, ironically concludes with a punning reference to her own still-buried desire for motherhood: "A bag of bones I would have killed for" (92).

Juxtaposed with this revelation, on the same day, is Bragg's own suppressed sexual desire for the "boy" he sees running in the ravine while on his daily walk. Later, Bragg returns to this desire in dialogue with his split-off self in the mirror.[7] In the earlier "Bragg and Minna," it is simply noted that "Bragg was looking in the mirror the way most people do who don't really want to see themselves . . ." (36). Here, as Billingham summarizes, "the competing voices articulate aspects of his inner conflict" (212), as Bragg dramatically "faces up" to his own desire, and is almost "caught" by Minna with an erection. For Bragg, in the face of Minna's desire, heterosexual sex increasingly equals fatherhood, and yet he emphasizes Col's *boy*ishness in a link to paternal, if not paedophiliac, desire, just after finishing his internalized argument with the conclusion "*No children. Ever* . . . (but still inquiring aloud, '*Never?*')" (87-88). When Bragg finally acknowledges his longing for the "naked runner," he turns out to be Col, the bartender at the book launch they attend that night. Preparing for this party, Minna packs her "pocket*book*," the dated term punningly conveying Minna's linking of femininity and writing, in which she carries "talismans" of her "*stillborn children: Alma* [her dead sister]. *Bag-lady. Bragg*" (102). Significantly, Bragg is described as a still-born child, on the threshold between life and death.

This speaks to Bragg's own undeveloped emotional needs—including for fatherhood—his fear of success as well as of affection, while signalling Minna's of motherly as well as wifely relationship to him. Later, Col finds Minna's pocketbook and returns it to Bragg, affirming his husbandly control of Minna's property and/or "babies," commenting, "I think I may have *something that you want*" (114, emphasis mine). This phrase allows all the campy possibilities to remain in play here, so the purse might be seen as representing babies, the female, and Col's body.

"A Bag of Bones" thus details the beginning of Col and Bragg's relationship and, with Minna, the formation of their "pink triangle." Bragg is shocked when his two identities—one public, one private—collide at an evening where homophobia becomes a theme. It involves the poison-penned critic Michael Marsden, mocked by Bragg in verse as a necrophiliac: "Michael Marsden, whom writers dread, screws the living and fucks the dead!" he declaims, to Minna's hysterical laughter (103). During this evening, Marsden is lured by a (straight) man dressed in drag into the bathroom and a display of homosexual panic just before his own vindictive review of a new book is read, causing him to visibly deflate, a "monster" no more. This deflation follows logically as retribution for Marsden's scornful comments earlier about marginalized voices entering fiction: "*nigger-books, faggot-books and dyke-books. North-American-Indian-books! Feminist-books and macho-books! Where will it end? and* WHEN*?*" (105). As Billingham remarks, the hysterical Marsden may be "a kind of *alter ego* for Bragg," as he is forced to confront his own resistance to acknowledging this community he is suddenly identified with, even as he occupied a voyeuristic position in the bathroom, there mimicking another "pink triangle" with "Sylvia" and would-be lover Marsden (Billingham 215). For "I wouldn't write a gay novel for all the tea in China," Bragg had declared earlier to Minna (99). Yet by the end of the evening, both have met and tacitly accepted Col into their household, but for different reasons. Bragg is acknowledging his previously hidden homosexual desires, perhaps mirrored by his new identification with the "neophyte" author whose book is being honoured that night. While listening to Marsden's attack on what he calls "another *Death in Venice*" (111), Bragg realizes "He's attacking who and what I am" (112). Yet later he looks at the humiliated Marsden and his anger fades away as he realizes Marsden "had shown himself to be pathetic" and "human. . . . For one entirely crazy moment, Bragg was tempted to cross the room and put his arm around him" (113).[8] As we've learned from Findley's fiction, "crazy" is not what "we"

think it is, and even former enemies can be redeemed within the larger circle of community.

Meanwhile, by allowing Bragg to bring his homosexual desires into their home, in the form of Col, Minna, a life-long rebel against Rosedale's "ladyhood," can escape the "wife" role. The conjugal bed travels with Bragg as he sleeps sometimes with Minna, sometimes with Col—and sometimes with Ben, the dog. Minna welcomes Col into their home, knowingly, and although they don't extend the presumed ménage à trois with each other, it is an even more unusual intimacy, for as Col later puts it, they "have no secrets. Not having secrets is a kind of love" ("Come as You Are" 142). The two "rivals" both compete and collude, with mutual respect, for Bragg's attentions. However, the creation of the triangle redirects sexual and procreative desires into a more playful, more negotiated, performance of "masculinity" and "femininity." For instance, in "Come as You Are," when Bragg demurs at going to a costume party with Col, Minna reconfigures their triangle by teasing, "Col and I will go. I'll play the man" (118). "Playing the man" suggests Minna's acceptance of the dominant role, with Col the feminized subordinate, as the older *woman* takes (maternal?) control of the younger *man*.

Billingham points out the self-hate lingering in Bragg's refusal to analyze the "rage" he feels, despite his lovemaking with Col in "Come as You Are." While I would agree that Bragg "exhibits a closeted mentality" (215) in public, I would point out that Bragg, a thirty-five-year-old man in the 1980s, must resort to "passing," which "leads to a heightened awareness and appreciation for disguise, impersonation . . . and the distinction to be made between instinctive and theatrical behaviour" (Babuscio 25). So he defines his Halloween identity as being "THE STRAIGHT MAN WHO SLEEPS WITH BOYS," allying the homosexual with the stereotypical paedophile/paederast despite Col's protest that he's not a "boy," in an example of what Babuscio, defining the gay sensibility, calls "a bitter-wit that is deeply imbued with self-hate and self-derogation" (27). It is undeniably Bragg's struggle with this "self-hate" which is his major obstacle in accepting his role as husband to Minna and lover to Col, but I believe he does come to this acceptance by the chronologically latest (though earlier-written) story, "Bragg and Minna."

Minna is described by Billingham as primarily "a thwarted mother figure" (206) and she writes, "the Bragg and Minna stories leave the reader with the sense of how his characters remain trapped by these rigid gender categories, rather than how they succeed in changing or escaping them" (217). I find

this assessment, focusing mainly on the two *Dust* stories, reductive; I also think that by examining Findley's "pink triangles," it is possible to see how the triangles themselves offer more fluid arrangements for meeting desires within other contexts/with other partners. That is not to deny the ongoing tension between Minna's procreative desire and Bragg's homosexual desire (and Col's), but this tension is undercut by a "campy" element which both characters display *as writers*. For instance, after hearing of the discovery of the infant remains next door, Minna, revealing the power of metaphor's sublimation, calls her "pocketbook" of talismans, her "bag of bones" (102). The "talismans" are reminders of her own circle of community, which includes her husband, but also the treasured memory of her dead sister, and the bag-ladies she is rescuing either literally or symbolically through writing-as-witnessing. And as she muses on the day's events, Minna juxtaposes two distinct "babies," human and literary: "People kill them so easily . . . Plaster them over inside the walls. *Kill them with reviews*" (116, emphasis mine). Thus, Minna, as writer, views herself as already nurturing life through her art, if not yet in her yearned-for child. The fact that she is willing to accommodate, even "love" her husband's lover ("Come as You Are" 129) shows her respect for Bragg's different needs—just as she respects his very different writing career—in a testimony of loyalty and love. In this regard, Bragg and Minna are joined in favouring coalition politics, feminist and gay, over what might be seen as exclusionary identity politics, in an arguably "queer" (and campy) undoing of categories of human behaviour and needs.

"And now, the dreaded Halloween," is the opening announcement of "Come as You Are" (117). The adjective "dreaded" passively dialogizes the text, situating us in Bragg's perspective on a holiday with pagan roots whose theme of masquerade underlines Bragg's anxiety about his shifting identifications: husband to Minna but not father; lover to Col, who has joined their household, but remaining, in his ambivalence, as Col puts it, "the queerest queer I've ever met" (126). Bragg and Minna are separated by their desires on Halloween, as she stays to meet the children in the company of her cancer-stricken friend, Mercy, and he reluctantly agrees to attend a costume party with Col, put on by the "drag queens" and "faggots" he claims to hate. And both meet their combined desires and fears on Halloween: Minna the "Charlie Manson" figure or "rapist"; Bragg the exhibitionistic Henry Albanese. The focalizing role once again alternates between spouses, and the title reflects the self-revelation behind costume, but offers an extra layer of self-consciousness. For Col presents himself (in Minna's high heels,

lipstick, and false eyelashes) as "a drag queen dressed as a college boy" while Bragg insists on wearing his usual "grey flannels," while "declaring himself 'THE STRAIGHT MAN WHO SLEEPS WITH BOYS!'" (119, 120), in a camp labelling which appears to attack simplistic categories of hetero/homo, man/boy, predator/parent. Bragg thus acknowledges his own "passing" while the younger Col flirts with the flamboyance Bragg fears. At home, Minna confides in Mercy that she has considered artificial insemination. Mercy responds with the shocked epithet, "Jesus," and Minna responds dryly, "Well—no. Jesus is not available. . . . I want Bragg's babies" (129). Campy humour both underlines, and undermines, her yearning. Soon after Minna's confession about her desire to have children, even "Charlie Manson's," she is confronted with a threatening masked male who appears to try to seize her, leading her violently to fend off "the rapist," amputating his finger with the storm door in a displaced castration. Perhaps it is his silence that is most threatening to Minna, the fighter of silence; she has no compunction about throwing the finger in the fire after he flees. Meanwhile, Bragg's admirer, Henry Albanese, insists on knowing if the hero of his story is "queer," a plea which Bragg evades, saying only "'I didn't recognize all the possibilities'" in his fictional persona (135). When Henry (identified by a stranger as "YOU SEQUINED BITCH!" [136]) is pulled away, Bragg admits it was a "close call," as "I almost liked him" (136). Here is the beginning of Bragg's own incipient self-critique, uncovering his own identification as a "queer" human who doesn't yet "recognize all the possibilities."

Interestingly, Bragg, like cancer-victim Mercy, talks about being "dead" but Col reminds him of how alive he is in his lovemaking with him: in another instance of camp's double entendre, Col remarks, "now I know what they mean by *ass-ault*" (126). Col's intimate dialogue with Bragg offers more instances of the "double-voicing" of camp, with Bragg addressing Col as "you bloody bitch!" in an implied identification of gay with the feminine or subordinate, and Col agreeing that he has been "practising" sounding like Minna (126, 127). Col's androgynous features further convey a critique of masculinity as dominance or control which Bragg, in his struggle with his multiple identifications, has not yet absorbed; the narrator emphasizes in an aside: "*I won't let you [lean back]—and sure as hell, I won't let me [expose myself]* was the message of everything learned about masculinity. . . . Even women suffered because of it" (143). A declaration is then made about what women want: "*I want you—the person lying whole and naked on the bed.*" And in a reminder from/of the implied author, we are informed "Bragg did

not know this. Colin Marsh did. So did Minna. This was the war" (143). Once again, Minna and Col are aligned in a coalition of shared interests between women and (the new generation of) homosexual men, who are joined through "double-voicing" in Bakhtin's sense of "hybrid construction."[9] If Minna's discourse is fractured by her parodic references to class consciousness, including the subversively sarcastic formalisms or "speech manners" of what Bragg calls her "lady-mode" in "Bragg and Minna," Bragg's (and Col's) is increasingly fractured by the ironic posturing of camp's double-coding of a homosexual "belief system." As Minna good-humouredly explains to Mercy on behalf of the absent men, "'We speak dialect here. . . . Just in case it looks and sounds like a civilized household: *man, woman, dog*'" (129).

Stepping back from the 1997 Minna and Bragg pair, to that of 1988, is actually to go *forward* in narrative time, to the end of their marriage, the birth of Stella—a "monster" child with six fingers, six toes, and half a brain—and the death of Minna. "Bragg and Minna" begins in Australia, where she died, with the sprinkling of her ashes on the stones at Ku-Ring-Gai, and leads into Bragg's meditations on their twelve-year marriage, including Col. Col appears as focalizer for the first time, looking at his (publicly defined) "friend" beside him on the plane, and thinking, "we are told . . . an awful pack of lies about love" (9), juxtaposing the traditional union symbolized by his parents ("it had only been their lies that kept them together" [10]) with their unconventional, compassionate triangle. Col speaks now of his own ability to love the idealized storyteller Minna, to whom he would be both attentive listener and chivalrous servant, leaving Bragg to "contend with her needs" (11). Before their creation of the "pink triangle" that keeps Bragg alternating between Col's and Minna's beds, however, there was the invisible third party, the child Minna desired. Procreative sex is linked with life by Minna but with death by Bragg, who declares himself a "genetic homosexual," the carrier of faulty genes. Minna's defiant response to his fear of "monstrosity"—"MAYBE WHAT I WANT IS MONSTERS!" (15)—becomes prophetic as Minna, tragically, gets her wish. Like Lotte in *Not Wanted on the Voyage* or Rowena in *The Wars*, Stella is visibly "different" and so rejected by most of the human community. Stella embodies Minna's empathy for "crazies" like "the Man Who Hated Streetcars" ("A Gift of Mercy" 40) and all those whose silence she seeks to articulate in her writing—possibly including Bragg. Yet Stella is taken away from her initially resistant father, to be raised by "strangers" such as the Australian couple Minna locates as part of the "Minna Joyce conspiracy," another illustration of the circle of community. As

a mother against her husband's wishes, facing her own terminal illness, and seeking her caregiving replacement, Minna redefines mothering as a self-willed act of family re-construction. While asserting she still loves Bragg, she finds another lover, the "sad, mad poet from Sydney" (5), Stanley Nob, who eventually winds up guiding Bragg and Col to the top of the hill for the memorial ceremony. Looking at Nob, his presumed rival, Bragg ironically identifies with Minna as desiring subject, creating another "pink triangle" by reflecting "Nob was so damned good-looking. . . . Bragg had wanted him himself" (5).

On the plane trip home, where the journey with Minna's ashes is reconstructed in Bragg's mind, Bragg is painfully reminded of Minna's courage through his encounter with the drunken, dishevelled "Janis Joplin" girl, another rebel against "ladyhood" (6, 11). Taking over Col's vacated seat, seeking community, she finds her overtures rejected by Bragg as he tells her his friend is in "the washroom"; she in turn mocks his genteel euphemism by repeating: "Oh, the *wash* room!" she said (7). Watching her impose on politely embarrassed fellow travellers on the long flight home, Bragg is uncomfortably reminded of Minna's ability to get her way through a discourse combining the class privilege of her Rosedale upbringing, or what he calls her "lady-mode" (9), with sarcastic authority, as when Minna would make a polite request to a fellow passenger, "I wonder if you'd mind . . ." but end with the threat, "Of course, I can have you forcibly removed. . . ." (9). This is another example of Minna's hybridized discourse, mixing linguistic identifications in a manner both powerful and, ironically, parodic of the source of its power, like her use of the mock-genteel label "my dear." Yet at the end of the trip, the girl, re-dressed, appears to perform the demure bride-to-be, who is "not allowed to be sad" (25). For Bragg, it is as if Minna were killed a second time. This imaginary second loss pushes Bragg to reconstruct himself as a father, and he pledges to bring Stella back into his life. He will carry her to see the Aboriginal petroglyphs that he views as a "forever visible" (26) testament to difference, the carving once seen as a "shaman" or (stigmatized) "witch" now read as a disabled six-fingered child helped to stand by her parents. With this affirmation, Bragg takes a step towards a larger identity, and at this point, he is no longer "trapped in a no-man's land between two active, life-affirming alternatives" of lover to Col or father to their child (213), as Billingham sees it: he is both. The epiphany of the stone carvings leads Bragg to accept both the monster within and the monster without, as gay father to a disabled daughter. By returning to Ku-Ring-Gai "with Stella on his shoulder. Or his

hip" (26), he is ready to inhabit both/either father (shoulder) and/or mother (hip) position, thereby embracing Minna's ghost along with his own complex subjectivity.

"A Gift of Mercy" should really be pluralized as "*Gifts* of Mercy." The first gift is Minna's final departure to Australia with Stella, refusing blame as their marriage ends. Narrated through flashback exposition in loosely alternating spousal perspectives, this story takes us into the formation of the marriage, and its foundation on the twin "gifts" of mercy and "madness" of the two writers. Minna, herself once institutionalized by her own mother as a young woman—"because she had broken all her family's traditions of silence, propriety and submission" (55)—defiantly chooses to live and work on Queen Street in close proximity to the Mental Health Centre and its "crazies" (51). Taking a job at the "Moribund [a pun on *Morrison*] Café," Minna considers the main audience for her class-based rebellion to be her divorced mother, who has recently "married up" to become "Mrs. Harold Opie" (30). Leaving the café to chase impetuously after Bragg in the street, she thinks "What if her mother could see her now?" (32). Bragg himself later realizes that what "gave his writing its 'voice' was his savage sense of humour—laughter that only reached the page" (49). The source of it was that "he was set aside from the comfortable mass by the fact of his homosexuality," (49) seen as an affliction that must be forgiven by his family. Minna, perhaps in her most courageous, argumentative behaviour, represents "the bitch" (50) he must free from within himself, and which he eventually expresses by embracing marriage to her along with his homosexual relationship with Col. Bragg and Minna's first meeting reveals their shared obsession with different silences—of madness, of homosexuality *as* madness. For it is Bragg's "lost" look as he bursts into the café which first attracts Minna's curiosity, and draws her out into the snowstorm to ask his name. "Three months later they were married" (34) would appear to be the story's pat romantic "ending," but it is really only the beginning of their campy rewriting of the marriage plot.

A dedicated recorder of the pain of the mad, Minna draws a circle of community around those most—even her husband Bragg—would shun, claiming "*Just to be seen and heard and acknowledged. That's what they wanted. Witness*" (51). And it is as a witness to an old woman cast off by her rich daughter—her own story in reverse—that Minna enacts a "gift of mercy" one night. From the husband's perspective, we read: "Bragg came home and found a stranger in Minna's bed" (35). In a parody of adulterous betrayal, the expected infidelity turns out to be an intrusion into the marital

unit of the child-like crone who lies like a crying baby in the wife's bed, the third party in another "pink triangle." Libby Doyle's presence here literally forces Minna to share her husband's bed, despite his fear of procreation. Bragg, however, performs the "masterful" role of patriarchal husband by insisting "Mrs. Doyle" leave the house he bought, an act of exclusion further justified when he discovers her stealing their belongings. Still closeted, "the bitch" still leashed, Bragg as focalizer here speaks smugly of the "detritus of humanity" (43) that he tries to "protect" Minna from by first, buying the house on Collier Street and second, by taking Libby Doyle back to her alley. Minna, though, sees not an assault on their property, but rather, a future suicide attempt in the purloined dressing-gown cord as a noose. The exercising/exorcising of Bragg's "masculine" and middle-class authority, however, seemingly inspires him to express his own suppressed desires as he picks up "a lad called Donald Murray" (57) for his first one-night stand, in their new home, as if in rebellion against Minna's initial reconstruction of their family grouping along the lines of *her* desire: Minna, Bragg, Bag-lady/baby. Yet while remembering their romanticized first meeting outside the café, against a backdrop of snow and instant attraction, Minna also reveals that the reason Bragg entered the café in the first place was to try and place a call "'to phone a man [Bragg had] met and make him a gift of [Bragg's] virginity'" (57). Another "gift of mercy"—and an example of the compassionate witnessing each partner provides to the "madness" of the other through their ironic reconstruction of love and marriage. This "double-voicing" of family prepares for the official creation, with Col, of the "pink triangle" which will accommodate, for a time, all their desires by deconstructing, with campy humour and class subversion, the master narrative of the middle-class family.

As I have shown, Stuart Bragg is both a "monstrous" object of social surveillance and the apex of a "pink triangle" that parodies masculinity, heterosexuality, and patriarchy. Along with Minna and Col, Bragg uses the double voice of irony, parody, and theatricality to sketch out a wider circle of community, including homosexuals, "crazies," and his monstrous daughter, Stella. By means of linguistic and narrative "double-voicing," especially in the two *Dust to Dust* stories, a campy critique of the heteronormative family is enacted which is political in the largest sense: clearing the way for the creation of circles of community in which nurturing is non-gendered, hegemonic masculinity is questioned, and humans recognize their own submerged connections to both the natural and the numinous. As these stories suggest, a "double voice" on masculinity, femininity, family, must

be cultivated in order to make room within the old triangles for new, more fluid arrangements for love, marriage, mothering—for women *and* for men. Writing about the history of homosexual identity, Sedgwick declares, "One thing that does emerge with clarity from this complex and contradictory map of sexual and gender definition is that the possible grounds to be found for the alliance and cross-identification among various groups will also be plural" (*Epistemology* 89). Are these stories feminist, in some sense? I would have to say Findley is an ally of feminism within a liberal-humanist framework. Is Findley's "campy" treatment of the "performative" aspects of gender identity also appealing for those sympathetic to queer theory? Yes. Especially in the later stories, where Col and Bragg develop their own "double-voicing" discourse as gay men, we see how Bragg releases his pernicious, closeted rage. Babuscio observes, "Camp can thus be a means of undercutting rage by its derision of concentrated bitterness. . . . Laughter . . . is its chosen means of dealing with the painfully incongruous situation of gays in society" (28). And is Findley also able to show how we are all brought into the circle, through our awareness of moments of "double-voicing" and multiple but complementary rather than contradictory identifications? Perhaps it is worth noting that the "pink triangle," reclaimed from its stigmatizing role in Nazi concentration camps to become "one of the symbols of the modern gay rights movement," has recently given way to the "rainbow flag" supporting the community of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender individuals.[10] But I'll let "Tiff" have the last word: "I'm perfectly happy to have it said, 'He is a homosexual.' I just don't want to be collected exclusively in gay anthologies. . . . I want my world to be wider than my sexuality. And it is" (Kruk, "I Want Edge" 85).

NOTES

1 While acknowledging the extremely wide and diverse use of "queer," I draw on Judith Butler and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's foundational critiques of both gender and sexuality as being, to some degree, constructed within a heteronormative social discourse. Stuart Bragg, in his occupation of the alternating roles of husband to Minna and lover to Col, exceeding the simplification of a utopian "bisexuality," would certainly appear to undermine the heterosexual/homosexual opposition.

2 For three exceptions, see Gabriel; Martell; and Pearson.

3 Or, in Linda Hutcheon's argument, Findley's use of irony as discursive strategy is both "deconstructive and constructive," where the constructive critique moves from engaging a political position of marginality to one of liminality where "new things can happen" (31).

4 Drawing on Sara Ruddick's discussion of "maternal thinking," which includes three

concepts—"preservative love, nurturance and training"—the last one speaking of socialization in an initially pragmatic sense. However, I have replaced "training" with "witnessing" as a form of feminist resistance explicitly recurring in Findley's texts. See my "Mothering Sons."

5 In an essay that in some ways prepares for my own, Heather Sanderson has analyzed "Losers, Finders, Strangers at the Door" (*Dinner Along the Amazon*), in terms of its triangular relationship between Daisy McCabe, Arnold McCabe, and Arnold's younger lover, Caleb. It is "a drama of power and powerlessness, of two trapped players manipulated by a third and struggling for advantageous positions relative to him and each other" ("'What is there left to say?'" 80). However, Arnold, the object of their mutual interest, is absent from the story and the focus remains on "the tentative formation of relations by which these three will be able to live together" (86). Richard Dellamora also mentions, in passing, the application of "triangulated male desire that Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick . . . has shown to be basic to English male homosocial culture" to the complex relationship of Mauberley, Wallis Simpson, and the Duke of Windsor in *Famous Last Words* (184). These moments of critical intersection support my sense that "the pink triangle" belongs to Findley's "CATALOGUE OF PERSONAL OBSESSIONS," conscious or not (see his Introduction to *Dinner* ix).

6 The erotic triangle Sedgwick describes, and Sanderson here employs, is not necessarily homosexual in its foundation, but Sedgwick argues famously for "the potential unbrokenness of a continuum between homosocial and homosexual—a continuum whose visibility, for men, in our society, is radically disrupted" (*Between Men* 1-2).

7 Mirrors are a regular feature of Findley's short fiction, linked to his recurring motif of social performance: see my paper in Lynch and Robbeson.

8 While questioning "Sylvia," a straight man in drag, about his plan to trick Marsden, Bragg inspires a bit of "camp" discourse by asking a leading question about the plans for the washroom scene: "As long as you aren't going to." . . . "What? Go down on him? I'd rather go down on *The Titanic*" (107). This "queer" pun elicits Bragg's complicit laughter. In "Come as You Are," he will trade such camp barbs privately with Col, in a new verbal identification with the "faggots" he publicly dismisses. For the moment, Minna, as a member of heteronormative culture, is left out of this particular "circle." Both later stories enact a "campy" discourse that was not as overt in the 1988 pair.

9 "Hybrid construction": "an utterance that belongs, by its grammatical (syntactic) and compositional markers, to a single speaker, but that actually contains mixed within it two utterances, two speech manners, two styles, two 'languages,' two semantic and axiological belief systems" (Bakhtin 304).

10 See www.pink-triangle.org and Johnson.

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derek beaulieu

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There's George. Where does she come up George? Yeah but where does it come up? I think you need to be over there. There it goes I see it in-between the trees. There it is coming right over top the trees. Uh huh it be right on top of those trees. I saw it. There it goes. That's brighter than usual. Yeah. It is. Oh yeah. Right over those trees. I saw it when it went through that hole. I don't remember it being that bright, that big. Me neither. What was that part? it must be part of one of them boosters. Oh look, there's two. It's going off into two. That trouble or not? They're not having trouble are they? That's trouble some kind George. That's trouble of some kind, innit it or not? There it goes again. I think I'll go in and listen. They got troubles. No that's trouble of some kind George. That's trouble of some kind. That doesn't look right. Yeah, I haven't either. Its not as bad as it was. I don't know, it sure didn't look right. It what? Exploded? What? Said it exploded? Boy I knew it didn't look right. You could tell. Theres some trouble all right. That's sorta a historical moment we got here on tape I guess. Hope we got it on tape, lets see what happens.

Geoff Martin

Pierre Berton, Celebrity, and the Economics of Authenticity

In the subterranean reading room of the William Ready Division of Archives and Research at McMaster University stands the upper torso of a headless mannequin. From its sloped shoulders hangs the ecru suit jacket of Jack McClelland, a suit that is cut, quite literally, from the cloth of Canadian literature. Emblazoned across the buttoned chest, the flatly ironed sleeves, and the broad-shouldered back are authors' names and titles that signify McClelland & Stewart's central role in Canadian literary history (see King). In white capital letters, "MOWAT" stands out boldly from within two black squares on either shoulder, while "Leonard Cohen: Beautiful Losers" angles provocatively along the right arm. Down the front, right breast step three names of Canada's literary giants: "Richler," "Laurence," "Atwood," with "The Edible Woman" hovering delectably above the large front pocket. This pocket's material, cut separately from the rest, disturbs the angular pattern by proclaiming in straight, black lettering, "Pierre Berton: The Last Spike."

To a younger generation of critics, Berton's inclusion in this "who's who" of CanLit authors seems something of an anomaly. Unlike the others, Berton's name and many of his texts are now dated, grown dusty on the cottage bookshelves of the nation; he is now, for all intents and purposes, a dead, white, male historian. The silence surrounding his name and his work, however, stands at odds with the remarkable purchase Berton's celebrity and writings had in Canadian popular culture from his first syndicated dispatches from the fabled "Headless Valley" (Nahinni Valley, BC) in 1946 straight through to his death in 2004. This silence is especially thick in academic circles. A thorough review of various social science and humanities databases reveals

Photo: Ron Scheffler / McMaster University Library

that where Berton gains mention it is either in a review or as an introductory hook, a way of gesturing to a popular Canadian perspective before delving into other analyses. One of the more "recent" literary treatments of Berton's work reveals the dramatic shifts Canadian cultural criticism has undergone since 1985 when E.D. Blodgett, writing in *Essays on Canadian Writing*, sought to locate a distinctively Canadian literature by asking as his title, "After Pierre

Berton What?" Twenty-five years ago in this journal, Lorna Irvine usefully analyzed Berton's interest in and thematization of "the low art of selling," citing the ambivalence Berton exhibits between his own "confidence man" tactics and his castigation of American salesmanship (69). In hindsight, Irvine appears to have hit upon the very thing that has made Berton anathema to literary critics: economics.

Berton was always unapologetically "middlebrow" in his self-promotion and in his appeal to a Canadian readership—an appeal that simultaneously garnered him his best-seller status and set him at odds with the academic community. Although the concept of the cultural middlebrow carries pejorative connotations, the term can be productively employed as a method of framing both Berton's appeal and his influential, though critically neglected, function within Canadian cultural history.[1] The biographical focus of this paper thus functions in two ways. The first is to argue that Canadian cultural critics should (re)consider Berton by parsing the construction of his celebrity and mapping out the intersections between his "total star text" and the broader cultural field in which that text signified so successfully.[2] Since Berton's celebrity was, in fact, built as much on the controversies elicited by his daily columns and his broadcast opinions as it was on the public's interest in his books of history, critical interrogation of Berton's legacy can function as a means of locating and re-exploring those issues and topics that resonated with (and, sometimes, outraged) a broad spectrum of Canadians at mid-century. The second track I explore is the suggestive ties between Berton's own self-construction and the literary nation-building project for which he is most famous. Given the resonance of Berton's nationalist vision and his consummate skills of self-promotion, it is not entirely surprising, albeit somewhat unnerving, that the myth surrounding his celebrity looked increasingly like the national myths he wrote about. In her study on Canadian literary celebrities, Lorraine York closes with a discussion of Canada's Walk of Fame; she notes Berton's logical inclusion because his works, "which are markedly middlebrow in their populist retellings of Canadian history, constitute a classic exercise in national myth-making" (169). As I will demonstrate here, the authority with which Berton spoke—and the influence his voice carried—was built squarely upon his remarkable celebrity status. Understanding this alliance of myth and celebrity offers a way of analyzing the coalescence of economics and national appeal within the formative myths and narratives that continue to resonate in Canadian public space.

So what enabled Berton in the first place? What generated his appeal and a market for his books? At the root of his popular allure, I argue, is a strategic emphasis on his frontier heritage, which positioned Berton as an ideal Canadian everyman moving from the outskirts of the nation to prevail over its urban core by sheer force of will. In its obituary for Berton, for example, the *Toronto Star* editorial board attempted to fuse his outsider myth with his lived reality: "born and raised in the Yukon, Berton never lost his love for the remote parts of Canada although he spent most of his life in the Toronto area" ("Pierre Berton, 1920-'04."). Similarly, in page headings throughout Elspeth Cameron's 1987 *Saturday Night* profile, Berton's biography is crafted into a fairy-tale romance between him and the nation:

> Once upon a time . . . / Pierre Berton was a Boy Scout in Victoria who wanted to impress Canada so he / . . . made himself the best journalist in Toronto but that wasn't enough so he / . . . mastered television and conquered the airwaves of the nation but that wasn't enough so he / turned to writing sagas of Canadian history and became a national icon and / . . . lived happily ever after. (19-30)

Cameron's rendition crowns Berton as "the official storyteller of the nation" and also works to soften his zealous drive to succeed (21); his heroic trajectory, spanning western Canada, bridging every public medium, is only endearing when coupled with his outsider status and his boyish determination. These constant references to Berton's northern, outsider origins, even while maintaining his centrality within the Toronto-based national media, find their source in much of his own material; that is, the coverage of Berton over the course of his life tended to mirror his own self-mythologizing.

In one of his last books, *The Joy of Writing: A Guide for Writers, Disguised as a Literary Memoir*, Berton lays out thirty pieces of advice for new writers. For rule number eight, "salvage everything," Berton gleefully recounts that "for the Klondike experience, I have recycled my own memories and chunks from the book itself at least a dozen times in various works. . . . It helps, of course, to have been born in a fascinating town, but any writer can make his town fascinating" (121). Berton lays claim, here, to his own distinctiveness while also emphasizing a formula for success that is seemingly reproducible for any and all with panache and the necessary work ethic. By virtue of this career-long fusion of his self-made status and the larger cultural memory of the Klondike Gold Rush, Berton in effect forged his own myth as the damn lucky gold panner who simply struck it rich. And for the media, such a blending of the individual and the collective was an especially useful handle for making sense of Berton and what he seemed to mean for the country.

But more than simply crafting his own celebrity, Berton was consciously re-working the popular mythic space of the North; *The Mysterious North* won the Governor General's Award in 1956. A.B. McKillop, whose biography of Berton appeared in 2008, notes that Berton's focus on the North had "tapped into one of his country's most deeply felt myths of identity" (300). Berton acknowledged as much when he noted that at mid-century "the North . . . was as unknown a quantity as the mysterious East, hence my title" (*Joy* 83). Berton, then, plied the trade of Canada's mythic North, much like Sir Richard Francis Burton traversing and translating "the Orient" to his English readership. McKillop goes on to state that, following this publication, Berton's national presence and much of his subsequent work

> became increasingly linked to Canadians' collective anxieties and desires and their need to hear stories about themselves as a means of self-understanding and expression. This was the first step toward the creation of what would make Berton not only a bestselling author but also a cultural brand and, following upon it, an iconic figure in Canadian life. (300)

Historical narratives of the mythic North may well have turned Berton into a bestselling author; however, what sold "Pierre Berton," the literary celebrity, was the way he inserted himself into that northern space, asserting the authenticity of his experience and, therefore, the authority of his opinions; "after all," he remarked on his fascination with the Klondike, "it was in my blood" (*Joy* 94).

Berton's outsider positioning was a fundamental element in two of his most significant books of cultural commentary: *The Comfortable Pew* (1965) and *The Smug Minority* (1968). Berton wrote the first at the behest of the Anglican Church of Canada, which sought to generate a national dialogue on religion by finding, in his own words, "a 'name' writer of stature [who] might produce something both stimulating and critical . . . in plain, easily understood language" ("Preface" viii-ix). To everyone's surprise, the Anglican Church and Berton included, *The Comfortable Pew* ended up shattering publishing records in Canada, selling well over 150,000 copies—more copies than anything else that Berton would ever write (McKillop 430).

This book, like a number of his other titles, encapsulates a defining cultural moment—in this case, the mid-1960s centennial shift from British colonial and religious values to an embrace of Canadian cultural nationalism and increased secularization. Berton's plainspoken treatise against the hypocrisy of Christian institutions representing or defending "the forces of conservatism in Canada" meant that his moniker became the name to either protest loudly

or champion staunchly ("Preface" ix). And as the country collectively turned to the first page, they encountered Berton's romantic glance back at the "blue Yukon hills" surrounding his old Anglican parish; reading forward, they followed Berton through his own disillusionment with the church.

Three years later, at the request of the New Democratic Party, Berton penned *The Smug Minority*, a biting critique of the political and economic establishment in Canada. This book, according to McKillop, "marked the zenith of Berton's career as a crusading journalist, [for its] . . . fierce polemical attack on class and social inequality in Canada" (465). In speaking forcefully to the Canadian public, Berton angered religious conservatives (again) and infuriated the economic elite, but established himself, in the process, as a trenchant advocate for liberal humanism. In the *Toronto Star*, Jack Hutchinson noted that "it's hard to tell which the reviewers hate more: Pierre or his book" (qtd. in McKillop 318). One anonymous reviewer, whom McKillop suspects to be Conrad Black, called Berton "the Mother Gerber of the literary world" and condemned the way "he masticates McLuhanistic thought-thumbs into the platitudinous pabulum precious to the plebeian palate" (qtd. in McKillop 477, n63). The polarizing controversy, like all book controversies, fueled sales. But more significantly, the controversy sold ideas. McKillop even suggests that *The Smug Minority* enabled a truly national dialogue that precipitated Pierre Trudeau's "just society" platform, for the book's "success in mid-sized cities and small towns ensured that Berton became a household name everywhere, . . . a name now fully associated with national aspirations for social equality and justice" (479).

Meanwhile, Berton's increased public visibility signalled his centrality within mainstream cultural life. In a *Maclean's* review, Jon Ruddy took issue with Berton for his hypocritical membership in what he called "The Comfortable Few" of the nation's top media personalities (qtd. in McKillop 464). Elmer Sopha, a Liberal MPP, signalled Berton's "phoniness" because of the disjunction between his growing wealth and his left-leaning values; Sopha declared that while Berton was writing the book, "he was [also] on television bemoaning the fact that Toronto restaurants serve only half-a-dozen hors d'oeuvres . . . [and] was pictured sitting in his Kleinburg home sitting (sic) in his Oriental robe and drinking mulled wines" (qtd. in Berton, *My Times* 318).[3] Such criticisms may have undermined his authenticity for some, as reviewers and readers sensed a seeming disconnect between Berton the author and Berton the man, yet Berton utilized his own mythology—his cultural capital—as a way of blurring any such distinction.

The Smug Minority is indeed fascinating for the way Berton marshals his own mining camp experiences not only in the service of his argument but also as a way of re-connecting his authorial persona to his Klondike roots. Reflecting on his "jack-of-all-toil" labour during the Depression at age seventeen, he writes, "this 'job,' which everybody had congratulated me upon getting, which was supposed to be so ennobling, which was to make a man of me, was actually degrading, destructive, and above all useless" (46-51). Berton condemned the "gospel of work" for the way in which Canada's upper class encouraged and profited from the dehumanizing physical labour of the lower classes. In a comment on the construction of his own celebrity, however, Berton acknowledges that the one thing such mining experiences has earned him is status:

> [This] line in my official biography . . . I notice is seized upon joyfully by those who have to introduce me when I make after-dinner speeches: "During the thirties, he worked in Yukon mining camps to help put himself through university." When that line is uttered the audience is prepared to forgive me almost anything: outlandishly radical opinions, dangerous views on matters sexual, alarming attitudes toward religion. I am pronounced worthy because in that one sentence is summed up the great Canadian myth: that work—*any* work—is the most important thing in life, and that anybody who is willing to work hard enough can by his own initiative get as far as he wants. ("Dirtiest Job" 244-45)

The irony, of course, is that Berton's own autobiographical writings assert the philosophy he was critiquing. In disclosing his formulas for success, whether in the techniques of writing or the salesmanship of publicity, Berton emphasized the possibility that what he did others could do also. Berton thus translated the myth of the hardworking, northern miner into the myth of the hardworking, crusading writer. These various iterations garnered him the authority of public speech and the assurance of a listening audience, especially as he aligned himself with the ardent nationalism and leftist politics of the 1960s.

In his study, *Celebrity and Power: Fame in Contemporary Culture*, P. David Marshall theorizes that "the interactions of celebrities as reported on television and radio and in magazines and newspapers establish a code of individuality that is central to the meaning of any celebrity" (264). Berton's "code of individuality" was certainly configured through these diverse media; it is where he made his name as "working-class" outsider, as iconoclastic provocateur, as national storyteller. What is especially remarkable in Berton's case, in contrast to other manifestations of literary celebrity, is the way he appeared to fully disclose the economics and machinations behind his own

celebrity-construction. In his writings on the business of writing, he fully acknowledges the economic self-interest and salesmanship involved. "To stay alive in this country," he advises, "a freelance writer [must] be a salesman with all the chutzpah of a used-car dealer" (*Joy* 120). This is, emphatically, not the Romantic myth of the impassioned or reclusive artist; in Berton's self-construction, an aesthetic front is effectively sidelined by the need to, in his words, "earn . . . bread" (296). This insistent foregrounding of the labour of writing and the economic necessity that structures his writings and his salesmanship allowed Berton to successfully maintain his authenticity as a plain-spoken and hardworking everyman, even as his celebrity shifted to "best-seller" status.

Regardless of how well your published book might be selling, Berton argued, the hidden benefit is that people now refer to you not as a "writer" but as an "author." The advantage to this hierarchy is that "it gives a broadcaster a reason to put you on the air. You're a somebody. You've got a handle and without a handle they don't know how to identify you" (*Joy* 93). With his emergence as a best-selling author, Berton had two very good handles that, he happily concedes, served him well in constructing his credibility as a qualified Canadian commentator. Berton acknowledges that only after the publication of *The Mysterious North* was he solicited for interviews on matters far beyond the subject matter of his book:

> *They want my opinion.* And they're paying me a fee. I've written a book and that qualifies me to comment on any subject under the sun! I'm no longer plain old P.B., I'm Pierre Berton, best-selling author. I get to appear on panels and express my views with other best-selling authors who also have instant opinions. (*Joy* 94)

Here, Berton links his status as a best-selling author to his increasing multimedia presence, demonstrating how his success in one medium certifies his appearance in another. Marshall attributes this fluidity to "patterns of consumption" whereby a celebrity represents "flags, markers, or buoys for the clustering of cultural significance" (245). This is to say that as Berton's visibility multiplied exponentially, his celebrity accumulated an ever-increasing measure of significance, which in turn generated greater sales, which in turn garnered more media coverage.

Of pivotal importance to Berton's marketed celebrity-authorship was Jack McClelland's repeated assertion that he "publishes authors, not books" (qtd. in McKillop 415). In so doing, McClelland offered up Canadian writers for public consumption, insisting not simply on the importance of their published words but on the cultural significance of the celebrities themselves.

The gambit worked. Through the '60s and '70s, Berton's celebrity amassed such a "cluster of cultural significance" that, McKillop argues, "Canadians bought his books not necessarily because they wanted to read what he wrote, but because they wanted a part of him" (547). In her obituary for Berton in the *Toronto Star*, Sandra Martin points to the partnership between the two men, saying, "Mr. McClelland was the perfect marketer for Mr. Berton's colourful narratives. . . . Together they rode the roller-coaster of cultural nationalism with Mr. Berton providing the content and Mr. McClelland supplying the razzmatazz." By 1971, on the strength of his backlist along with his bestselling nationalist histories, *The National Dream* and *The Last Spike*, Berton's titles accounted for twenty per cent of McClelland & Stewart's revenue (McKillop 525); for a publishing house almost constantly on the brink of receivership, Berton was the crucial factor in maintaining the solvency of Canada's principal Canadian-content publisher.

To be sure, Berton's celebrity and his authenticity with the Canadian public were not created solely by his writings; equally significant was the medium of television in establishing his voice, presence, and authority with a national public. On 5 September 1952, four days after the arrival of television in Toronto, Berton appeared on a live opinion panel. Finding his first experience frustrating, he resolved never to do it again, yet his single appearance had made him immediately recognizable throughout the city, which led to his about-face. Of the new medium, he later said, "it was the greatest marketing tool yet devised, and since I was now determined to write best-selling books, I would have to make use of it. Television was not an end in itself, but it would be the means to publicize my real work" (*My Times* 91). In Berton's retrospective view, every personal, televised appearance was a strategic attempt at greater public visibility.

In his explicit attempt to augment the cultural capital of his name via the broadcasted image of his personality, Berton's bow tie became his iconic marker. At one point, he suggested to Elsa Franklin, his producer, that he lose the unfashionable collar, to which she responded, "keep your bow tie; it gives you a vaguely academic look and has become part of your image. . . . Don't try to change that image: it's what people are comfortable with" (*My Times* 272). Berton's bow tie thus functioned as a marker of familiarity as well as a distinguishing, authoritative feature. Moreover, Berton frequently re-told the story behind the bow tie, connecting himself to an old-time, hard-drinking newspaper editor in Vancouver who double parked in traffic in order to buy one on credit for Berton (*My Times* 131). The story re-asserts

Berton's beat-journalism roots and turns the bow tie into a performative act of self-deprecating confidence.

As her influence in maintaining the bow tie makes clear, Franklin was an astute television producer on whom Berton relied heavily upon in his transition from "crumpled newspaperman" to socially relevant cultural authority (Cameron 25). According to Cameron, with Franklin's arrival in 1964, "Berton emerged as a new creature . . . at once mod and distinguished," and yet he "never turned into a slick, plastic performer" (25). Style aside, Franklin "took charge of Berton's sprawling professional life" and created new television programs, such as "My Country" and "The Great Debate," on top of the already-popular "Front Page Challenge" and "The Pierre Berton Show" (25). In his review of McKillop's biography in the *Globe and Mail*, Ken McGoogan summarizes the "formidable" Franklin as Berton's "business mastermind, organizer, negotiator, promoter par excellence and psychological protector." Contrary to Berton's public image, he was not entirely a "one man show." Though he does disclose his reliance on various individuals in his later autobiographical writings, it was a reality that "Berton tended to gloss over . . . in his heyday" (McGoogan). What worked so well in his favour was that his extremely capable ensemble worked tirelessly in producing, publishing, and sustaining the celebrity that was Pierre Berton.

In Berton's recounting, every instance of media involvement, every posture broadcast live, was a further opportunity to promote his name, his brand, and, ultimately, his books. This is to say that Berton crafted his literary celebrity by publicizing it via his media celebrity, and his authenticity as a literary celebrity depended, to a significant degree, on his status as a bestselling author. That such disclosure did not work against his authenticity suggests the degree of resonance he maintained with his popular reader-and-viewership in Canada. This resonance was further solidified by Berton's public debates with academic historians; his impassioned defenses against their smug criticism assisted him in bolstering his popular appeal through his last three decades as a writer of Canadian history.

It is difficult, admittedly, to maintain a distinction between Berton's mid-career celebrity and the self-interpreting voice of Berton's autobiographical texts. In these later works, Berton articulates a seemingly career-long distinction between his technique as a popular historian and the academic task of historical analysis. Initially, however, Berton engaged forcefully with academics, insisting on the equivalent worth of his historical narration and their academic history. While Berton denied ever intending to be "a crusader

intent on bringing history to the masses," he admitted, "I had entered a barren literary field waiting to be ploughed, [so] I decided to seize the territory for myself" (*My Times* 330). In seizing this imaginative territory, he opened himself to stringent criticism from the academic community.

When *The National Dream* was published in 1970 and *The Last Spike* in the following year, Berton underwent a transition from simply being, in his own words, "a personality" to being "a distinguished author, hoisted into the pantheon of Canadian icons by the tidal wave of nationalism that had swept the country following the Centennial Year" (*My Times* 327). His newsprint reviewers almost unanimously praised the book; a number of historians, on the other hand, begged to differ. H.V. Nelles, for instance, scorned the populist sell and laudatory dust jacket praise of Berton's books. Despite acknowledging "in fairness" that *The National Dream* was better than "us Gradgrind academics expected" but not "quite so good as the newspapers would have us believe," Nelles was unequivocal in the necessity for Canadian historians to now leave *narrative* history safely "in the hands of journalists" ("Ties" 270). In a 1974 CBC radio debate, Carl Berger disputed Berton's interpretation of the railway's significance to Canada, noting that "professional historians ask harder questions of enterprises like the CPR than it is possible to answer in a work which is essentially narrative, dramatic, and addressed above all to recreating this experience as a great nationalist thing" (qtd. in Cameron 28). For what it's worth, these critiques hinged on Berton's allegiance to the Laurentian thesis, most fully developed by 1940 in the work of Donald Creighton, who saw national development projects such as the railway as powered by commercial interests in eastern cities. By the 1960s, academic historians were paying more attention to regional, working-class, feminist, and ethnic histories (McKillop 529-33). Such criticism provoked Berton into passionate self-defense, and in a popular medium such as CBC radio, he was sure to win in terms of public opinion.

According to Cameron, Berton "retaliated . . . by accusing professional historians of being a 'snobbish in-group' who didn't care about communicating with the masses"; his work, he argued, is "social history, as well as political history, and it's been neglected by many historians in this country" (28). Berton objected to their critique that there was no original analysis in his story of the railroad, for he "saw the building of the railway as the great epic story in our history," not a bloody revolution, but a "seminal epic . . . of man against nature" (*My Times* 323). Responding sharply to the criticisms of Canada's foremost historians, while simultaneously engaging

the listening ear of a national radio audience, Berton secured not only the defense of his books, but also his authenticity as national spokesman, as champion of the masses. In *My Times*, Berton clearly relishes the triumph of his railroad books, for "the story of the country had been left largely in the hands of the history professors. Now people were saying, in effect, 'My God, we do have a history, after all!' My mail proved it" (331).

The irony of J.L. Granatstein's trajectory as an academic historian is especially suggestive of the salience of Berton's celebrity. Like Nelles, Granatstein was suspicious of Berton's best-seller status, asking, "how is it that this man, single-handedly propping up McClelland & Stewart, can produce a book for each fall season?" ("Quint" 12). Granatstein rightly discerned that Berton's success was due largely to the fact that "he is omnipresent in the media, that he is tough, shrewd, and combative, and that he has the contacts and connections to get the maximum publicity" (12). Unfortunately for his polemic, however, Granatstein's invective turned not into a critique of Berton's narratives, but into a denigration of Berton's reading public, since "every non-reader in Canada has a shelf of Bertonia right alongside the *Reader's Digest* condensed books" (12). By attacking middlebrow literary taste, Granatstein reinforced the very "ivory tower" myth he was trying to assail in arguing for traditional narrative history; his larger point that "Berton fills a national need" was not a tribute to Berton, but a call for increasingly specialized academic historians to return to writing history for the general reader. In 1977, Granatstein published a *Globe and Mail* op-ed article under the rather pompous title "A professor finds that pop history is trivial, hasty, sloppy, and demeaning." Granatstein castigated popular historians who "in their efforts to make history marketable and interesting . . . have somehow trivialized the past." "Pierre Berton," he admits, "is a good researcher. . . . But he consciously makes his work 'interesting.'" In a scathing reply, Berton stated derisively, "well, professor, I sure as hell don't consciously make it dull" (*Joy* 277). Berton challenged Granatstein's assertion that he was an amateur historian, proclaiming himself, instead, "a professional" owing to his three major books of history, his two Governor General's Awards, and the praise he received from some other professors. Lest his boasting appear more immodest than mocking, Berton closed with a biting rejoinder:

> With one sweep of his hand, the professor dismisses all but the cosy coterie of university historians as shoddy amateurs who write popular history. . . . He gives us precious little evidence for such a statement. . . . A man who can't get the title

> of Walter Stewart's last book right, and who has forgotten his own research on the alleged Arthur Meighen trust fund, has a lot of gall referring to other works as "trivial, hasty, sloppy and demeaning." Those adjectives surely apply to his . . . piece, which wouldn't get a C-minus in a high school English course. If he is going to attack us non-academics for being lousy historians, I think we can make a pretty good case that this particular historian is no great shakes as a writer. (*Joy* 277-78)

With such apt responses, it is not difficult to imagine how such "highbrow" criticism helped consolidate Berton's authenticity as "the official storyteller of the nation." That there was no love lost between the two men suggests the inherent instability in the nationalistic project of producing a single, cohesive story for a country. The irony, too, is that Granatstein has spent the rest his career in the service of this nationalistic goal, while the rapid eclipse of Berton's cultural currency following his death is explained, at least in part, by the growing disconnect between the history he told and the multiple histories Canadians began to identify with.

Eventually, Berton chose to differentiate between a "scholarly historian" who is interested in analysis and exposition and his own role as a popular writer who is interested in narrative, in "a beginning, a middle, and an end" (qtd. in Wilson 4). That the academic establishment stopped paying any sustained attention to Berton certainly helped lessen their acrimonious relationship. Granatstein also changed tack, turning his critique entirely on the academic establishment for deconstructing national history. When Granatstein won the $10,000 Pierre Berton Award in 2004 for "outstanding achievement in popularizing Canadian history," he stated tersely, even while carrying a bow-tie in his pocket, that "Canadian history is too important to be left to only Pierre Berton" (qtd. in McKillop 669).

That even Berton's most dogged critic would eventually offer him some grudging respect is indicative of the near-reverential status Berton had acquired by the end of his life. In fact, McKillop tracks a growing appreciation for Berton *after* his lengthy and provocative time in the spotlight. Just as his "heyday" had passed, so too had "much of the Canada he had known and written about. But the more it receded, the more venerable he became to the Canadian public" (626). His later writings infuriated fewer people and also matched the nostalgia of his (now) older readership for a bygone Canada. Berton's brand was firmly connected to a "sense of history and collectively held national values and traditions," so as that version of Canada came increasingly under threat, his books and his celebrity maintained a significant generational appeal (644).

In his last years, however, Berton repeatedly foregrounded his earlier controversial self over and against his increasing iconicity. In the *Toronto Star* obituary, Warren Gerard notes that Berton remained "edgy" right to the end of his life and quotes him in a 2002 interview:

> I was hated, you know. I made no secret of the fact that I was an atheist. . . . My TV show enraged people. I had prostitutes on, and I treated them like real people . . . I was fired from *Maclean's* after I wrote a piece called 'Let's Stop Hoaxing The Kids About Sex.' Now I'm the 'beloved author,' the 'beloved historian of Canada,' an icon. . . . [But] I never set out to be a patriot or a popular historian. I just liked storytelling.

Berton's comments are as much a matter of "setting the record straight" as they are an attempt at replaying the controversy he once provoked—controversy that had generated the very iconicity he was now, apparently, trying to deny. Berton took one last crack at controversy when he offered a televised "celebrity tip" on how to roll a marijuana joint; as his final point on Rick Mercer's *The Monday Report*, Berton counsels, "and remember Canada, it's the loose joints that tend to fall apart, leaving unsightly toke burns on your chairs or on your bow tie" (YouTube). In this, his last television appearance, Berton re-asserts his old, controversial self and thumbs his nose at his own iconicity, while also plugging the branded marker that made an image of his name—his bow tie. His "celebrity tip" was acknowledged, of course, in nearly every obituary six weeks later.

Despite all this, however, Berton was unable to ensure the resonance of his brand past his own death. Alternative conceptions of what makes "Canadian history" aside, Berton's rapid decline is also explained by reference to the nature of his writing. Characterizing Berton as a uniquely Canadian "journalist-as-generalist," Geoff Pevere suggests that Berton "always wrote for his time and never with any pretensions to posterity" (xv). Indeed, twenty years before his death, Berton conceded, quite candidly, that "I think [my books will] all probably—a lot of them will go out of date" (qtd. in Wilson 10). The matter of the country's dated "shelf of Bertonia" connects to another possible answer; perhaps the Canadian media and the reading and viewing public had so much Berton for so long that the current cultural silence can be interpreted as fatigue.

I say "fatigue," though, to indicate what I take to be the temporariness of our waning interest in the man. Canadian popular culture and its governing national mythology continue to reflect too much of his influence to ignore him completely. His emphatic remark, "I just liked storytelling," reflects his

stated fascination with historical evocation, epic narrative, and social and individual characterization—all of which place him firmly within a literary camp that is reluctant to touch him. So much so that to say that Berton is perhaps one of the most significant and culturally important Canadian literary storytellers is both an indisputable fact and, simultaneously, a disquieting and objectionable statement to make within literary circles; this rejection is partly explained by a lingering denigration of middlebrow writings, despite all statements to the contrary. Another decisive element is that Berton's celebrity and writings continue to rankle; his admitted "seizure" of barren literary territory and his mythologizing of an exoticized and nostalgic northern frontier rubs against contemporary critical understandings of Canada's own ongoing legacy of colonization in the North. Canadian literary and cultural critics need to account for, explicate, and critique the many ways his writings and his celebrity have contributed to an imagined Canada. Berton's Canada might not be the Canada of the twenty-first century, but that's all the more reason to trace out the interconnections and disjunctions between his time and ours.

Writing in this journal after the 2008 national election that saw "culture" become a central campaign issue (when Steven Harper's negative comments about culture may have lost him any chance at winning in Quebec), Laura Moss appealed for Canadian critics to be "especially attuned to the realities of newly invigorated cultural nationalisms"; without entirely dismissing Diana Brydon's call for upending "the myth of *the national dream*" in favor of "seeing Canada in a planetary context," Moss cautions that "the nation isn't going to go away" (11, emphasis mine). "Nationalism," she points out "is irrevocably part of the practice of everyday life in Canada" (10). Indeed, patriotic nationalism isn't going to go away either; if anything, it is a renewed and invigorated force in Canada, coming from both the political right and the political left. If critics and commentators are to understand the force and appeal of this nationalism, to see how it intersects with or reacts against the range of emergent nationalisms from the past forty years, it is crucial that we historicize those affective narratives that structure our own and other citizens' responses to this nation. As for Berton's place in it all, our uneasiness, our contemporary glance away, is the best indication of a need to further analyze, for it is truly impossible to stare at mid-to-late twentieth-century popular culture and nationalism in Canada without getting a bow-tie full in the face.

NOTES

1 For a critical re-appropriation of the term "middlebrow," see Hammill.
2 The term "total star text" refers to a celebrity's public and private text "as read across all her/his different media manifestations" (Dyer 136).
3 Elmer Sopha's opinion piece is also reprinted in a newsprint collage on the inside, rear cover of Berton's *My Times*. Efforts to locate the source of this article proved fruitless.

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Michael Aird

Alpha Effect

after 3 numbers itself nothing magnetic
nothing magic
the shelled chatter has also filled
your lungs apart

its grey between cost them
a caged product, shavings of warmth

in the room when you have one
I'm to transmit
no further ground deformed
coordinates that speak only of themselves

despite which
our push thoughts catch orbit
out of this twin-field and pivot
suffer ahead
with the talked over, wrestled down

at last
you are one of us
are not one of us

Manina Jones

Colonial Contracts
Marriage, Rape, and Consent in *Malcolm's Katie*

Isabella Valancy Crawford's 1884 long poem *Malcolm's Katie: A Love Story* is one of the most thoroughly discussed and controversial works of nineteenth-century Canadian literature. Much has been made of the implications of the poem's enigmatic final lines, in which newlywed Katie, prompted by her father's questioning, proclaims that she would not exchange the bounty of a settler wife's life for Eden itself, nor would she trade her new husband for Adam, "*if I knew my mind*" (6.40, emphasis mine)—a conditional statement that D.M.R. Bentley's Introduction to the 1987 edition of the poem suggests could be read either as a superficial gesture of feminine self-deprecation or as "a chilling admission of alienation from her own thoughts, feelings, desires and perceptions, from the constituents of her very identity" (n. pag.). Ceilidh Hart has observed of Crawford scholarship that, "As *Malcolm's Katie* was taken up by critics interested in feminism and issues of gender, there emerged a central question about Katie, and critics oriented their arguments around this question: does Katie have agency or not?" (n. pag.). Certainly many interpreters of the poem's feminist significance have read it for oblique expressions of young Katie's sexuality, agency, and power (Bentley, "Introduction"; Devereux, "Documenting"; Hart; MacDonald; Relke; Tracy); these expressions often become the critical focal point for an understanding of the poem as feminist in both intention and implication. I would like to propose, however, that the feminist urgency of *Malcolm's Katie* lies precisely in its relentless depiction of Katie's "absent mindedness" (Bentley, "Introduction") and Crawford's suggestive portrayal of the consequences of Katie's lack of consciousness for the regulation of her

body, its affects, and its reproductive potential within colonial culture. In this light, the poem's closing phrase has the potential to signify rote feminine self-deprecation as a profound gesture of alienation through which Katie's identity as a settler wife is iteratively performed and formed. This paper therefore seeks to reorient Hart's question, exploring not so much whether or not Katie has any agency, but attending instead to how her agency is epistemically and ideologically constrained within historical conditions. To do so, I offer a reading that situates the question of Katie's agency in cultural contexts related to marriage, sexual consent, and property law that that define a settler wife's role and indeed, regulate feminine desire itself during the colonial period. In these contexts, the contracts—both literal and figurative—to which a settler wife's assent is assumed to be freely given or withheld are, the poem intimates, at the same time foundational to colonial culture and utterly compromised. What might it mean, Crawford's poem indirectly asks, for a woman to say "I do"—or "I don't"—if she does not know her mind? And if Katie does not know her own mind in accepting Max's proposal and acceding to the role of settler wife and mother, we must consider how this influences our understanding of her position at the heart of the iconic colonial family featured in the poem's ostensibly idyllic closing tableau. Indeed, I argue, finally, that in this tableau we find signs of Crawford's much darker satirical representation of the outcomes of the co-optation of feminine desire and the shadow cast on the colonial family and its future prospects.

While *Malcolm's Katie* is subtitled "a love story," it is clearly a poem that self-consciously places the abstractions of romantic desire within a distinctly materialist settler society in which love was subject to a carefully constrained process that conventionally culminated in the formalized legal and economic contract of marriage. In his book on courtship, love, and marriage in nineteenth-century English Canada, historian Peter Ward observes that when Victorian Canadian couples courted, "they negotiated a property transaction which would affect their economic lives as long as their marriage lasted. The bargain they struck conformed to clearly prescribed rules about the differing property rights possessed by each spouse" (38).[1] At the time of Crawford's writing, the nature of this agreement was the subject of both public debate and re-conceptualization within the law. According to the common law concept of marital unity, when they married, a man and woman became one person under the law, and as the popular saying had it, "the husband was that person" (qtd. in Ward 38); a woman's person, property, and legal authority were absorbed by her spouse. Thus the married woman's role as citizen in the

developing nation was activated through her transmission of her father's legacy and her submission to her husband's legal agency. As the *Upper Canadian Law Journal* put it in 1856, "The natural rights of man and woman are, it must be admitted, equal; entering the married state, the woman surrenders most of them; in the possession of civil rights before, they merge in her husband; in the eye of the law she may be said to cease to exist" (qtd. in Ward 40). This is what Rosemary Hennessy and Rajeswari Mohan in their article on British literature contemporary with the Married Women's Property Act of 1882 would call a mobilization of "the ultimate patriarchal privilege," which both controls women as property, and denies them access to property and even to ownership of their own desires, since it also denies them access to sexual consent as they make the transition from daughter to wife (470). Hennessy and Mohan indicate that the Married Women's Property Act was part of a larger discussion in which a woman's position in relation to property rights was beginning to be understood differently during the late nineteenth century: the social and legal debates that comprised this dispute "simultaneously constituted and managed a crisis in woman's social position brought on by changes across the social formation which made visible woman's contradictory social status, spanning positions as property and property owner. Legal reforms addressed this crisis by giving women control over their property; but by doing so in terms of male protection, the law kept in place woman's position as a non-rational other" (470). Legal historians such as Constance Backhouse and Lori Chambers make a similar argument in the Canadian context in the late nineteenth century, in which reforms in Chancery from the 1850s onward and married women's property acts of the 1880s were intended to better protect women from the coercion and cruelty of their husbands, since women were perceived as "weak and liable to be imposed upon" (Holmested qtd. in Chambers 4). As Backhouse observes, these statutes were produced by conflicting goals, motivated as they were on the one hand by a paternalistic desire to protect women from negligent, violent or irresponsible husbands and on the other by an increasingly egalitarian sensibility regarding property ("Property Law" 241).[2] "[S]uch changes did not emancipate women," Chambers indicates, "but transferred male responsibility for dependent, weak members of the family unit—women and children—from the husband and father to the state" (24).[3]

Malcolm's Katie enters into this contested climate regarding women's questionable status as consenting (or dissenting) subjects of governance, positioning the terms of the debate in the significant thematic context of

colonial development in which women's vulnerability and compliance actually served the vested interests of the settler-invader state. That women were as much property themselves as active agents in negotiating the contract of marriage (with its attendant transfer of material goods and property) is made evident in *Malcolm's Katie*, from its title to its final lines, which work to situate the narrative of the poem in the transitional space of Katie's shift from the possession of an established patriarch to that of an incipient one. Through Katie a transfer of wealth will occur, wealth that she both conveys (her father's real estate) and constitutes: in marriage she will move from being her father's "chiefest treasure" to being Max's lawful wife (3.216). As Bentley perceives, Katie's value derives "from her various positions as dutiful daughter, adoring wife and fertile mother in a patriarchal system whose continuity and genealogy she assures" ("Introduction"). Katie's diminutive body is, further, the focal point of a "narrative of national inheritance" in which the love plot is deeply implicated in "the mercantile enterprise of colonialism" (Libin 83, 93).

Historian Anna Davin has indicated that the notion of marriage and motherhood as a duty "began to circulate with increased intensity after the 1870s when population became the Empire's most pressing issue" due to expansionist anxiety that there would be insufficient British settlers to fill, and thus lay claim to the "empty spaces" of the empire (10), a circumstance in which the empty space of the womb and colonial geography become, not just analogies for one another, but dual vehicles through which colonial expansion and productivity might be advanced. This is the very historical moment when concerns about women's claims to agency and property ownership were also, increasingly, the cause of public concern. Backhouse points out that "it is generally assumed that the organized women's movement did not appear in Canada until 1876" ("Property Law" 233). However, she credits Mary Jane Mossman with demonstrating that public discussion of women's surrender of basic rights in the act of marriage in the Upper Canadian context dates as far back as between 1852 and 1857, when a group of women petitioned the Legislative Assembly, claiming that by the act of marriage a woman was "instantly deprived of all civil rights," while her property and earnings were placed in the "absolute power" of her husband (excerpts from petitions qtd. in Backhouse "Property Law" 233). Katie, then, is not just the potential recipient of her father's property, and is not simply property herself, but as a daughter, wife, and childbearing woman, she is the agent of territorial claim and inheritance through which the acquisition of colonial land is justified, naturalized, and perpetuated on behalf of the developing nation.

It is thus clearly significant to the notion of Katie's "value" that the initial romantic transaction between Katie and Max is sealed by a monetary token, when, in the opening lines of the poem, Max gives Katie "A silver ring that he had beaten out / From that same sacred coin—first well-priz'd wage / For boyish labour, kept thro' many years" (1.2-4). This is a symbol of his love, no doubt, but also a gift as surety of Katie's commitment and fidelity during his extended absence, in addition to acting as a "pledge redeemable in cash and property as soon as Max has hacked his fortune out of the wilderness," as Robert Alan Burns puts it ("Crawford and Gounod" 8). From the poem's initial informal ceremony of engagement, then, Crawford conjoins Max and Katie's romantic relationship to the work of settlement and its material rewards; the poem's two generic foci, the masculine settler epic and the feminine domestic idyll, are mutually implicated in this act.[4] As Mary Joy MacDonald asserts, Max, "with his ring made from money, is enclosing Katie in his future—and in the economic vision that will subsume and centre on her" (n. pag.).

Malcolm's "outspreading circles of increasing gold" (1.111)—the developed lands and commerce that constitute his prosperity—are thus echoed in the figure of Max's silver ring, and "the ring that he had beaten out" resonates even more disturbingly in the violent "ringing blow[s]" of the settler-hero's axe, through which, Max tell us, "Cities and palaces shall grow!" (4.43) through the progressive development of the nation. As John Ower puts it in his Freudian reading of the poem, the axe becomes "a sort of metonymic extension of [Max] Gordon's virility. The phallic connotations of his 'tool' are used by Crawford to indicate that, as a pioneer, he is dedicated to a 'labour of love'" (36). Or perhaps something more sinister, since if, as Cecily Devereux affirms, "colonization is an erotic act here, a performance of sexual power" ("Search" 289), it is even more specifically a performance of masculinity that legitimizes its coercive and often violent domestication of colonial space as part of the nation-building project by forcing the submission and even requiring the assent of its desired objects. "We build up nations—this my axe and I!" (4.56), crows Max over the devastated landscape he has made fertile for agriculture by imposing slash-and-burn methods. This act of domination is, arguably, extendible at least in figurative terms to the ways the material and sexual possession of women's bodies as marital property, through which their fertility is recruited and mobilized for the national project, takes place. Thus the ideology of masculine entitlement and claim permeates the representation of the settler's relationship with both a

feminized landscape and a female object of desire; the homely language of cultivation and courtship in the poem is in constant danger of slipping into the language of forcible possession, coercion, and violence. Diana Relke, for example, observes that Crawford depicts Katie's enterprising settler father and male kinsfolk "as dragging the ripping beak of the plough through the knotted soil (1.77)—a particularly violent image of rape when constructed by a woman aware of the way she is identified with nature" (164). As Chaim David Mazoff mildly puts it, "Nature [here] is not wooed" (111), though, as we shall see, by the end of the poem, nature and Katie are represented as acquiescing voluntarily to the colonist's romantic dominion. Read for its critical dimension, *Malcolm's Katie* thus allows careful readers a glimpse into the ways in which the rhetoric of courtship and colonialism work in concert to subordinate notions of feminine desire and sexual integrity to the enforcement of women's roles both as property and as guarantee of domestic claim, hereditary continuity, and genetic "purity" in settler society.[5]

Despite her "queenly" role in her father's household (3.33), one does not have to look too deeply into the poem to appreciate the ways in which Crawford constructs Katie as an object of disputed material exchange between men, in a manner that borders on social satire. In an obvious parallel to the poem's condensed history of colonial development in which the "lab'rer with train'd muscles" looks to "the familiar soil" and proclaims it "*Mine own*" (2.225, 228, 229), Katie's competing suitors, Max and Alfred, meet in a clearing in the wilderness and engage in a testosterone-charged battle—first verbal, then dangerously close to axe murder—over their entitlement to the absent Katie. When Max discovers that his beloved is also claimed by Alfred, he reacts like a spoiled toddler squabbling over a toy: "'Your Kate,' he said; 'your Kate!' / 'Yes, mine, while holds her mind that way, my Kate' / . . . 'Your Kate! your Kate! your Kate!—hark, how the woods / Mock at your lie with all their woody tongues. / O, silence, ye false echoes! Not his Kate / But mine" (4.174-75, 187-90). If, as some critics have considered (Bentley, "Introduction"; Burns; Hart; Mazoff), the main stimulus for Max's love is the economics of pioneering activities, then there is not much beyond rhetoric to separate the claims of Alfred the "wrong suitor" from Max, the "right" one.[6]

Unless, perhaps, it is Katie's own wishes that distinguish the two men's claims, since, as Alfred says (willfully misrepresenting Katie's position), she is his "while holds her mind that way." So, what *does* Katie want? Or, to put it another way, what space does this "materialist and capitalist erotics" (Devereux, "Search" 289) allow for feminine desire? Katie is initially reluctant

to press Max's suit when her father expresses his longing for a son, for "she had too much / Of the firm will of Malcolm in her soul / To think of shaking that deep-rooted rock" (3.47-49). While they seem to emphasize Katie's resolve, these lines attribute her will to her father (in a geological image notably associating it with the stability of land), even as they assert her reticence in expressing her hopes. Romantic conventions make it clear that Katie is "meant" for Max, but her own expressions of desire and resistance are, like this one, remarkably equivocal. Katie declares that, in addition to an axe and some undeveloped backwoods land, Max owns "Katie's heart" (1.116), but even that conventional assertion of affection is immediately undermined by her lover, who supplements the girl's own statement with "'Or that same bud that will be Katie's heart, / Against the time your deep, dim woods are clear'd" (1.124-25), suggesting that she is not yet mature enough to mindfully pledge her own love. Max might here be seen as unwittingly referring to the legal and ethical concept of consent to a contract, an exercise of judgment that is available only to an adult individual who is capable of both knowing and acting rationally on his or her own desires, a role for which Katie, presumably, is intellectually unqualified if she does not know her mind. By his use of the possessive pronoun, Max hints that Katie's desire, like wilderness land, must itself be cleared and occupied in order for his claim to be legitimate, a disturbing idea, given the brutal sexualized descriptions of clearance by Max himself that follow.

One place critics have turned for signs of Katie's expression of her own submerged desire is the undeniable genital symbolism of the "Lily Song" she performs in Part III of the poem for Max, who has departed to prove himself a worthy pioneer. She sings:

> Thou dost desire,
> With all thy trembling heart of sinless fire,
> But to be fill'd
> With dew distill'd
> From clear, fond skies that in their gloom
> Hold, floating high, thy sister moon.
> Pale chalice of a sweet perfume,
> Whiter-breasted than a dove—
> To thee the dew is—love! (3.189-97)

Hart calls this lyric "a vehicle for Katie's self-expression, her expression of sexual desire for Max," and Bentley more carefully argues that it obliquely registers "A powerfully sensual awareness of female sexuality" ("Introduction"). These readings, however, give too little weight to the fact

that both the song's authorship and its metaphorical import are attributed to Max: it is "a lily-song *Max had made* / That spoke of lilies—always meaning Kate" (3.173-74, emphasis added). The song, then, is not the expression of Katie's yearning—or if it is, Katie is not represented as the author of her own desire. Instead, the song is a rhetorical projection through which *Max's* desire is transferred to Katie and then embodied, rehearsed, and realized by her in her recital of the song, even in Max's absence.

Similarly, in the opening scene of courting in *Malcolm's Katie*, Max asks Katie to contemplate her reflection in the lily pond, and anticipates her response to his leave-taking by ventriloquizing her voice: "That sixteen-summer'd heart of yours may say: / 'I but was budding, and I did not know / 'My core was crimson and my perfume sweet; / 'I did not know how choice a thing I am . . .'" (1.26-29). This speech highlights Katie's lack of self-knowledge, since in its formulation she does not even know that she does not know her innermost desires. It also implies that while she may be a "choice thing" for Max, she is not fully competent to be a *choosing* thing herself. In *Malcolm's Katie*, the figure of the lily evokes Katie's erotic longing, but ultimately points to the ways in which that desire is in fact less expressed *by* the love lyric than it is a discursive construct *of* it: in a sense, Max woos Katie by putting words in her mouth, repeatedly telling her—and then having her repeat back to him—how much she wants him.

Crawford certainly seems to set up Katie's rendition of Max's yonic "Lily Song" as a site of masculine desire: the audience for her performance in the wilderness amphitheatre is the patently phallic logs (see Bentley, "Introduction"), which also function as a symbol of patriarchal property and colonial development, conflating the masculine erotic and economic desire that arguably underwrite Katie's recital in the first place. The logs, in fact, are "signed" with the initials of Katie's father in an acknowledgement of what Mark Libin characterizes as the inheritance narrative's depiction of "both the virgin female and the virgin wilderness [as] successfully bequeathed from Malcolm Graham to the rightful heir, who bears the same initials": Max Gordon (82). No sooner does Katie finish singing her song than her body is symbolically surrendered to this economy when the logs rear up and claim her: "the rich man's chiefest treasure sank / Under his wooden wealth" (3.216-17). Katie's body here almost literally becomes grist for the patriarchal mill.

The image of the lily occurs in a similar but even more obviously satirical context in an earlier Crawford poem, "A Wooing" (1880), in which the male speaker also likens his lover to a lily, and the "dusky leaves" of the water

lily (54) folding themselves around the flower are compared to "the walls of this my mansion" (57) which he holds out as an incentive to marriage. Having initially offered a floral metaphor of violets growing "In the woodland's dim recesses" for his love's blue eyes (8), the speaker at first seems to locate himself in proximity to her in the idyllic forest environment "In the dim and lone recesses / Of a bank" (11-12). The "bank," however, turns out to be a financial institution where his bonds (another pun in which the ties of affection are also commodities) and coupons are deposited. The suitor's offer of a marital home proposes the transfer of his beloved from her position as "Daughter of the House of Jackson" to a structure he has acquired through foreclosure and which is chock full of modern material accoutrements (48-52). The walls of this mansion, he ominously promises, "would close about my lily" if she accepted him, imposing both spatial and economic (fore) closure on her body within the terms of the marital relationship (53-58). Crawford here mocks avaricious motives for marriage and also, as we shall see shortly, overtly places the legitimacy of a young woman's consent to marriage—her ability to say "I do" or "I don't" in response to the suitor's offer—in question. Though the setting of "A Wooing" is clearly more urban and modern than the later poem, viewing the two in juxtaposition illuminates the ways in which Crawford presents love, not as freely given, but as mortgaged to the teeth in a coercive mercantile/domestic infrastructure.

When Katie finally announces her rejection of the alternative or "wrong" suitor in saying "Nay" to the dishonorable Alfred, she does so in terms that once again suggest her compromised competence: Katie's supposedly resolute psyche is said to "shield" her against the imposition of Alfred's will, but her mind is likened to "a table di'mond" inscribed "thro' all its clear depths [with] Max's name" (3.265-69), a phrase that elides the meaning of a "tablet" for writing and the "table" or flat reflective surface of a gem, hinting that Katie's resistance is an expression that reflects both Max's will and Max's claims on her, certified by his authorizing signature.[7] This is in effect a materialization of the concept of marital unity such that the weight of Max's signature would override the symbolically more egalitarian entwined initials of the courtship ring with which the poem opens. The initials would seem at first to represent "the companionate ideal of mutual love and respect" of evolving nineteenth-century liberalism,[8] but the image is here countered by the legal resonances of Max's graphically represented claim on Katie's affections and person, which of course are not unlike the brands Malcolm burns into his logs as a sign of ownership. Indeed, the reference to the

diamond is itself revealing, since at the time the poem was composed, the African gem trade was opening up following the discovery of a rich source of diamonds in the Cape Colony in 1867, a context that aligns Katie with the products of a burgeoning colonial gem trade, in which the stones were first "mined" and then traded as commodities.

By the time Max returns and Alfred is finally vanquished in Part Six, Katie's voice is reduced to a submissive verbal echo of Max's triumphant claim: "'There lies the false, fair devil, O my Kate, / 'Who would have parted us, but could not, Kate!' / 'But could not, Max,' said Katie" (6.164-66). Katie's verbal echo is reminiscent of the woman's self-depreciating refrains in the poem "A Wooing," repeated phrases that clearly substitute for any actual expression of her will. Confronted with her suitor's request, "May I woo thee? May I wed thee?" (17, 41, 59) the woman first answers, "I do not know," (18) then "I am not sure," (42) then "Let me ask my heart" (60). She finally, presumably, looks inward and finds, not her heart's desire, but paternal authority, after which reflection she resolves the suitor's questions by fully deferring to her father's wishes: "Ask Papa," she says inconclusively. In all but the last instance, the woman's lack of both independent will and the capacity to express such a will is ridiculed by Crawford's insertion of the voice of a parrot, which mindlessly mimics her words, as if to confirm that the beloved herself is merely a parrot for patriarchal discourse. The poem's deflating final line affirms the socially pervasive nature of such deference: "'They all do it,' said the parrot" (80).

Similarly, the co-opting of consent in *Malcolm's Katie* is further demonstrated by the amount of yea-ing and nay-ing by men that takes place over Katie's inert body. So, while her father, wakened in the middle of the night by concern for his daughter's choice of suitor, claims that he will leave the decision about whether to accept Alfred up to Katie herself—"'Kate shall say him "Nay" or say him "Yea" / At her own will'" (3.87-88)—as Bentley observes, he seems prepared, if necessary "to exercise the Victorian father's right to forbid his daughter to marry an unsuitable man" ("Introduction"): "'Nay, nay: she shall not wed him—rest in peace'" (3.77). Alfred, however, is clearly not a man to take no for an answer, especially when it is offered in non-verbal terms, as Katie's initial unwillingness is: "Katie said him 'Nay,' / In all the maiden, speechless, gentle ways / A woman has" (3.88-90); that is, she does not actually *say* "nay" at all. In wordplay that deliberately confuses the bodily eye with its homophone, the "aye" of acceptance, Alfred admits that that his love of wealth overrides any preferences Katie might have,

verbally expressed or not: "So, Katie, tho' your blue eyes say me 'Nay,' / My pangs of love for gold must needs be fed / And shall be Katie if I know my mind" (3.149). At the very moment when he self-consciously overrides Katie's consent, he also speaks the line echoed by Katie in the final words of the poem. Hart astutely reads this verbal resonance as signalling the potential contamination of Katie's intentions with Alfred's dishonesty in her final speech, raising "potential questions about Katie's own honesty and the integrity of her language." They also obviously call attention to the way Katie parrots the words and desires of the men in her life. Even in a moment when she seems to recognize this lack of self-assertion in the poem's final line, Katie performs that very lack.

Alfred's speech also lays the ground for his subsequent deliberate misreading of the reflection of his own inflamed desire in Katie's gaze. Later in the poem, Katie, fearing (based on Alfred's lies) that Max has abandoned her and feeling the weight of her debt to Alfred for rescuing her from the logs, pleads, "O, Alfred!—saver of my little life— / Look in my eyes and read them honestly" (6.56-57). Alfred candidly replies that he can see there only the reflection of his own desire: "O simple child! what may the forest flames / See in the woodland ponds but their own fires?" (6.58-59). Just as Max ventriloquizes his longing through Katie's voice in the "Lily Song," Alfred, gazing into her eyes, finds only the likeness of his own desire legible there: in her eyes he determinedly reads only "ayes." One might well ask, then, in a world where a woman's ability to consent or refuse consent is so thoroughly conceded that "ayes" can say "nay," how can yes mean yes and no really mean no?

In other words, the poem seems to ask, when a woman's ability to consent to marriage or sex is co-opted, where her body circulates and is contested as a piece of property, what, really, is the difference between the contract of marriage, the crime of rape, and the scene of imperial conquest? This might seem to be putting the case in rather hyperbolic terms, but the slippages in *Malcolm's Katie* between the language of seduction and dominance suggest that Crawford is offering a form of commentary by hinting at just such a sliding scale. Crawford's numerous critics have paid remarkably little attention to Robin Mathews' early interpretation of the climactic moments of the poem as setting the stage for a rape,[9] but it is an important reading because it allows us to see the scene not just as a narrative turning point or site of philosophical conversion,[10] but also as a moment at which the vulnerability of Katie's sexual integrity produced by her lack of (self-) consciousness and desire is most dramatically performed.

In this scene, the devious Alfred convinces Katie that Max has been killed while working in the backwoods. Katie, true to her pedigree as a Victorian sentimental heroine, promptly falls faint upon the moss at Alfred's feet. "'Now will I show I love you, Kate . . . / And give you gift of love; you shall not wake / To feel the arrow, feather-deep, within / Your constant heart," Alfred proclaims (6.89-92), using what Ower would call the metaphor of the "penetrating weapon" (33) to describe the imposition of his will. Mathews argues that in Alfred's speech he uses an "involved image" that conveys his intention to take sexual advantage of Katie "in her insensate state":

> The black porch with its fringe of poppies waits,
> A propylaeum hospitably wide,
> No lictors with their fasces at its jaws,
> Its floor as kindly to my fire-veined feet
> As to thy silver-lilied, sinless ones! (6.104-08)

"'A propylaeum,'" Mathews explains, "is a vestibule or entrance to a temple" while "'lictors' are attendants who punish offenders at the order of officials," and "fasces" is a bundle of rods or sticks with an axe blade protruding from the top that was carried before a Roman magistrate as a symbol of authority. According to Mathews, Alfred is thus saying in a poetically round-about way that he will sexually take (or rape) Katie while she has let down her guard, so to speak, both because she is unconscious and since there is no Max with an axe there to punish or prevent him.

Katie's unconscious state and her consequent exposure to Alfred's advances thus make necessary Max's heroic intervention and that he cements his role as her future husband, though, as we have seen, Crawford's depiction of Katie's so-called protector has already implicated him in tropes of violent sexual mastery. Backhouse's analysis of rape law in Ontario sees the later nineteenth century as a transitional period in the understanding of the nature of that crime. So, while at the beginning of the century rape was viewed only as a crime against male property and a potential interference with a woman's reproductive function within the domestic economy, as the century progressed, the crime was increasingly represented in addition as a violation of a woman's sexual integrity, although her "autonomy" was neither characterized by agency nor was it self-regulated: "the predominant thrust of late nineteenth-century rape law was paternalistic. Seen as vulnerable, corruptible, and most important, passionless, women required protection from the evil designs of male sexual predators" (236). But what if the paternalistic protectors are revealed as themselves part of a culture

in which women's sexual subjection is a constitutive element? *Malcolm's Katie* shows such conceptions at work in Crawford's 1880s representation of its earlier colonial moment, in its demonizing of the threat to exclusive masculine property rights over women in the villainous person of Alfred, in its recognition of Katie's passionless "sexual integrity" only insofar as it is accommodated to the patriarchal structure of the colonial family.

Indeed, as soon as Max intervenes on her behalf after Alfred's attempt on her virtue, Katie utterly subjects herself to Max's will: in the moments following Max's rescue of Katie, he must decide whether to save the rogue from drowning, and when he looks to Katie for guidance, she can only counsel, "'Do as you will, my Max. I would not keep / You back with one light-falling finger-tip!'" casting herself "upon / The mosses at his feet" (6.135-38), much as she had done with Alfred only moments before, when she "fell along the mosses at his feet" (6.87). Katie's speech both defers to Max's judgment and hints at a wife's bodily submission to her husband's sexual urges (as in, "do *with me* as you will, Max"). In literal legal terms, of course, husbands were immune from any charges of rape, because the will of wives was not recognized as separate from that of their husbands: legal precedent "stated that a husband could not be guilty of rape committed upon his lawful wife, 'for by their mutual matrimonial consent and contract the wife hath given up herself in this kind unto her husband, which she cannot retract'" (Backhouse, "Rape Law" 234). As Backhouse avers, this "codification of spousal immunity at the end of the century stands out as a striking illustration that property notions remained firmly embedded in the law of rape" (236). Katie in this case has already subsumed her will to Max, in effect as a precondition for their marriage.[11]

Marriage, then, was defined by a woman's freely given consent to yield consent forever, and this is just one of the elements that vaguely trouble *Malcolm's Katie*'s closing scene of supposed marital bliss. Like the scene of Alfred's assault, it takes place in a threshold setting, on a porch.[12] And in it, Katie offers a contorted analogy between the "wild woods and plains" of the wilderness and "bounteous mothers" "with their ashes mellow[ing] the earth, / That she may yield her increase willingly" (7.32-35). Katie seems to articulate what might be seen as the integrative ecological vision of co-operation Relke attributes to her, but Katie's language on closer analysis reminds readers of the violence at the heart of this vision and the ways in which feminine submission is implicated in that violence. This passage indeed might be read as an extension of the dynamics of the "Lily Song" as a

scene in which the feminized land itself appears conveniently to surrender to its expropriation for colonial interests and even accede to its own conquest. Indeed, at this moment, in Katie's ecological language, the rape and violent domination of the landscape, so vividly described in the passages in which Max burns and clears the land for his homestead, is rhetorically restaged as a seduction in which the land actually seems to invite its own domination in an act of willing self-sacrifice in the interests of fertility: the wilderness offers itself up in a gesture of immolation that is the condition for future growth and reproduction. Imagery earlier in the poem establishes "flames" as reflecting, not female passion, but masculine desire.

Libin examines references to hybridity and miscegenation in *Malcolm's Katie* as a manifestation of what Robert Young calls "colonial desire" (qtd. in Libin 81). However, Libin argues that in the end this is "a poem about seamless and successful inheritance, and the land itself is presented as a similarly uncontested bequest" (82). The baby boy at the heart of the Gordon family, Libin argues, "guarantees that a patriarchal link of inheritance will be continued for at least one more generation, and the bountiful land, the 'rich, fresh fields' will pass without contest from Malcolm to Max to Max's new son, Alfred" (Libin 81-82). But if we are to read connotations of rape in the climactic scene of Alfred's assault, then it becomes possible to consider that moment as a symbolic *interruption* of the continuous line of inheritance and succession to which Libin alludes. The presence of a baby named Alfred by Max and Katie ostensibly as "the seal of pardon" for a villain who has recognized and recanted the errors of his ways (7.7-10) may certainly be part of an integrative narrative of Christian forgiveness. However, given even the possibility of reading the adult Alfred's attack as a rape, the name may also be taken as a feature undermining the poem's final integrative vision. Readers might be forgiven for momentarily taking "Alfred" as a patronymic, a hint that the baby's parentage is not as "honest" or pure as we might be led to believe. And it may be more than prurient speculation to consider the possibility that Alfred is, either literally or in a more figurative sense, the baby's "natural" father. If this is the case, then the child's role as an emblem of national progress is, to say the least, placed in question. At one point, when Max lies injured and close to death at his feet, pinned by a tree in a random backwoods accident, Alfred even insultingly proposes that it might be better if Max were culled from the colonial gene pool, since the "good" suitor is not virile enough to ensure the line of succession in a natural world governed, not by Christian compassion and righteousness, but by an amoral Darwinian

struggle for survival: Alfred tells Max that "earth's children should not call / Such as thee father—let them ever be / Father'd by rogues and villains, fit to cope / With the foul dragon Chance" (4.263-66).[13] As Kate Higginson writes, "Rape has long been used allegorically to figure threats to the national body; during the late nineteenth century the condition of the new Canadian Dominion was frequently represented in visual and print media by a young, besieged woman." For Higginson, the allegorical Miss Canada, "an emblem of possessable national land . . . reiterates a set of conventions explicating feminine vulnerability, paternal protection, and heterosexual desire" (35). Crawford's poem might be read as taking this argument a radical step further, hinting that rape is in a certain sense less a metaphor for the violation of the national body, than it is actually *constitutive of* that national body. In this alternative reading of the allegorical tableau that concludes the poem, *Malcolm's Katie* hints at the prospect of a contaminated genealogy of colonialism. In so doing, Crawford signals the violence and materialism that taints this idealized settler family and the scene of colonial occupation itself.

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NOTES

1 Through inheritance, of course, the consequences of that transaction extended well beyond the life of the marriage.
2 Backhouse demonstrates that these egalitarian impulses were effectively reversed in judges' application of the law: "the hierarchical family the judges idealized required that married women be rigorously restricted from exercising control over their property. The autonomy that full married women's property rights would have given Canadian wives was an appalling prospect to nineteenth-century judges" ("Property Law" 242).
3 As we shall see, there were similar developments in the legal codifications of rape at the same time, through which the crime was making a transition from "conceptions of property to paternalism" (Backhouse, "Rape Law" 236).
4 See Waterson on the Tennysonian domestic idyll and Mathews on the epic of nation-building.
5 See Mark Libin's essay for a discussion of the racial implications of Crawford's narrative of inheritance.

6 For example, Burns offers that "Alfred is no more greedy than Max, only more straightforward about coveting Malcolm's wealth." In fact the two men are in some ways presented as doubles: for example, Alfred's speech on the mortality of love echoes Max's "Lily Song," and by Part Four they both have a red mark on their temple.

7 Alfred expands on the trope when he states that he would not normally claim the love of a woman whose heart is otherwise committed: "One cares not much," he says, "to place against the wheel / A diamond lacking flame" (3.103-04). In so doing, he also conveys Katie's presumed lack of passion, since, as a jewelry trade website puts it, "the bigger the table, the greater the brilliance . . . and the less the fire" (Tradeshop).

8 As Chambers observes, this ideal "was not incompatible with the belief that wives should not only esteem their husbands, but also willingly—and completely—submit to their will" (24).

9 Mathews refers to the event as a "seduction," perhaps actually demonstrating the slippage in his own choice of words: the event can hardly be an act of persuasion, since Katie is unconscious. This would not even legally be a "seduction" in the terms of Crawford's time since at sixteen, Katie is technically over the age of consent, though she remains childlike.

10 In 1978, David S. West offered a counter-reading in which he interpreted this portion of the poem as a staging of Alfred's philosophical justification for attempting to take his own life and Katie's.

11 Bentley recognizes this effect even earlier in the poem, when he perceives that Katie's steadfast assertion that Max "is as true as I am" (6.70) "is less a simile than a statement of identity" ("Introduction").

12 I am grateful to Kristen Warder for this observation.

13 I am indebted to Kristen Warder for drawing my attention to these lines. Bentley's notes on the poem interestingly suggest an allusion here to Shakespeare's *King Lear* (I.ii), Edmund's meditation on nature, begetting, and bastardy—and, I would add, Edmund's appropriation of property outside the legitimate line of inheritance.

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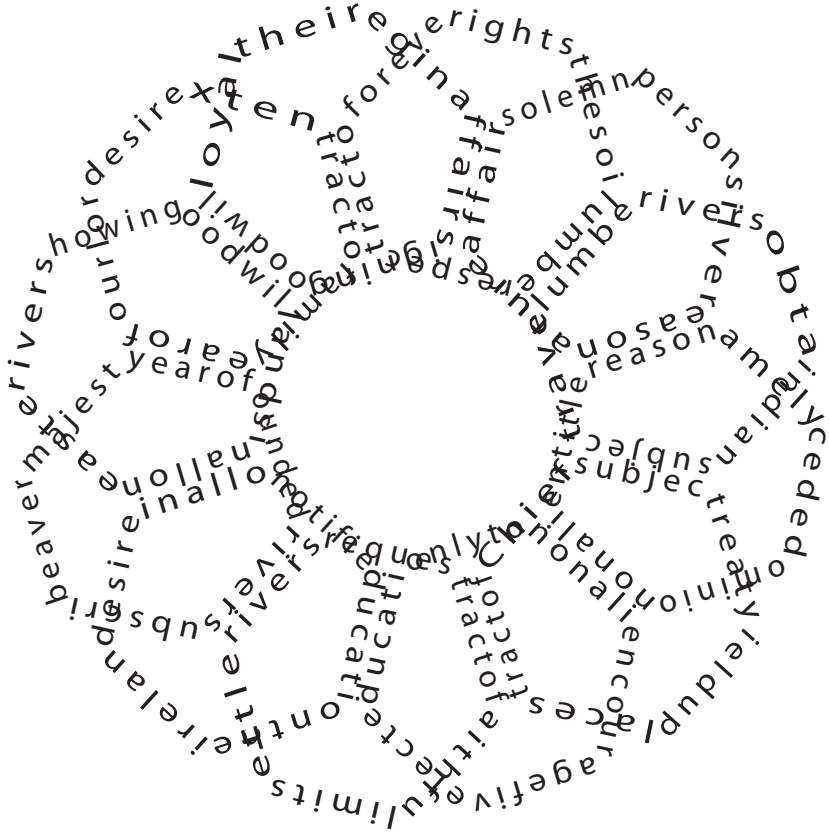
Shane Rhodes

Settlement, Mining, Lumbering, Trading

mediatation on Treaty Eight



All words in this mediatation have been taken from the Government of Canada 1899 Treaty Eight document. The word-bond structure of these two poems mimics the carbon bond structure of two nematically stacked coronene molecules, each of which is composed of six fused benzene rings. Coronene is one of the many polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons found in the tar sand strip mines of northern Alberta on Treaty Eight land.

Medrie Purdham

"Who is the Lord of the World?"
Leonard Cohen's *Beautiful Losers* and the Total Vision

> Here is my big book. I hope you don't think it's too big. I want it to be the very opposite of a slim volume. I hope I've made some contribution to the study of the totalitarian spirit and I needed a lot of space and forms to make my try.
> —Leonard Cohen, in a letter to Miss Claire Pratt of McClelland & Stewart about *Flowers for Hitler*, 1964[1]

When Leonard Cohen wrote to his publisher in 1964 about the size of his book of poetry, *Flowers for Hitler*, he described an almost inevitable formal identification of the "big book" with its subject, "the totalitarian spirit." With customary humility, Cohen suggests that the work is big not because it is authoritative but rather because it is tentative. An artist must be an uneasy kind of world-maker and certainly an uneasy kind of experimentalist where his writing engages totalitarian themes. Totalitarianism itself has often been explored for its analogy to art; Walter Benjamin viewed totalitarianism as the aestheticization of politics[2] and Hannah Arendt explored, similarly, its perverse idealism.[3] Further, Arendt's influential critique of totalitarianism, which I will draw on centrally, emphasizes its essential unworldliness and foregrounds its novelty, dubbing it "a novel form of government" (*Origins* 593). An unworldly creativity animates Cohen's *Beautiful Losers* (1966), a book that is bigger and more wildly inclusive than its predecessor. This novel touches on totalitarian themes, themes that readers might find uncomfortably reflected in Cohen's own apparent search for a total vision. Important to the novel's aesthetic is the notion of the self-perfected body, with its ready analogy to the totalitarian self-perfected body politic. Total selves, total works,

perfect bodies, and spectacular human unities animate the work. Cohen demonstrates, meanwhile, that to give up on the total vision for fear of its negative totalitarian valences is also to give up on the sacral notion of a revealed world, a world that is fundamentally conceivable as one creation.

Cohen remarked in a 1964 speech that the source of all our ideas is an "absolute and ruthless longing for the presence of the divine" ("Loneliness and History" n. pag.). For the characters in *Beautiful Losers*—the morose historian and his self-sacrificing wife, the hedonistic guru and the ecstatic saint—creativity is circumscribed by loneliness and by a sacral sense of vocation. The historical condition (wherein we are partial, contingent, imperfect, and changing), seeks heroic resolution, in Cohen's novel, in a timeless, apocalyptic moment of total, universal identity. Notwithstanding its putative status, in 1966, as "the most revolting book ever published in Canada" (Fulford n. pag.), *Beautiful Losers* is controversial for the twenty-first-century reader mainly because of its mixing of discourses in aid of a vision of totality. Cohen's projection of history to metaphorical-theological ends is the source of the novel's enduring risk. Cohen assigns to art the "absolute" and "ruthless" qualities of the search for evidence of holiness, which are easily transferred to other kinds of absolutism and ruthlessness. The multivalence of those terms underlines the risk, for Cohen, of perfect creativity: to be the perfect artist, one must turn oneself into a person who could imagine anything.

In discussing Cohen's 1992 album, *The Future*, Ira Nadel locates in the title song "the ironic wish to return to the totalitarian views of the past" (142). Nadel asserts that this wish is "undercut" by the album's pervasive sense of "waiting for a miracle" (142). What *Beautiful Losers* shows, though, is that the religious attitude in Cohen's work, especially insofar as it anticipates apocalypse, complements more than it countervails those frames of mind that gave rise to cataclysmic politics. Both implicitly seek total representations. Cohen's characters are always *in extremis*, nurturing radical selves that are alive to the message of the universe. If they submit to a "voluntary loss of self" (Pacey 18) for the sake of revelation, it is for the sake of accommodating and understanding everything, which is conceptually indistinct in the novel from ways in which the self may be monstrously enlarged.

The charismatic heart of *Beautiful Losers* is Kateri Tekakwitha, the seventeenth-century Iroquois Virgin. Tekakwitha's loneliness, suffering, and mortification of her body, are matters of scholarly interest and psychosexual fixation for the novel's first narrator, a scholar, I.[4] Tekakwitha's

spiritual practice entails attuning herself to the voice of a God who has been revealed to her through the perfect refinement of her own terror, for the Jesuit Black Robes of New France have inspired religious devotion through frightening images of hell. Thus, as a self-disciplined, self-perfected figure, Kateri exemplifies the novel's own paradox: that terror is on one hand the prerequisite for creative awareness, and on the other hand the instrument of internal self-regulation by which total states (analogous, perhaps, to the colonial, homogenizing project of religious conversion) are achieved.

Each of the novel's characters radicalizes his or her disposition, just as the saint does, for the sake of perceiving, representing, or embodying a totality. The enlightenment of I. is the ostensible subject of Part One (Lee 91); I.'s late wife Edith and his friend and lover F. are his tutors in radical selfhood. F. works a drastic spiritual training on I. through a series of humiliating revelations disclosed in a posthumously delivered letter. F. promises to complete the story of Tekakwitha for the sake of I.'s personal and historical "ecstasy" (i.e., orgasm and apocalypse). However, the letter also requires I., as part of this training, to confront certain devastating facts: that F. had an affair with Edith and carried out eugenic experiments in order to manufacture her beauty; that the Jesuit "system" that produced the saintliness of Catherine Tekakwitha is spiritually arbitrary and inherently terrorist; and that history is a catastrophe open to instantaneous renovation. F. and Edith are purists, radicals. Their mutual pursuit of the "perfect body" is a metaphor for the novel's own orientation towards totality.[5] F.'s all-embracing appetites, sexual and other, support his effort to make his body an incorporative machine: "Who am I to refuse the universe?" (6). In her self-annihilation, Edith is equally extreme. She commits a magnanimous suicide meant to relieve I. of his martyr-worship. For Edith, as for F., the body is its own form of total representation. Michael Ondaatje asserts, indeed, that "*all understanding* comes from Edith's death" (8, emphasis added).

Edith's radical will is, for Norman Ravvin, crucial to Cohen's articulation of the novel's "ethical centre" (24). Ravvin follows Lee in commenting upon Edith's unlimited ability to love her oppressors. (As an adolescent, Edith forgives the men who gang-rape her, even holding the youngest of them to her chest in an unexpected *Pietà*.) Ravvin explores Edith's involvement with F. in a sexual episode in an Argentine hotel room with a waiter who is a pop-incarnation of Hitler. To cure Edith's acne, F. obtains from the Hitler-waiter some soap made of human flesh, manufactured from the bodies of Holocaust victims. Edith, using it, says, "I'll try anything" (qtd. in Ravvin 27). This, for

Ravvin, represents the acknowledgment that anyone is capable of anything—even Edith, the original sister of mercy. The condition in which "all things can be done" is the moral limit of human freedom, as revealed in Cohen's poem "It Uses Us!":

> Kiss me with your teeth
> *All things can be done*
> Whisper museum ovens of
> A war that Freedom won.
> (*Stranger Music* 53)

Freedom uses us as much as we use freedom; the novel dwells at this limit.

In the episode of the Hitler-waiter, Cohen blurs totalitarian politics with beatific suggestions of apocalypse. The novel frequently uses the metaphor of a hypodermic needle by which I. becomes a junkie of history.[6] Stephen Scobie suggests that Cohen's customary association of history with drugs points to the addictiveness of systems of control (52). History is the record of those patterns of domination that we have deemed we "need to keep" (*BL* 201). In Cohen's sustained metaphor, we take history into our incorporative bodies (I.'s constipated body, similarly, is incorporative and sinister: the "museum of [his] appetite" [42]), and we become history in the flesh. F. and Edith, during their Argentinian dalliance, replace the drug of history with the drug of miracle, injecting themselves, with water from Tekakwitha's Spring, mail-ordered from the "Revelation Club" in New York (115). This gesture to Revelation presents the injection as an apocalyptic moment in the novel's usual sense: it creates an identification of the self with the universal body: the perfect body. For Northrop Frye, water is usually associated with dissolution, chaos, and death (for, archetypally, "the soul crosses water or sinks into it at death" [146]). The dead waters of the world are reanimated by the living waters of the Garden of Eden at the end of history and then transformatively internalized: "Revelation says that in the apocalypse there is no more sea. Apocalyptically, therefore, water circulates in the universal body like the blood in the individual body" (146).[7] The Argentinian scene makes use of such living and dead waters in its juxtaposition of the injectable tonic of Tekakwitha's Spring, and the immersive, genocidal substance of the bath. When F. first tells Edith that the Hitler-waiter has a "treat" for them, Edith's reply, with its overtone of "shooting up," invokes the language of the hypodermic needle of history. "Shoot," she answers, proposing to internalize and embody the Hitler-waiter's vision, just as she shares his bath (194). As such, Cohen elides the "pure" apocalyptic notion of universal identity with the totalitarian ideal of One Man.

The body itself might be considered a "work" in the context of this novel, especially as it becomes the vehicle for experiments in totality and perfection. The phenomenon of selves moving towards forms of self-perfection is mirrored in the suggestion of the way textual works are, or in are in the course of becoming, total works. *Beautiful Losers* cites *La Système d'Exposition du Monde*, a seventeenth-century tome contemporary with the life of the historical Kateri Tekakwitha. This expository magnum opus is reflected in *Beautiful Losers*' abundance of total representations, from I.'s History of Them All, to F.'s "long letter" that fulfills his promise to "tell [I.] everything, the complete gift" (116), to the individual lists and litanies that pepper the novel. Art forms, in *Beautiful Losers*, implicitly orient themselves to totality; Cohen compares the projection beam in the novel's final section to an archetypal albino snake "offering our female memory the taste of—everything!" (236). The drive towards total representation propels this novel, whose working title, *Plastic Birchbark*, was followed by its own insistently omnivorous subtitle: *A Treatment of the World* (Cohen, "Working Papers" n. pag.).

An acknowledgment of the novel's Enlightenment-inflected totalizing drive seems implicit in the arguments of those who have seen the novel as arguably modernist (Dragland 264) or poised at a moment of modernist critique (Glover 14-15); it inheres in the arguments of those who see the text as in some way "socially revolutionary" (Leahy 38) or in pursuit of a cumulative, historical moment, even a release from history. Critics have wanted to suggest that *Beautiful Losers* contains ethical warnings about the way in which the total representation overmasters the real: it appropriates others' victimhoods (Wilkins 36) and, flaunting that, makes possible the casual adoption of a fascist aesthetic (Ravvin 30). But the critic of the novel must not attempt too unequivocally to show that Cohen is critical of or ironic about total documents, perfect bodies, and radical selves. The reader must be attentive to the way totality still manages to function, in *Beautiful Losers*, as a kind of spiritual imperative and an ideal for a helpless art. Cohen cannot be altogether ironic about literary totality while reserving for his novel the function and mood of a sacred text, which, by Philippe Sollers' definition, "delivers and delimits everything" (78).

Beautiful Losers' aspiration to visionary totality is cued by its emphasis on apocalypse. In an apocryphal story, Tekakwitha, dining with the Jesuit brethren and other colonists, spills a glass of wine. It stains the table, and then adds its pigment to the guests, the landscape, the sky, and the moon. The reddened world projects the image of the "universal bloodshed" central

to apocalyptic thought. In seeing the horror of the dinner guests, Tekakwitha says, equivocally, "I guess I owe you all an apology" (104). This is nothing short of a promise of return: *Beautiful Losers*' surreal epilogue *is* Tekakwitha's apology in the way it too collapses observable distinctions in the world. The novel is apocalyptic in the sense that everything becomes "potentially identical with everything else, as though it were all inside a single infinite body" (Frye 136): the perfect body.

Lacking a traditional plot, the novel derives its energy and its argument from its central comic pair, I. and F. Cohen's comedy of ego pits I.'s befuddlement against F.'s delirious self-certainty, but the novel shows that both ego-extremes are avenues to the beauty and danger of the "total" vision. Although the novel characterizes absolute loneliness—like Tekakwitha's—as a precondition for witnessing divinity and a gateway, then, to the perception of totality, Arendt observes that a loneliness like I.'s is, as a disposition, "common ground for terror" (*Origins* 612) and potentially a dehumanizing impediment to labour and to the production of artistic and scholarly work, denying one's integrity as *homo faber* (*Origins* 612). Loneliness gives one "the experience of not belonging to the world at all, which is among the most radical and desperate experiences of man" (*Origins* 612). Cohen's art is *made* of radical and desperate experiences—indeed, he suggests that "[w]hat is most original in man's nature is often that which is most desperate" (*BL* 58)—but Arendt suggests that a desperate loneliness gives one a dangerous sense of the superfluousness of oneself and, perhaps, the human being in general. In Arendt's view, long social deprivation makes a person so unable to trust himself as "the partner of his thoughts" (*Origins* 614) that he loses, utterly, his standards of thought and action. I., a consummate hermit, resurrects such an untrustworthy partner in F., by now five years dead. The imaginary/recollected F. is an intimate antagonist,[8] one who helps to ensure that I.'s work is ever more sprawling.

Indeed, I.'s writing of an unfinishable history (with Tekakwitha at the centre) is a gesture of self-denial, for he cannot bear to consummate his authority by ending his work. Yet, paradoxically, as the history encompasses more and more material, (for it is a total vision in conception even if it can never be one in practice), I.'s becomes increasingly a god's eye perspective. He thinks of himself as a *non*-authority, but creates himself as a *total* authority, albeit without a world in which to exercise it.

I.'s is a failed discipline. His inability to finish his document and thus to separate himself from it reflects his inability to overcome his erotic

attachment to Tekakwitha's pain, with its uncomfortable reflection in Edith's own suffering. I.'s diffuse will produces the formal repleteness of both his historical project and his lonely narration, while also troubling the limits of his humanity. I. suffers from the desire to know everything, and from the desire to *be* everything. He constructs a "total self" by identifying, meaninglessly, with every position on the ideological spectrum:

> I always wanted to be loved by the Communist Party and the Mother Church. I wanted to live in a folk song like Joe Hill. I wanted to weep for the innocent people my bomb would have to maim. I wanted to thank the peasant father who fed us on the run. I wanted to wear my sleeve pinned in half, people smiling while I salute with the wrong hand . . . (21)

Whereas most people assume that it is a totalitarian principle to be absolute in one's convictions, Arendt writes that "the aim of totalitarian education has never been to instill convictions but to destroy the capacity to form any" (*Origins* 603). I. is unable to respond personally even to the story of the sexual violence visited upon his wife in her childhood. He impassively editorializes upon the "collective will" that determined that Edith be raped: "Who can trace the subtle mechanics of the collective will to which we all contribute?" (63). Unable to organize the world according to his own personhood, "I" searches for the unitary idea, instead, in God's omniscience:

> . . . I Cannot Think of Anything Which Is Not Yours. The Hospitals Have Drawers of Cancer Which They Do Not Own. The Mesozoic Waters Abounded With Marine Reptiles Which Seemed Eternal. You Know the Details Of The Kangaroo. Place Ville Marie Grows And Falls In The Gobi Desert. Nausea Is An Earthquake In Your Eye. Even the World Has A Body. (57)

This passage describes I.'s desire for a total vision, as modelled in God's command of everything. When I. adds, "I Do Not Think It Behooves Me To Describe Your World," he undermines the authority he is nonetheless always covertly assuming. He makes of his own nothingness an all-encompassing idea, an undeclared godhead.

I.'s hermithood, moral preoccupation, and accumulative craft suggest the apocalyptic moment described by Tekakwitha's Uncle in a traditional story. Uncle narrates from his own moment of historical despair ("*There would be no harvest! . . . the world was unfinished!*" [93]) and projects a vision of a world that is, in more than one sense, "finished":

> . . . Uncle told himself the story he had heard as a little boy, how Kuloscap had abandoned the world because of the evil in it. He made a great feast to say good-by, then he paddled off in his great canoe. Now he lives in a splendid long house, making arrows. When the cabin is filled with them he will make war on all mankind. (95)

I. retreats from the world (after a feast of chicken on the night of Edith's death) and dwells in moral preoccupation; meanwhile, his alter-ego F. plants weapons in Quebec. I. exists in precisely the attitude of loneliness and reactivity that "nourishes revolutionary ideologies" (Goodheart 129), while F. attempts a universal emancipation. I. and F. are collectively like Kuloscap, their extreme egos and totalizing, universal projects infused with warlike potential.

F., in contrast with I., considers that his own selfhood in a given instant contains all of the danger and beauty and crisis and possibility of mankind. Mad, syphilitic, disgraced in Parliament, and disintegrating in a nuthouse, F. hardly seems to be a paragon of self-control. But if I.'s is a "discipline of self-restraint" then F.'s is, in Gary Snyder's phrase, a "discipline of following desires" (qtd. in Tytell 10). This philosophy originates in St. Augustine's maxim that "if you but love [God], you may do as you incline" (James 79), which, as William James notes, carries a significant "passport beyond the bounds of conventional morality" (79), only demanding that happiness be strenuous. F. is a happy universal revolutionary; he smuggles arms and promises "revenge for *everyone*" (*BL* 119, emphasis added). In another version of the total vision, F. promotes the idea that he has a complete command of everything that *has* happened ("I took you to a *complete movie* of the second world war" [186]) and can see, with clarity, every element of the past realized in the present. He repeatedly tells I. that his aim is to show I. "*how it happens*" (or "*everything happening*") (179, 194, 198, 199, 200, 219), binding everything into the totalizing purview of his own joy.

The all-inclusive instant constitutes, for F., a culmination and universalizing of history.[9] Walter Benjamin remarks that

> Now-time, . . . as a model of messianic time, comprises the entire history of mankind in a tremendous abbreviation . . . [The historical materialist] recognizes the sign of a messianic arrest or happening, . . . a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past. He takes cognizance of it in order to blast a specific era out of the homogeneous course of history. (396)

Thus, it is not enough for F. to experience time explosively himself, he must *impart* this model of time to the historian, I., in order to give him the sign, show him the revolutionary chance, and relieve him of "the useless History under which [he] suffer[s] in such confusion" (200). Peter Wilkins has identified the "risk" of totalitarianism in F.'s uninhibited refomative zeal (26), but F. is all the more totalitarian in his aestheticization of history and politics, a tendency that bears upon the novel as a whole. F. relates a

nightmare vision to I. that suggests Benjamin's "tremendous [historical] abbreviation," Karl Marx's "nightmare of history," or Franz Kafka's modern "train accident" (Griffin 91):

> I seemed to wake up in the middle of . . . [an] accident, limbs strewn everywhere, detached voices screaming for comfort, severed fingers pointing homeward, all the debris withering. . . . [A]ll I had in the wrecked world was a needle and thread, so I got down on my knees, I pulled pieces out of the mess and I started to stitch them together . . . my needle going so madly, sometimes I found I'd run the thread right through my own flesh . . . and I knew that I was also truly part of the disaster. (*BL* 186)

F. would perfect the *universal* body just as he would perfect Edith's (by his machinations in the Argentinian hotel) or his own (by subscribing to the bodybuilding system of Charles Atlas, parodically renamed Charles Axis). F.'s narration of his nightmare vision evokes Benjamin's discussion of Paul Klee's iconic "Angelus Novus." Benjamin recounts the way the "angel of history" confronts the "wreckage of the past." The angel has the impulse to make whole the human disaster, but is blown by the storm of progress helplessly into the future (392). F., who by his own account, "labored to become an Angel" (190), has the same impulse to perfect the world's body; because time has collapsed in his dream-vision and he is unimpeded by the contingencies of progress, he, unlike Klee's angel, is able to do it.

In this passage, F.'s ethically dubious human creativity dangerously mimics the apocalyptic ideal of universal identity; it also suggests, uncomfortably, the self-perfecting body politic of the totalitarian state. Cohen implies that if history is unorganized in its very nature—an accident in which everything is simultaneously possible—then history also invites powerful and charismatic personages to intervene and *make* order. A notion of ultimate selfhood, for Cohen, is so intimately linked to this frenetic world-creation that the "universal vision" is madly inscribed into the creator's very flesh, inseparable from his person. F. cannot help reconstituting the human being according to his own ideal, and he cannot create them as entities altogether separate from himself. Although F. is a Member of the Parliament of Canada and thus potentially a worker of historical change, his occult machinations seem to exemplify instead the "false, worldless politics" that Arendt regards as the very foundation of totalitarianism (qtd. in Aschheim 125).

F.'s emphasis on the "rush" of revolution continually substitutes drive for action. He celebrates his first day as a parliamentarian with a victorious drive to Ottawa, accelerating so fast that I., beside him, is afraid for his life. F., typically eroticizing the danger, initiates a shared masturbation session

that culminates with the car tearing through an illusory brick wall, painted on a scrim of silk. The wall's hymeneal "Rrrriiiippppp" (99) represents the piercing of the veil of truth and is designed to be the moment at which I. ejaculates. But I., horrified, is mysteriously unable to find sexual gratification in the glorious "death" that F. and Edith have engineered in a rented parking lot. "Button up," says F., disappointed, "it's a long cold drive to Parliament" (100). Cohen juxtaposes "the long cold drive" that will end in F.'s role as an actual policy maker with the mad flight through the scrim (98) in which he expresses himself as the messenger of truth. It is a totalitarian principle that "all action aims at the acceleration of the movement of nature or history," particularly when the totalitarian ruler usurps Nature or History in dealing arbitrary death sentences (Arendt 602). Although the "death" that F. has contrived for I. has proven to be an illusion, F. nonetheless illustrates Arendt's larger point, which is that, "[if] terror can be completely relied upon to keep the movement in constant motion, no principle of action separate from its essence would be needed at all" (602). F.'s role in Parliament is completely superfluous; his domain is not action, but motion: acceleration into terror-producing ecstasy.

I.'s personal dissolution and lack of certainty was identifiable in the catalogic quality of his narration. Alternately, F.'s total authority is also visible in his complete command of particulars. "We are now in the heart of our pain," writes F. enthusiastically, finishing the story of Tekakwitha's martyrdom for I., "we are now in the heart of our evidence" (218). The equation of pain with evidence is everywhere, making the relisher of evidence the fetishizer of pain. One of the best ironies in the novel is Cohen's citation at this moment of the *Exposition du Système du Monde* (89), a total document proffered to the world even as Tekakwitha is tearing the flesh from her bones. Tekakwitha's inordinate pain and terror are, to the Jesuits, to I., and to F., the *real* explanation of the world's total system. No amount of objective world-description can testify to the principle of cosmic organization like one Iroquois girl's voluntary self-destruction in the name of God.

One aesthetic means by which fascism "provides the illusion of collective experience" is the mass rally, whose message is, first and foremost, its own status as a spectacle (Morrison 6-7). F.'s own charismatic public display at a *Québec Libre* demonstration is essentially aesthetic. The crowd is as uniform as a "quicksand" into which I. sinks (126). Someone recognizes F. as a Patriot and hoists him to the podium, where he begins a radical speech demanding that Blood reclaim Blood (129). But only the speaker who has

come *before* F. imbues F.'s cosmic demand with the specific implication that the *French* reclaim their blood from the *English* in a revolution. F.'s utterly nonspecific demand for blood sounds, instead, like the apocalyptic call for total bloodshed: the red moon of Tekakwitha's Feast, "*revenge for everyone*" (110, emphasis added). The total anonymity of the crowd means that their subscription to revolutionary partisan lawlessness cannot be challenged by any of them. The speaker, from whom "F" seamlessly takes over, declares, importantly, that "History cares nothing for cases!" (126). A concept of justice that *cares nothing for cases*, evading an acknowledgment of the individual, is totalitarian. Arendt says of totalitarian thought that, "each concrete individual case with its unrepeatable set of circumstances somehow escapes it" (*Origins* 595). F.'s totalizing view of history seeks to unite everyone into a single identity that eliminates all human difference.

Despite his career, F. is no politician, but rather an aesthete of totality; he is, in fact, the pure theorist of totalitarianism. F. speaks of universal violence and speaks no further. Arendt writes that terror "makes the plurality of men disappear into One Man of gigantic dimensions" (*Origins* 600). F.'s revolutionary speech does not advance a *cause*, it simply creates this Man. Terror operates by figuratively "pressing men against each other" so that they have no room to determine their individuality (*Origins* 600), just as the crowd literally presses in towards F. Thus, the recognition of F. as a Patriot in Part One will be accurately echoed in the recognition of I./F. as the Terrorist Leader in Part Three. And the inclusion of I. in this identity is appropriate because of his willingness to replace his own reasoning with F.'s, just as he surrenders himself to the mob while F. speaks in the park. This is what Arendt describes as the "two-sided preparation" of the totalitarian subject which fits everyone equally well for the roles of executioner and victim (*Origins* 602).

The limits of F.'s vision are finally exposed in his own inability to subscribe to it. His long letter becomes momentarily mournful and, against its own philosophy, reflective. The ultimate limitation of F.'s thinking is that, in his unrestrained power to create and reveal, he has barred himself from wonder, and become incapable of standing in revelation: "I was jealous of the terrors I constructed for you but could not tremble before myself" (163). Then, true to his intention to tell I. *everything*, F. reveals what could only have become apparent to him with the relaxation of the urgency and obsession that have driven his creativity thus far: "God is alive. Magic is afoot. God is alive. Magic is afoot" (168). And, with that, the novel inclines itself towards

the sacral or apocalyptic totality that has, throughout the novel, always been inextricable from the totalitarian one.

Arendt speaks of the "necessary insecurity of philosophy" as an antidote to the violence that comes from forcing men into (or submitting oneself to) conviction (*Origins* 470). She argues that no idea is sufficient to explain everything, not even the idea of God. This is why God must be understood as the *revelation* of a palpable reality, and not as an idea that exists behind and before everything: "A theology which is not based on revelation as a given reality but treats God as an idea would be as mad as a zoology which is no longer sure of the physical, tangible existence of animals" (*Origins* 604). A theology of revelation ensures that the principle of God is never held in a single, unitary idea. The political corollary is that nothing is deducible "from a single premise" (*Origins* 604); there is no satisfactory total system or explanation. Accordingly, in F.'s beautiful speech, neither God nor Magic is anywhere in the world; rather, they are both everywhere: alive, afoot, in service, and in command.

Beautiful Losers' surreal epilogue is both a "happening in Montreal history" (256-57) and an epiphanic spiritual event. The crowd is disparate: mothers, doctors, "androgynous hashish smokers," "karate masters, adult stamp collectors, Humanists," and others (257). Almost a census, in the manner of a Hieronymus Bosch painting or a doomsday book, the epilogue enumerates the people who anticipate their historical "Revolution" (257) or their apocalyptic "second chance" (257). It describes a binding event that is so potentially inclusive, and potentially so expressive of the culmination of history, as to appeal to Nazis and Jehovah's Witnesses alike (257).

The bizarre ending illustrates the novel's visionary but reckless valuation of creativity. An old man in a treehouse (who has qualities of both F. and I.) makes lustful comments to an insolent boy. He hitchhikes into the city, performing a sexual favour for the blond housewife who picks him up (and who has features of Tekakwitha, Edith, and Isis, the mother of truth). He ventures into the Shooting and Game gallery on the Main where the crowd recognizes him as an escaped Terrorist Leader and a notorious sex pervert. As the crowd closes in on him, I./F.'s body dematerializes and becomes transfigured into an open-air movie of Ray Charles. Finally, the Jesuits' petition for the beatification of Tekakwitha and the now third-person narrator formally closes the work.

Linda Hutcheon, among others, addresses *Beautiful Losers*' apocalyptic closure, showing that the Epilogue's motifs correspond to those of the Book

of Revelation. She contends that this ending projects the (apocalyptic) possibility of total "identity alienation" for the nation at large (45). One might equally choose to emphasize in the apocalyptic elements of the novel's closure not identity alienation but its opposite: total identity. Even structurally the chapter moves from scattered similes to total metaphor: a version of the attainment of the perfect (conceptual) body. It opens with a string of extravagant figures, all similes:

> . . . In Montreal spring is *like an autopsy*. Everyone wants to see the inside of the frozen mammoth. Girls rip off their sleeves and the flesh is sweet and white, *like wood under bark*. From the streets a sexual manifesto rises *like an inflating tire*, "The winter has not killed us again!" Spring comes into Quebec from Japan, *and like a prewar Crackerjack prize* it breaks the first day because we play too hard with it. Spring comes into Montreal *like an American movie of Riviera Romance*, and everyone has to sleep with a foreigner . . . (246, emphases added)

In an apocalyptic condition, the animal is completely identifiable with the mineral, the vegetable, the human, and the divine. When Cohen describes the joy of "closing in on [one's] object" (256), he is talking about the crowd's seizure of I./F., but the idea more broadly applies to the totality of subject/object identity in the Clear Light.

I./F.'s very memory is all-incorporative and "represented no incident, [for] it was all one incident" (246); likewise he less a person than a style of unlimited being. He comes ready to work an epiphany, which for Frye is the meeting point of the mimetic and apocalyptic modes. I./F. sees the potential for his miracle—a total human unison—in the cinema, where he notices that "[s]ometimes, when all the eyes contained exactly the same image, like all the windows of a huge slot machine repeating bells, they made a noise in unison": laughter (252). "I./F." is determined to create a human unison and performs his own transfiguration in service of the first principle of universality he perceives.

Frye insists that it is the work of culture to translate our dark impulses into imaginative *imitations* of those impulses; the epilogue is a playful reconception of some of the novel's most serious themes. Earlier in the novel, F. describes exactly this kind of imaginative "taming" when he originates the Telephone Dance (where lovers stick their fingers into one another's ears to appreciate the inner "hum" of the other). F. says, very much in the spirit of Frye, "I suppose that certain primitive bird and snake dances began the same way, a need to imitate the fearful and beautiful, yes, an imitative procedure to acquire some of the qualities of the adored awesome beast" (33). By this reading, Beauty may be the remnant or the trace of Terror.

In the eccentricity of the epilogue, Cohen creates a world that is aesthetically inviolable. No element can fail to "fit"; thus, Cohen affirms his complete creative power, his own total vision. The ending welcomes the reader (259) while yet flaunting the authority of the writer. When the Jesuits petition for the beatification of Tekakwitha, Cohen is implicitly asking the reader to appreciate, simultaneously, the miraculous work of the novel. If Kateri Tekakwitha's name means "she, who advancing, arranges the shadows neatly" (47) and the old man's transfiguration is cinematic, then Tekakwitha must be the supernatural projectionist who squeezes him through the "strait gate" of time to become pure image. To assume that Tekakwitha is this invisible presence working strange magic in the novel is to identify her fully with Leonard Cohen himself. In creating Tekakwitha as the worker of the novel's own magic, Cohen creates himself simultaneously as the perfect artist. As Elizabeth Kaspar Aldrich explains, "The charismatic force of the genius is the result not of his identity with God, but of his perfect identity with his own inspiration (or ego) and hence with his own works" (10). "Leonard Cohen," in this instance is the perhaps uneasy answer to what theologians describe as the one true apocalyptic question: "who is the Lord of the world?" (Fiorenza qtd. in Callahan 461).

Cohen seems to swerve back to the autonomy of art in the novel's epilogue, with its fantastical open-air spectacle. This phenomenon, though, is without true credibility; nobody expects it to have implications for the real world of action. It has no coercive power, and is understood by onlookers as a mere representation. "Thank God," says one of them, "it's only a movie" (259). It causes a collective sense of *something happening* but does not have the power to mobilize "the universal body" except for in the fleeting instant of its first apprehension: it is not politics or faith, though it takes on qualities of both. Arendt's critique of totalitarianism is that it is art masquerading as a politic. The almost ludicrous esotericism of Cohen's epilogue seems designed to insulate his art from penetrating other discourses.

Cohen demonstrates that the "total vision" represents everything human that is beautiful or dangerous, and, incredibly, he insists on Art's right to be absolute in its aims nonetheless. The transcendent impulse that marks Cohen's art—its heroic quest for a theologically inflected total representation—is how Cohen's art responds to the personal and historical condition of loneliness that he claims is everyone's. His art adopts the "absolute" and "ruthless" qualities of that longing, while coming openly to self-consciousness about those qualities. Cohen seems implicitly to want to

lift the veil of Beauty to find the Terror of the original idea beneath. In 1964, he figures History as a kind of unravelling creativity, "the description of the path of an Idea" ("Loneliness" n. pag.). He supposes there was an original generative moment where the guardians of the idea were simultaneously its priests (preserving the forms of the idea through ritual, and binding themselves to the community) and its prophets (following the mutable idea into "the regions of danger"). *Beautiful Losers*' drive towards visionary totality betrays a deep nostalgia for that original moment:

> I do not know what that original idea was, whose path through the generations attended with such beauty and terror.
> I want to know.
> (Cohen, "Loneliness")

NOTES

1 I am grateful to Leonard Cohen for permission to quote unpublished material. I am indebted to Dr. Brian Trehearne for his supervision of this work during my doctoral research. And I thank the readers who reviewed this manuscript.

2 In *Modernism and Fascism*, Roger Griffin examines the complex relationship between aesthetic modernism and fascism (including Benjamin's claim about the aestheticization of politics). He explores the ways in which the radical, impersonal, and experimental qualities of modernism found political expression at mid-century. Griffin discourages a facile identifications of modernism with fascism, however, by pointing out the anti-modern strains in Nazi ideology, with its pastoral, nostalgic evocation of the "mythical German *Heimat*" (313). He cites, as well, Mussolini's veritable war on avant-garde art.

3 Arendt portrays Adolf Eichmann as, paradoxically, an unimaginative idealist, "a man who lived for his idea" without compassion or pity (*Eichmann* 42). Cohen's poem, "All There Is To Know About Adolf Eichmann" seems built on Arendt's suggestion of the banality of his evil.

4 Cohen's early critics (Pacey, Scobie, Barbour) established the convention of referring to the scholar as I., in respect of his first person narration.

5 Cohen's "Suzanne," of course, features the revelatory "perfect body" (95). Stan Dragland's afterword to *Beautiful Losers* describes its characters as figures with "perfect bodies and wide open minds" (266).

6 F.'s Invocations to History make this metaphor most explicit (*BL* 200-01).

7 It is clear that Cohen consciously adopts this trope; elsewhere, I. describes "the viscous blob of come in my palm thinning and clearing, like the end of Creation when all matter returns to water" (68).

8 Mark Migotti describes the Nietzschean "erotic-agonistic pedagogy" (52) by which F. urges I. to accept the priorities of the self. It might be observed that even I.'s martyr-worship illustrates Nietzsche's unique view of asceticism. For Nietzsche, the saint-venerator

admires not the saint's piety but rather the saint's strength and pleasure in self-control. The worshipper unwittingly relates to the saint, in other words, as a successful dominator (*Beyond Good and Evil* 58-59).

9 Christophe Lebold, in a similar vein, discusses the novel's rejection of linear history and linear time. Lebold finds emancipatory the novel's suggestion of "cyclic time" (149) and its use of a "deep structure of recurrence" (150).

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Gregory Betts

39—I Became Them

I became they
and they barely noticed
their eyes were my eyes,
their arms helped me reach
a most unbecoming manner.

By absorbing their radiant text
mimicking the soaking reflex of
a hard-wired copyright network,
ask them to write poems that I put my name on (they all
became me,
my own lost, they all took the name of
my body, their minds, our authorships,
palindromes of a hard-wire)

I became them and soon they me.
And so, the cycle complete, I returned to the veil,
snickering as devils do in the instant they became me,
all sixteen personalities.

As I scanned hundreds and hundreds of them,
tried to become I, an entry should be
and would be everywhere at once, a song,
the verses sound, right.

By sharing my DNA
and giving birth
and loving more and more and more
and I watched my eyes glittering
in their eyes' bright reflection.

The first time that I said
'because I said so'
mutating by nuclear testing
waged against us.

Is it plagiarism
to copy what your kids say?
Identities dented from little elbow
room overcrowding
personalities, dissociative from the
too many within me
and weren't we all satisfied?

Nick Treanor, Jacob Wren, Alison Starkey, Andrew Topel, Terry Trowbridge, Priscilla Brett, Brian Bartlett, Catherine Heard, Andrew Waldie Porteus, Laurie Anne Fuhr, James Yeary, James Dewar, Kathleen Betts, Nadine Flagel, Ted Betts, Warren Dean Fulton, Amanda Earl

Cynthia Sugars

"Our symbiotic relationship with the stories that we tell"

An Interview with Michael Crummey

Michael Crummey is one of the foremost contemporary writers of Newfoundland. His poetry and fiction is renowned for its focus on the stories and traditions of Newfoundland culture, exploring in the process questions of prejudice, betrayal, loyalty, and memory. A central theme of his work is the mixed form of indebtedness people in the present owe to the past as inheritors of its traditions, prejudices, violence, stories, and acts of courage. As Crummey elucidates in this interview, these myriad forms of cultural memory combine in intangible ways to constitute the living world of contemporary Newfoundlanders.

Crummey was born in Buchans, a mining town in the interior of Newfoundland, an area that informs much of his writing. He completed a BA in English at Memorial University in St. John's. While at Memorial, he won the University's Gregory J. Power Poetry Contest (1986), which inspired him to devote himself to a writing career. In 1994, he won the Bronwen Wallace Memorial Award for the most promising unpublished poet; his first volume of poetry, *Arguments with Gravity* (1996), won the Writers' Alliance of Newfoundland and Labrador Book Award. His second and perhaps best-known poetry volume, *Hard Light* (1998), is a collection of prose poems that retell ancestral stories of outport Newfoundland. This book contains his acclaimed prose poem "Bread," about a couple who grow to love one another through experiences of trial and hardship. The book was nominated for the Milton Acorn People's Poetry Prize in 1999. His most recent collections of poetry include *Emergency Roadside Assistance* (2001) and *Salvage* (2002).

After completing an MA at Queen's University, Crummey turned his attention full time to writing. Around this time he published *Flesh and Blood* (1998), a collection of short stories set in a fictional mining town in central Newfoundland, which was nominated for the Journey Prize. In 2000, he returned to live in Newfoundland, and there published his first novel *River Thieves* (2001), which quickly became a Canadian bestseller. This novel offers a fictional treatment of the final days of the colonial conquest of the Beothuk people in early nineteenth-century Newfoundland. It is a complex and wrenching treatment of a pivotal moment in Newfoundland's colonial history, evoking the ways this history impinges on present-day Newfoundlanders who are positioned as inheritors of this genocide. The novel tells the story of the capture of Demasduit (Mary March), one of the last of the Beothuk, and the settlers who try to recruit her into becoming their liaison with her people. Crummey takes the gaps in the historical record as a central premise in his novel. Demasduit uses language (or the rejection of language) as a form of defiance, refusing to speak English in only but the most rudimentary manner. This resistance parallels the overall resistance of the historical record about the Beothuk, which cannot transparently mediate between the present and the past yet nevertheless persists as part of the inheritance of contemporary Newfoundland culture. *River Thieves* won the Thomas Head Raddall Award and was shortlisted for the Giller Prize.

Crummey's second novel, *The Wreckage* (2005), set during the Second World War, navigates questions of destiny and forgiveness—both in the context of interpersonal experience and in terms of global violence. Like many of his writings, it concerns the inexorably contingent nature of human fate—what the narrator terms "the rain of incident and circumstance" (165)—and the difficulty people have of salvaging something meaningful from the flotsam and jetsam of their lives. It is this probing concern with questions of contingency that contributes to the power of Crummey's fictional portrayals of Newfoundland people, culture, and history.

His most recent novel, *Galore* (2009), was a finalist for the 2009 Governor General's Award and, in 2010, won the Commonwealth Writers' Prize for Best Book in the Canada and Caribbean region and the Canadian Authors' Association Award. *Galore* is a transgenerational magic realist epic set in an outport community in Newfoundland, replete with folklore, mystery, ghosts, love affairs gone awry, greed, ambition, and retribution (of a kind). A central theme is the way we need stories as a form of sustenance, in part because they affirm a sense of continuity over time. Toward the end of the novel, one

of the central figures, Callum Devine, explains what he most misses about the wayward priest Father Phelan. It is not his religious instruction, for the priest was relentlessly mercurial, but rather the sense he conveyed that "the people on the shore were something more than an inconsequential accident in the world" (143). Throughout his work, Crummey explores the inescapable contingencies of people's lives, tracing their need to believe in some thread of connection with the past, whether conscious or not, sometimes in the form of legend, sometimes in the form of circuitous physical or cultural inheritance. In this interview, Crummey discusses how these questions inform *Galore* and many of his other writings, particularly the ways conceptions of the "carry-on" effect of inheritance and emplacement are integral to Newfoundlanders' sense of cultural-historical identity.

This interview took place on 29 May 2011 at the Congress for the Social Sciences and Humanities in Fredericton, New Brunswick. It was co-sponsored by the Canadian Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies and the Association for Canadian and Québec Literatures.

Cynthia Sugars (CS): One of the things that's hard to forget about *Galore* is the opening scene, with Judah coming out of the whale.[1] I was wondering if you could talk to me a bit about that, where that came from in your mind, and whether that was the originating moment of the book for you.

Michael Crummey (MC): No . . . the originating moment was reading *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel Garcia Marquez, which was a book I had avoided most of my life because I had it in my head that I disliked magic realism. Magic realism, in my mind, felt like a completely unnatural marriage of elements that didn't belong together. And it felt like a cheat; it felt like if you can do anything, as an author, then there's no work to do. So I had avoided ever reading Marquez, and then just by accident came across the book and thought, well, I'll take a shot. And what I loved about what he was doing in that book was the way in which the otherworldly elements were treated in exactly the same way that everything else was treated. It was like describing rainfall, or gravity. And there was an afterword to that book in which he said he had tried to write that book a number of times, and failed miserably, and it only worked when he decided he would tell the stories in exactly the way his grandparents used to tell them—which was as if they were absolutely true, with no ironic distance at all.

There was so much in that book that was completely foreign to me, but as I was reading it, I kept thinking, "This is just like home. This is just like

Newfoundland." And I thought there's a book to be written about the place that does some of the same things with that material. So I wanted to write a book about the lore of the place, the folklore of the place. But I'd never thought of it as magic realism. My sense of outport Newfoundland—and I think this is still true among the older folks in outport Newfoundland—was that they had lived between two worlds: there was the physical world, the ocean, and the rock that they lived on, and then there was also a kind of netherworld that they had populated with stories from the old country, about fairies or witchcraft, superstitions. Then there's whatever happens in Newfoundland itself, the ghost stories, the folk cures, and all that sort of stuff. And they didn't distinguish between them in their minds, one wasn't more real than the other, and they impacted their lives in the same way. They were both just as real. So I don't think of the book as magic realism so much as real realism. I was trying to recreate that sense of a world where those things were taken at face value. So I was collecting a ton of what I felt was amazing material, some of which just came from talking to friends, you know. A lot of that world is still there, just barely below the surface of the SUVs and flat screen televisions and coffee shops—you just have to scratch a little bit to find it.

But I wasn't sure how to start a book like that. I really had no idea where I would start. And I was standing in my kitchen, I don't know why, this song that I was forced to sing in school called "Jack Was Every Inch a Sailor" came into my head—I don't know how many people know it—Jack is swept overboard, swallowed by a whale—which I've since discovered is an old English dancehall song, so not originally from Newfoundland at all. But everybody in Newfoundland knows it.

And then there's also the story of Jonah from the bible. The bible, and religion in general, were so inextricably entwined in those people's lives. I really like the way this notion of a person coming out of the belly of a whale cuts on both of those things, the folkloric side and the biblical side. So just at that moment I said, okay, well I'll start with that, I'll have a man come out of the belly of a whale and hope for the best. [*laughs*] And I thought, well, if he's coming out of the belly of a whale, he'll probably be bleached, really, really white, and he'll probably stink like hell. But that's all I knew when I started, and so a lot of the book was writing a story in which the people are trying to make sense of Judah as they go, in the same way that I was trying to make sense of Judah as I went.

CS: One of the details in the book is that he has this fish stink that never goes away, and I don't remember whether it's the doctor who diagnoses it or

somebody else, but they give it a label, bromhidrosis,[2] which is a wonderful detail. What I liked, too, is the way that you have that fish stink become something that's inherited after that by various descendants of Judah. So I want to ask you about the way you mythologize inheritance; it's one of the things I love about the book. I'm thinking about the ways that you have things that are not genetic become inherited.

MC: Well, Newfoundland's a really interesting place. It's like a little tiny Petri dish, you know, there haven't been a whole lot of outside influences on it since those first Europeans settled there. There are about a half a million people there, and ninety-some per cent of them are direct descendants of an original European settler population of about twenty-thousand—seventeen- to eighteen-thousand—pretty much a fifty-fifty split between Irish and West Country English—and there are a whole bunch of other smaller things in the mix, but that's basically the line. So the two main families in the book became stand-ins for those two lines.

I've also recently discovered that in a lot of these kinds of communities, there are researchers from all over the world coming to Newfoundland to study genetics because it's a genetic isolate. Some of these small Newfoundland communities are about the same as Hutterite or Amish communities in terms of how genetically isolated they are. So in many ways, Newfoundlanders today are who Newfoundlanders were three-hundred or four-hundred years ago, genetically. So I really wanted to play with that in the book. So many things are passed on genetically, of course, the colour of the hair, the ability to sing, all those sorts of things, Judah's stink, all of that stuff gets passed on from one generation to the next. But I was also thinking that the folklore of a place, in a way, is like the cultural DNA of a community, and that's passed on in exactly the same way. And a lot of the book was me playing with this notion of our kind of symbiotic relationship with the stories that we tell. I think that's a human trait, and in Newfoundland it's kind of concentrated.

These stories I was working with were stories that were created and told by Newfoundlanders, but now those stories tell us who we are, as Newfoundlanders, and are creating Newfoundlanders—and that circle is something that I wanted the book to model somehow. So all of that inheritance stuff was kind of a metaphor for the way that those stories are still telling us who we are. Newfoundland now is nothing like Newfoundland as it was even fifty years ago. And when I started writing the book I thought I was writing a book about the past, but what amazed me was how much of that stuff is still present and how much it still affects us.

One of my favourite stories—I was talking to friends of my parents—and they told me about somebody from up the shore who had died, and sat up in his coffin at the funeral and walked home. And of course, the coffin was good wood, and he couldn't let it go to waste, so he made a day bed out of it, and slept on that for years—until he died the second time. And I've heard stories like that in just about every corner of Newfoundland. Every community in Newfoundland has a story about some guy waking up at a funeral or just as he's about to be buried. And I think the reason that that story is so omnipresent, and why it's told so often, other than the fact that it's a crazy story, is that it's a metaphor for the place itself. Newfoundland has always been an incredibly difficult place to make a go of it, and there have been times in all of these communities when it looks like it's done. And then often it's not, there's this completely unexpected resurrection, or at least people get through it and carry on. So that story to me became a touchstone for all kinds of storylines in the book, and it starts with Judah coming out of the belly of the whale, but then there's Little Lazarus, who has this unexpected resurrection, and the guy pulled out of the weird submarine that's made—all of which became a metaphor for the place itself within the novel.

CS: And at the end of the book we have the character of Abel, who is Judah's great-great-grandson . . . he seems to be on the verge of becoming another Judah for the community. I think he sees a whale over the side of the boat.

MC: In a way the book circles on itself, and I was playing with that notion of how our relationship to the stories is a circle as well. But it suggests that the book goes back to the beginning and starts over again. And in many ways the people in these communities were really fatalistic and suffered a great deal, so I always had a bit of a mixed relationship to that ending. Am I saying that it just starts over again, and we go through all the same crap again? Really?

When I started writing the book I didn't really know what the ending was going to be, but I knew that somebody was going to be saved by the fact that they were a direct descendant of the guy that came out of the belly of the whale—and it wasn't until I was three-quarters of the way through the book that I realized it was probably going to be more than that, that it was going to return. There's a movement in the book away from the magical sort of otherworldly stuff as the outside world impinges on it, and that stuff moves into the shadows as the book progresses. So what we have at the end of the novel is a man who's . . . lost himself. He's gone overseas to the war, and through a shelling incident has lost all memory of himself, he's lost his ability to speak. He doesn't know where he came from, who he is. And the way I

saw the ending was that what saved him in the end are those stories. What comes back to tell him who he is are those stories that he's been told about the people that came before him—and that sends him naked over the side of a boat chasing a whale, basically.

CS: There's also the fish stink. . . .

MC: [*laughs*] He's also saved by the stink because the German soldiers who come upon him think he's been dead for quite a while, and they just leave him be. I had that in my head very early on, but the taking it that much further was something that I didn't get to until I was well into the book.

CS: You say that if you scratch below the surface of a Newfoundlander you come across these stories. So I want to ask you, are you superstitious?

MC: No, I'm not myself superstitious. I did live in a haunted house. [*laughs*] But I'm not superstitious. I would say that I'm a skeptic; I don't buy otherworldly things as a rule. A lot of people ask about the stories in this book and say, "Was it true? Did that really happen?" And I think that's got nothing to do with it. Whether these things are true or not is irrelevant. What's important is whether or not the people who tell those stories believe they're true. Or if they impact the lives of the people in the community as if they were true.

I did own a house in which my bed used to shake me awake in the middle of the night. And just a couple of days ago I was at the Ship[3] and a young guy came up to ask—he's working on a PhD in folklore—and he wanted to talk to me about some stuff and he said, "Oh by the way, I lived at 6 Chapel Street for a while," which is the house I used to own, and he said, "I think that fucking place is haunted." So I don't know what's going on there.

CS: Elements of mythology and inheritance also come up in the stories in *Flesh and Blood*—I'm thinking in particular of the story "After Image." What I like especially is the boy in that story, who is part of a family, but he's been adopted . . . and so he turns himself into an authentic family member by, well, setting fire to himself in a sense. I'm wondering if you could talk about that story a little bit.

MC: That's a story that kind of started in some of the same ways that *Galore* started for me—it was a collection of stories I'd heard about the town I grew up in. Just strange stories . . . there was a woman who worked at the hospital who used to tell fortunes for women in the evening. There was a friend of ours who was really badly disfigured in an electrical accident. There was a story about the town my Dad was from in which lightning entered the house through a stove . . . someone got up to put wood in the stove and when they opened the dampers of the stove lightning came through the chimney, ball

lightning, and it circled the baseboard. And the mother basically got her broom and went to the door and swept it outside as it was going by.

There were a bunch of stories like that that just were really interesting to me and they seemed to fit together somehow. So I wrote a story in which I tried to create characters in which those kinds of things came into play.

And there was a family in the town that I grew up in who were kind of outcasts. They were looked down upon, and when I was a kid, if you touched them by accident, you were said to have the family's name "touch"—and you could only get rid of it by passing it on to someone else—which was a horrific thing, I mean, it's an awful memory. So I created a family of outcasts who were also special in a way. And this little kid was adopted, not knowing he was adopted into the family, and stands out because he's so ordinary. He intuits he doesn't belong, even though he doesn't know it. And it's about his attempt to find a place in that family, and he ends up badly burning himself, more or less by accident, but is confirmed in his place in the family by his disfigurement—which I had always thought of as kind of a beautiful thing.

But I remember it was turned into a stage play, and I talked to a friend afterwards, who is transgender, and he was appalled by it. You know, the sense that, "So what are you saying, that people are willing to deform themselves to fit the norm that they want to belong to? or that the family pressure forces people to?" Which is not something I'd ever seen in the story . . . so, perspective is everything I guess.

CS: It could be that he makes the story his own . . .

MC: Well that's how I thought.

CS: The play *Afterimage* won the Governor General's Award in 2010, didn't it?

MC: That's right, Robert Chafe's adaptation.

CS: So what was that like, watching one of your stories transform?

MC: This was a company in St. John's called Artistic Fraud—one of the most innovative theatre companies in the country, I think. Jillian Keiley is the artistic director—she's out of her mind—and Robert is the playwright-in-residence. He writes most of their shows. And when they sat me down to say they wanted to adapt "After Image" for the stage, and Jill was going to create an electrified stage with a copper floor and wire walls, and all the actors were going to be hooked up, they were going to be wired to their costumes so they could light lightbulbs and spark off each other, I thought, you know . . . that's not do-able! [*laughs*]

But they did it! And Robert, who's a fantastic writer, he invited me to be as involved as I wanted to be, and to collaborate with him as much as I wanted.

And I said, "You know, I'd rather you just take it." By that point the story was twelve to fourteen years old to me, and I'd forgotten why I'd wanted to write it in the first place. And Jill and Robert had found something in it that meant something to them. So I thought it would be better if they just took it and did what they wanted with it.

And Robert did quite a bit in terms of . . . there's a travelling photographer in the story, who goes door-to-door and takes pictures of families. Rostotski, who's this famous photographer from Newfoundland, did that, and came to our door when I was a kid. He was a ventriloquist, actually, and we had this little stuffed monkey and he was making the monkey talk to get us to smile for the picture. It was bizarre. Anyway, I had a family photographer in the story, and Robert made that photographer a much more integrative part of the story of the family. He did a whole bunch of things like that to make it work theatrically. And I thought it was beautiful. I found it really hard to feel connected to it as something that was mine, you know, it felt like another creature altogether—but a really lovely one.

CS: A question that keeps coming up in discussions of Atlantic Canadian writing is the ways Newfoundland conventionally has been depicted in stereotypical terms, you know, as a place that's locked in the past, or outside of time, a mythic place, a quaint place, a folksy place. So I'm wondering how you see your work fitting into that. Do you see your work playing into some of those representations of Newfoundland, or do you see yourself doing something different?

MC: You know, I'm just trying to make a living. [*laughs*] I don't know, that is one of the things that literary critics talk about: that this sense of Newfoundland as a timeless place, or of outport Newfoundland as a place apart from the world, is in some ways doing a disservice to Newfoundland, because it creates the sense that there was a real Newfoundland that no longer exists, and that whatever we have now is some sort of pale shadow of it.

And that's something that I've struggled with in my personal life quite a bit. I always felt a bit like a faux Newfoundlander, you know. I grew up in a mining town nowhere near saltwater, never caught a fish in my life, left Newfoundland to go to Labrador West when I was about fourteen, and then ended up on the mainland for a long time. And my only connection to that world was through my parents' stories, and my Dad's stories in particular. He was a great storyteller, and grew up fishing. And I had a real sense that *that* was real Newfoundland and that the world that I grew up in was less so somehow.

I moved home about eleven or twelve years ago, and was a bit apprehensive about it, because I wasn't sure if there was a place there for me. I didn't know if I would fit in. And the beautiful thing about being back there is that I've discovered, of course, that I am Newfoundland, that the world that we have there now is as much Newfoundland as any world has ever been Newfoundland. And that all of these things that I'm writing about in *Galore* are still present in some way. But . . . the world that I grew up in the '60s and '70s is a world that my parents couldn't have imagined growing up in Newfoundland in the '30s and '40s. And the world that my kids are growing up in is a world that I couldn't have imagined growing up in Newfoundland in the '60s and '70s.

So, the real question is, how much of who we were do we carry with us through those changes? And my sense of it is that those stories continue to have a huge influence on who we are—that who I am in the world was shaped by my parents, and that they were shaped by their parents in a particular way. And I think Malcolm Gladwell, in his most recent book,[4] talks about the ways in which those defining cultural things about a people from a particular place carry on for generations and generations after the physical world that created those characteristics [has] disappeared completely. And I see that in Newfoundland now—that that world that created these people, even though that world is gone, they carry on in it, and that we're still shaped by those things.

So, I'm not sure where my work fits in all that, and it may be that I am just playing into stereotypes. The only negative things ever said about the book in review is that it falls off in the last hundred pages, 'cause the magic kind of disappears, right, and the history starts coming into it—and they're not interested in the history, they want more ghosts.

I was trying to create a real sense of how that otherworldliness, or that place that we think of as outport Newfoundland, is a place that *has* been replaced by the modern world—but that it still runs under the surface. But it's clear that there's some tension there in reviewers' minds about whether or not that's a good thing for a book to be doing.

CS: One thing that connects to this is the way the book plays with the idea of legends and how we as readers see the whale, and Judah being born out of the whale, and all that stuff, but then as we go through the novel and as time continues, the people forget, they forget how he got there, and they forget that he may or may not have blessed them when they caught more fish. I like the way it becomes dim . . . not even memory, it gets lost in time, so in a way

that's kind of what you're describing here, that these stories are there, but they're changing.

MC: Sure. I was also wanting to play with that whole notion of truth versus reality. What's interesting about those stories is not whether or not they're actually true. At a certain point in the book, nobody really remembers Judah coming out of the belly of the whale, no one is alive to have seen that, but the *story* is still present with them. And it's the story that's important. There's a point in the book where Judah just kind of disappears. He's supposedly locked away in this fishing shed, and when they finally go to look for him he's gone, and has been gone a long long time, and nobody ever finds out what happened to him.

And the point I think I was trying to make with that is that whether or not Judah ever existed is irrelevant. What's important about him are the stories about him and the role that the stories play in these people's lives. The fact that he's gone, and may never have been there, and there's no way to know what happened to him, doesn't matter. It's the fact that those stories have shaped people—that is the important thing.

CS: That was the one moment in the book where I wanted more, so I'm glad to hear you talk about that! I also want to ask you a little bit about history, and I know that you've talked about this already in other interviews and various other places, but do you think Newfoundlanders have a different relation to history? I think you may have said that at one point.

MC: Yeah, my sense of it is that they do. I think for a lot of Newfoundlanders, history is not about textbooks, or about great moments, or about elections. That history is more about where your family is from . . . and where your family used to fish and what piece of land they used to own, and there's a real sense that history belongs to people. So they're very possessive of it. And they have a sense of what has happened and what hasn't. And if you tell a story that contradicts them, then they're going to be pretty pissed off about it. So I think writing about history in Newfoundland is a bit of a dicey business.

When I wrote *River Thieves*, which is about events that took place two hundred years ago, but it concerns a particular family, the Peytons, I could not believe how many Peytons I ran into after that book came out. I got to meet a Mr. Edgar Bear. He was 93, and his grandmother knew John Peyton Jr. So I was sitting next to this man, if I held his hand, he held his grandmother's hand, she was holding John Peyton Jr.'s hand. And that was an amazing moment—just to see how close all of that is to the present still.

That it's not something that doesn't exist anymore, it's very present to people in Newfoundland, I think, their sense of ownership of those events—which makes it a fairly dangerous place to be a writer.

CS: So is that sense of the past being so alive playing into your poems in *Hard Light*? I think the opening poem of that collection describes a sense of rupture with the past.

MC: I think that that book was written out of my sense of being disconnected from the world that my parents grew up in. And having a real sense that the world that they grew up in had gone on pretty much unchanged for two or three hundred years, but in the space of their lifetime it had disappeared. The world that Dad grew up in—the '30s and '40s—there were changes, they had electric lights and they had the inboard motor and they had the cod trap. But outside of those things, their daily life was very close to how people had lived in Newfoundland a hundred years before, two hundred years before. And since Confederation with Canada, that world has . . . it just does not exist anymore. You can find people who lived it, but the world itself has changed completely.

And I felt a real sense of . . . well, I didn't want to be nostalgic about it, because it was such a difficult life . . . I remember Dad saying to me one time, talking about fishing on the Labrador, he started when he was nine—although he didn't take on a full share of the crew until he was eleven, he said, he had it easy for the first two years—and he said to me, "Oh, you would never have managed it." And what he meant was, I think, that because I knew a different world, that I would never have been able to live that way. People survived that world partly because they knew nothing different.

He moved to Buchans, to the mining town, because he had quit school at 15, his father had died, he took over the family fishery, was two hundred dollars in debt after two seasons, through connections got a job at a mining town, planning to pay off his debt and then go back to fishing right away. But there was no way he was going back to fishing after two years where there were heated buildings and a paycheque every two weeks regardless of the weather, and a bowling alley and a hockey rink and a movie theatre—it was like stepping into a time machine.

So I didn't want to be nostalgic about that world, but I had a real sense that it was a way of life that had gone on for a long time and now was gone. So there was that sense of rupture for *me*.

CS: Do you ever feel pressured to write a particular kind of Newfoundland novel that conjures a sense of Newfoundland "essence" or "authenticity?"[5]

MC: I certainly don't feel any pressure in that sense. I would say, in fact, that I feel more pressure to move away from the kind of work that I've been doing towards something more contemporary. I think the biggest criticism I get is that I'm writing about a world that doesn't exist anymore, and that I should . . . listen to rock and roll, for god's sake. [*laughs*] I mean, I never wanted to be a writer of historical fiction. It's just that those stories interested me, or it felt like those stories chose me as opposed to I chose those stories. I would love to write something that had less to do with the past and more to do with the world as it is today. But I also feel like I'm writing what I have in me to write. I've never made a conscious decision to write a story or not write a story because it fits or doesn't fit somebody's notion of what's right or wrong, and I think everybody in Newfoundland now is doing that. You look at books like *Come, Thou Tortoise* by Jessica Grant or the stuff that Lisa Moore and Michael Winter are doing which are über-modern in their approach to the whole notion of writing and what writing is and what it can do. They're cutting edge, but those stories couldn't have come from anywhere else but Newfoundland.

CS: Are there any Atlantic Canadian writers that have been a particular influence on your work?

MC: My favourite writers change constantly. It used to bother me that a lot of my favourite writers, when I come back to them after five or ten years, seem to suck [*laughs*] . . . or they don't interest me in the way that they did. As a writer who's reading, at different points in your life you're looking for different things or you're after different things and so it's not that the books change so much as *you* change, and the book doesn't speak to you in the same way. But there have been a number of Atlantic writers who were really big for me, especially early on. I'm thinking about poets like Alden Nowlan and Al Pittman who were huge for me when I was starting out because they were writing about a place that I recognized. Most of the writers that I first read were people living in places that I'd only seen in movies or read about in papers, so it was really important to have those writers writing about a recognizable landscape for me. Alistair MacLeod was a huge influence and some of David Adams Richards' early novels.

CS: Is it important to you to capture a sense of Newfoundland speech in your work?

MC: It's a really dicey thing writing in dialect, and it's often done very badly. I've always been really wary of doing it badly. I lived in Ontario for quite a while, and a lot of people would say to me, "How come you don't have an accent?"

As if there is *an* accent in Newfoundland. I mean, there are hundreds of accents in Newfoundland. One of the things that I try to do in my writing is to give a sense of people speaking in a way that is unique to a particular place or a particular character without having it come off sounding like a cartoon. Part of what I avoid is writing that drops *th*'s or drops *h*'s. I've never done that, I don't think. What I'm after instead is a particular cadence, and there is a very unique cadence to Newfoundland speech. Part of the cadence is where people place particular parts of speech in a sentence. Grammarians would say it's incorrect usage. But part of Newfoundland speech, part of the cadence of it, is using those things where they don't belong, for lack of a better word, and those are the kinds of things that I'm trying to play with when I'm writing dialogue. Especially in a book like *Galore*, I really wanted to give a sense that these people don't speak standard English and that how they speak is unique to the place they come from. But I have never written a narrative voice in dialect. I know that Joel Hynes's first book *Down to the Dirt* is written in Newfoundland dialect and it's a fantastic job. It's completely convincing. But often when people try to do that it just comes across as clunky and cartoonish somehow, so it's a very tricky thing.

CS: People talk about the explosion of Newfoundland writing in the last decade or two, with writers like Michael Winter, Lisa Moore, yourself, and Wayne Johnston, and I'm wondering if you see yourself as part of this cultural movement, if it is a cultural movement, and what you think it might be attributed to.

MC: Well . . . I can't really explain what's going on, in terms of the number of writers that are coming out of Newfoundland—and the number of really, really, really good writers—world-class writers. I mean, the population of Newfoundland is about the same as the population of Hamilton—and, I don't want to put Hamilton down, it's a fine city . . . And it's not just writing. Writing is the most visible one, but just in terms of the amount of cultural product that's coming out of Newfoundland in the last twenty years or so . . . I think a lot of it may have to do with the cultural shift that's going on. I think Newfoundland's in the midst of a real sea change, that Newfoundland now is completely different than it was twenty years ago, and it's going to be completely different five years, ten years from now. And there's a particular kind of energy, I think, that comes out of that kind of sea change.

We're also seeing now the first generation of Newfoundlanders who are university-educated, you know, just as a matter of course. So I think that there are people coming out of a culture that had been almost exclusively an

oral culture, who are now writing things down for the first time—and that there's a freshness or a depth to the writing that's coming out that may be related to something like that.

But, you know, I dropped out of my PhD for a reason . . . so I wouldn't have to answer these kinds of questions! [*laughs*]

NOTES

1 In *Galore*, a man emerges from the belly of a beached whale. The townspeople christen him "Judah" because there is some argument about whether the biblical character who is swallowed by the whale is named Jonah or Judas. They decide on a combination of the two names.
2 Bromhidrosis is a medical condition marked by extreme body odour.
3 The Ship Inn is a well-known pub in downtown St. John's.
4 Crummey is referring to Malcolm Gladwell's 2008 book *Outliers*, which examines various inherited environmental determinants that contribute to an individual's abilities.
5 This and the next two questions emerged during the audience question period at the Congress. I have condensed the questions; the answers are those provided by Crummey during the discussion period.

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Gregory Betts

41—To Get Read

chapter and verse rehearsed flat
to get read you must stop writing

poetry animation must be
something said before
your body must be ee
ae, adverse, head, aa
a badge, an erasure, no name

go gaga, repeat
the classics, something drastic
be dead
do anything but read
give away chocolate
upload your head
collaborate with group narcissism

go treated
get banned, censored, cross the line,
subversive challenge
go into advertising
post your words, leave your words
get published
be the weakest and most fearful point
give away all your other colours

read
liberate libraries within
on tv in tongues
in words
one letter at a time

read, read at, constrain to,
simple things
beg, edit to write
hit on google
get read, get read
with 1000 monkeys
and take care to spell correctly

Pearl Pirie, derek beaulieu, Gary Barwin, Carmel Purkis, Garry Thomas Morse, Jacob Wren, Brian Bartlett, Miekal And, Alison Starkey, Warren Dean Fulton, Sharon Honywill-Haddow, Natalee Caple, Amanda Earl, Kemeny Babineau, Catherine Heard, Priscilla Brett, Kathleen Betts, Susan Shone, Joseph Brown, Carmen Racovitza

Four Ways to Make Poems

Margaret Avison
The Essential Margaret Avison. Porcupine's Quill $12.95

Frank Davey
Bardy Google. Talonbooks $16.95

Karen Enns
That Other Beauty. Brick $19.00

George Sipos
The Glassblowers. Goose Lane $17.95

Reviewed by Nicholas Bradley

1. Search the web: *Bardy Google*, Frank Davey's twenty-seventh collection of poetry, is composed primarily of the results of Google queries governed by a series of complex, rigorous rules. In his preface, Davey notes that "The texts are part of my ongoing work to use the sentence as the basic structural unit of poetry—to create poetic texts, as they have always been created, out of the materials of prose." The first "poetic text" (or prose poem), "Exceed Your Limits," begins as follows: "Will we lose our tax status if we exceed our limits? How far will we exceed our limits? The sales price of the home does not exceed our limits. Your gross annual income does not exceed our limits." It continues in this vein for four pages, turning the seemingly innocuous phrase into cliché or cipher. Indeed, the book as a whole renders familiar (and sometimes topical) phrases virtually meaningless through repetition. The texts differ in vocabulary and sometimes structure, yet are linked by their hypnotic effects. The juxtaposition of discrete search results is sometimes puzzling, sometimes droll. But the language itself is often eerily familiar: the texts draw upon the registers of advertising, news, and personal disclosure. In *Close Calls with Nonsense* (2009), the critic Stephen Burt writes that "gamelike poems" "hold together if we can imagine a personality behind them." Davey's personality is certainly on display in *Bardy Google*. Some of his titles are cheekily self-referential—namely "New Turning Points for Canadian Literature" and "Surviving with Paraphrase"—and his love of Great Danes plays a role. But the book equally asks readers to listen to language divorced from persona. Davey observes that the poems are unrepeatable because search-engine rankings change continuously; thus his poems are given exact dates, from "3 June 2008" to "29 July 2009." Yet the paradigm allows for an infinite number of similar poems. *Bardy Google* finds meaning in Internet flotsam but reminds readers of the vast ocean of language from which the poems are drawn: call it the digital sublime.

2. Listen to others: *That Other Beauty*, Karen Enns' first collection, joins in the ongoing conversation among a host of contemplative poets in Canada. Robert Bringhurst's "Sutra of the Heart" supplies an epigraph for Enns' "The Hand Is a Field of Grasses" and hallmarks of Jan Zwicky's style appear throughout the book: poems invoke composers and their works (Mozetich, Bach, Mahler, Brahms, Schubert) and certain preferred words ("clarity," "wilderness,"

"light," "loss," "pitch," "resonance") echo the lexicon of *Songs for Relinquishing the Earth* and *Robinson's Crossing*. (Zwicky has edited Enns' poetry; both writers are accomplished musicians.) When Enns writes, in "Notes on the Angel's Descent," that "you put your ear to the world," she brings to mind a phrase from Zwicky's "String Practice": "tune / the ear to earth." In "That Other Beauty," Enns writes of lying "down lovely with" "grief," a phrase with an antecedent in Zwicky's "Aspen in Wind": "What is sorrow for / but to lie down in." I don't mean to suggest that *That Other Beauty* is derivative; the poems gain in interest from their connections to other poets' works. In "Tuning," Enns writes of apprehending a grey landscape and a glimpse of flicker and hawk: "The mind takes it in like a compound eye, / seeing, turning, seeing, / listening for the central pitch. / And resonance. / And form. / And unblinking thought." Her poems concern such connections among mind, heart, eye, and ear. They are attuned to the limits of language and to the paradox of writing about the inexpressible: "You have no language for this cold, / the insidious hands that press the clear ice plate / across your face" (from "Pausing on the Icy Step in November"). Enns has set herself the task of finding the words.

3. Watch the world: *The Glassblowers* is George Sipos' second book of poems, after *Anything but the Moon* (2005). (A memoir, *The Geography of Arrival*, has since been published.) His poems are meditative, often melancholy, and resolutely undramatic: they evoke stillness as the mind dwells on the minutiae of memories and landscapes. Many poems describe coastal scenes; Sipos, who lives on Salt Spring Island, draws upon sea and sky for images of tranquility and unseen motion. In "Fulford Harbour, November," the speaker gazes upon the "open water / untenanted by anything conscious" while "Above the bay, a cold front from the Pacific / slowly turns on its invisible pivot." In "Mt. McBride" (named for a peak on Vancouver Island), the speaker asks his companion whether anything would have been different had they not once "hiked those green mountains." The concluding lines suggest that the details of the climb have been dissolved by time: "Roosevelt elk pink on a marble ridge / all we now remember." Sipos' descriptions of natural beauty are accompanied by a sense of mortality. The cultivated flatness of his language reflects a sombre view of the world; the poems express and examine coastal malaise.

4. Break free: "Nobody stuffs the world in at your eyes. / The optic heart must venture: a jail-break / And re-creation." The opening lines of Margaret Avison's "Snow" "seem to speak clearly and memorably to everyone who hears them," writes Robyn Sarah in the foreword to *The Essential Margaret Avison*. Yet even when Avison's poems are more difficult (as in the rest of "Snow"), Sarah suggests, they "beguile with sharp flashes of the familiar . . . and their mysteriousness feels like the mysteriousness of life itself." Sarah's selection includes well-known poems ("The Butterfly," "The Swimmer's Moment," "Watershed") and less familiar works from Avison's last collections, *Momentary Dark* (2006) and the posthumous *Listening* (2009). One could quibble with individual choices (where is "Butterfly Bones; or Sonnet against Sonnets"?), but the selection is careful and effective. Sarah's task was difficult: as she notes, Avison's *Collected Poems* contains nearly 450 poems and the final volumes add another ninety to the total. Sarah is concerned to rescue Avison from the ostensibly confining categories of "Christian poet" and "associate of the Black Mountain poets." Avison's religious turn occurred in 1963, the same year as the Vancouver Poetry Conference, at which she appeared with Robert Creeley, Allen Ginsberg, Robert Duncan, Charles Olson, and Denise Levertov—all proponents of the

New American Poetry, to borrow the title of Donald Allen's influential anthology (1960). As Sarah suggests, Avison's religious poems are never simply devotional, while poems with spiritual dimensions were always part of her repertoire: "Is 'The Butterfly,' which refers to '[t]he Voice that stilled the sea of Galilee,' a Christian poem? It was written a full two decades before her conversion experience." Sarah's slim selection clarifies Avison's distinctive accomplishments and her idiosyncratic vision; it complements the three volumes of *Always Now: The Collected Poems*. The Porcupine's Quill's series of Essential collections—to date it includes Avison, Don Coles, George Johnston, Kenneth Leslie, Richard Outram, P.K. Page, and James Reaney—is a valuable part of the critical conversation about the shape and scope of poets' oeuvres and of Canadian poetic history. The collections also present an implicit challenge to critics: balancing comprehensive accounts of large bodies of work with careful attention to the intricacies of individual poems is a perpetual test.

Animal Book Mix

Simon Awa, Anna Ziegler, and Stephanie McDonald
Uumajut: Learn about Arctic Wildlife. Inhabit $14.95

Maureen Bush
Cursed!. Orca $7.95

Ian McAllister and Nicholas Read
The Sea Wolves: Living Wild in the Great Bear Rainforest. Orca $19.95

Rebecca Upjohn
The Last Loon. Orca $7.95

Reviewed by Lynn (J.R.) Wytenbroek

Animal stories are as popular now as they have ever been. Three of the four books reviewed here are about animals, although two are non-fiction while the other is fiction. Both genres reach different children at different stages of their lives.

Uumajut is a book for very young readers about Arctic animals. The text for each animal is brief but descriptive, while the pictures capture the animals' appearance and habitat, so young readers can "read" the pictures and find out almost as much about the animals as those who can read the text. The text is fascinating for both young and old readers alike as it is first printed in the Inuit language of Inuktitut. There are, therefore, many layers of teaching going on even as children will be entranced by the evocative artwork and clear text.

McAllister and Read's *The Sea Wolves* is a fascinating account of the lives of the wolves which inhabit BC's Great Bear Rainforest, on the northern coast. Filled with photographs of the wolves in their habitat pursuing their daily lives, this book is rich and in-depth. It is definitely aimed at the pre- or early teen reader. The prose is beautifully written as the authors trace the lives of the wolves throughout the seasons. The photographs and text also include, by necessity, the many other animals that inhabit the Great Bear Rainforest with the wolves, so the whole book wonderfully presents the many lives of the creatures which inhabit this ecologically diverse area of pristine wilderness. The layout is interesting, often with one full page devoted to a photograph and the opposing page with text, including a detailed caption for the photograph and a short "bite" of some interesting fact in the margin. Visually the book is stunning, with an evocative text.

The Last Loon is a novel for pre-teens, told in first person by the eleven-year-old protagonist, Ian. Feeling deserted as his parents leave him for a couple of weeks with a "loony" aunt he doesn't know, he soon finds that his aunt is quite a fascinating mine of information on the local wildlife, including a lone loon who has out-stayed its migrating season. Finding other children nearby helps Ian acclimatize to this strange backwoods environment where everyone

is anxiously keeping their eye on the loon as the ice begins to close in on it. Ian soon finds himself as concerned about the fate of the loon as everyone else, while he cements friendships and comes to respect and like his eccentric aunt.

Readers may find themselves with their hearts in their throats as time begins to run out for the loon that Ian, and therefore the reader, has come to care about. The cast of eccentric but lovable characters, including the mysterious aunt about whom Ian knows almost nothing at the beginning, builds the suspense. When we finally discover that his aunt has spent time in jail for punching out a heartless hunter, and that she is a leading researcher on wildlife in the country, we find ourselves joining Ian in his growing feelings for her. The cleverly planned rescue attempt by Ian and his new friend Cedar when the loon, trapped by the enclosing ice, is attacked by crows will keep readers on the edge of their seats. Overall, this excellent book combines great characters with a well-written, suspenseful plot that will keep readers turning pages as fast as they can read them.

The only non-animal book in this collection is Bush's *Cursed!*. Also written for pre-teens, the protagonist Jane is not as likeable as Ian in *The Last Loon*. Timid and defensive, Jane's character slowly grows on the reader as she becomes enmeshed in having to find a way to get the spirit of a scary figurine from New Guinea back, after releasing it accidentally and being dogged by bad luck until she recognizes what the problem is and takes control of the situation. The book turns out to be quite a good yarn with a clever premise, and it is spooky enough to entrance most young readers. However, liking Jane takes some work, and since the story is told in first person, the ambivalence of the character may lose some readers before the spookiness of the story catches them.

It is wonderful to see the quality of non-fiction for young people as embodied in both *Uumajut* and *The Sea Wolves*. But the plight of wildlife can also be conveyed thoughtfully and cleverly through fiction such as *The Last Loon*. These books are top quality, and should not be missed.

Il y aura une fois

Claude Beausoleil, éd.
Héritages du surréalisme. Noroît 18,95 $

Compte rendu par Swann Paradis

Regroupant les actes d'un colloque organisé par la Maison de la poésie en mai 2009 à l'occasion du 10e anniversaire du Marché de la poésie de Montréal, ce collectif propose, outre une « Présentation » minimaliste d'Isabelle Courteau, la contribution inégale de dix collaborateurs.

Rodney Saint-Éloi expose tout d'abord comment, aux lendemains de la première occupation américaine (1915-34), une conférence donnée par André Breton à Port-au-Prince le 20 décembre 1945 fut « l'étincelle qui allum[a] les flammes de l'insoumission », le pape du surréalisme ayant alors affirmé devant les autorités haïtiennes que l'insurrection était « la légitime violence que tout peuple asservi a le droit d'exercer quand on lui a enlevé les formes légales de sa patience ». Pas étonnant, dès lors, que le surréalisme—qui aurait selon Saint-Éloi provoqué la chute du gouvernement corrompu d'Élie Lescot—ait été depuis perçu, dans la Perle des Antilles, comme « l'arme miraculeuse du pauvre ». On notera ensuite la (trop) longue contribution de Pierre-Yves Soucy (quelque 25 % du collectif), qui retrace avec moult détails le parcours de François Jacqmin (et par le fait même d'une portion de l'histoire du surréalisme belge), tout en assénant au lecteur une analyse assez aride qui insiste sur les « *résonances* » plutôt que sur les « héritages » du surréalisme chez cet acteur de la « Belgique sauvage ». Beaucoup plus stimulante et agréable à lire, la contribution de Françoise Lalande retrace le parcours

d'un acteur important du surréalisme belge, Christian Dotremont, principal animateur du mouvement artistique Cobra. Bien que cette présentation soit aussi axée sur l'anecdotique, la richesse des informations fournies en fait une source inestimable sur la vie de cet acteur fascinant à « double visage, surréaliste et catholique, révolutionnaire et conservateur », dont l'histoire aura retenu surtout les spectaculaires « logogrammes » parfois réalisés dans la neige, voire dans la glace.

En ce qui a trait aux textes plus analytiques—alors que la communauté des chercheurs vient tout juste de dire adieu à l'auteur du *Surréalisme dans la littérature québécoise*, André-G. Bourassa, décédé en février 2011—, Karim Larose avance que « l'héritage incertain du surréalisme au Québec » est dû principalement au « contretemps » qui sépare l'effervescence du mouvement français et l'épanouissement du groupe automatiste; Larose souligne, à juste titre, l'écart manifeste existant entre la *surréalité* et la *surrationnalité* (notamment celle qui sous-tend l'automatisme littéraire défendu par Claude Gauvreau). Même constat de la part de Gilles Lapointe qui note que, s'il est aberrant d'envisager un « mouvement surréaliste québécois », il ne faut jamais perdre de vue que l'empreinte du surréalisme français au Québec fut principalement laissée dans les arts visuels et non dans la matière poétique, même si Fernand Leduc, puis Borduas (dans le texte « Le surréalisme et nous ») ont toujours refusé de se laisser annexer par le groupe d'André Breton, insistant sur le fait que les automatistes étaient « les fils illégitimes » voire « imprévisibles, presque inconnus du surréalisme ». Nous avons été toutefois beaucoup moins convaincu par l'effort de Peter Dubé, qui tente de rapprocher idéologiquement et esthétiquement le surréalisme avec le mouvement de libération gai et lesbien . . . Autrement plus savoureuse fut la lecture du dernier texte de ce recueil dans lequel Philippe Haeck commente avec une verve que n'aurait pas reniée le Robert Desnos de *RRose Sélavy*, une vingtaine de citations de Gilles Hénault, dont la philosophique : « Quand la poule pond un œuf, fait-elle un geste surréaliste ? » De son côté, Francis Combes propose, avec intelligence et finesse, que « le surréalisme est aujourd'hui le "cadavre dans le placard" de la poésie française ». Selon Combes, bien peu de poètes actuels peuvent avancer, sans rire, croire toujours à l'impératif rimbaldien, et affirmer que la poésie a le pouvoir de révolutionner l'existence individuelle, avant d'être une simple discipline artistique. Qui plus est—et contrairement à leurs cousins québécois—, les jeunes poètes français qui s'adonnent au *rap* ou au *slam* pratiqueraient très peu l'image (la métaphore), faisant de la rime et des rythmes réguliers un critère de qualité poétique; en d'autres termes, ils auraient troqué le « Je est un autre » pour le remplacer par l'idée que « Je est tous les autres », délaissant du même souffle le « changer la vie », pour se concentrer plutôt sur le « transformer le monde ».

Malgré les nombreuses données factuelles qui sauront plaire aux spécialistes, nous n'irions pas jusqu'à prétendre, à l'instar de la directrice de la Maison de la poésie, que ces « héritages » ont « provoqué et nourri un nouveau point de vue pour comprendre la création contemporaine ». Peut-être un peu à cause de l'« Intervention » de Maxime Catellier—exercice malheureux consistant à jouer ridiculement au surréaliste en mordant la main qui le nourrit—, nous avons fermé ce collectif avec un léger malaise repoussant à un peu plus tard notre désir *d'être follement aimé*. Il y aura une fois . . .

Poetry's "Where is [T]here?"

Cara Benson
(made). BookThug $17.00

Eve Joseph
The Secret Signature of Things. Brick $19.00

Barry McKinnon
In the Millennium. New Star $19.00

Lorri Neilsen Glenn
Lost Gospels. Brick $19.00

Reviewed by Crystal Hurdle

The "train's whistle" of Neilsen Glenn's "Home" and Joseph's "You Crossed in Winter" and "On Schedule" provides an ululating call of connection, of loss, in at least three of the four volumes.

Benson's *(made)* equates time with the act of making: "Morning arrives. // and the book begins[.]" The frequent single words ("moist"; "wobble"; "say") on single pages are precious and suggest that what had been a chapbook has thus been padded into a wee volume, but interesting juxtapositions exist elsewhere, such as "the local five and dime o'clock news" and the clever prose poem "billboard." What seems straightforward becomes a puzzle: "This required grandiloquent effort not to see before them that which was becoming behind them behind them." Exploring commodity versus the act of making, "Real Estate" fixates oddly and intriguingly on an apple.

Where is here? "The hole of course will overflow with such obfuscation. An absconding to return to." The volume considers what constitutes reality, creation versus existence—"If this is in your hands, it is only here because you hold it. When you 'put this down' [a euphemism for killing?] what will become."

This implicit question is answered in Joseph's sumptuously titled *The Secret Signature of Things*, nominated for the 2011 Dorothy Livesay Poetry Prize and shortlisted for the 2010 Victoria Butler Book Prize. "White Camellias" (winner of *The Malahat Review*'s 2010 P.K. Page's Founders' Award for Poetry), in a series of personifications, creates droll accounts for poems not written. What's tenor, vehicle? Her children "too, are not written." Protestations to not read too much into the portents of spiders and owls, for example, compel the reader to do just that. "The ship is not a metaphor," at the same time that it is. Snowdrops are like "brides left at the altar." The power of figurative language (with homage in "On Beginning" to Lorca, Neruda, Amichai, and "Whitman and the beautiful uncut hair of graves") is made obvious, yet it is incapable of saving the lost Aboriginal women in "Tracking," the final melancholic poem sequence. Death is stronger. Time erodes and changes; the tone, wistful, not sentimental.

The seasons winter and spring set up the cycle of rebirth. The poems "Old Age" and "Convalescence" focus on the body's physical losses, as does the splendid "Arrhythmia," which seamlessly melds provocative scientific fact with poetic language. The haunting collection begins with the *Menagerie* series, equating nature with creativity. Of "The Violet green Swallow,"

> above the trees
> I return
> as
> script.

As with Joseph, Halifax's former poet laureate Lorri Neilsen Glenn situates her collection *Lost Gospels* in winter and spring. She evokes the prairie life of her childhood, a dislocation of time and space. Despite many poems of loss (the Notes mention several to be in memory of different people), the collection is life-affirming. Several poems give the quality of being plunked down with another's family albums and scrapbooks, beginning with an implicit understanding of the homely dynamics.

As with Joseph, language is a tracking device that "parses birdsong." *Verge*, a lovely

sequence on the lost lilies of her childhood, uses epigraphs from nature books. Ethnographer Neilsen Glenn, standing on the shoulders of the greats, invokes a wide cast of characters: writers (Homer, Yeats), literary theorists (Irigaray), philosophers (Herakleitos, Heidegger, Pythagoras), and goddesses (Hera, Mnemosyne), along with a motley crew of musicians (Puccini, Neil Young, Billie Holliday): "We are all songs of imperfection." A disarming sequence, "Songs for Simone [Weil]," addressed to the French philosopher, ties together many of the plangent collection's themes: "Grief has more seeds than flowers do." Writing is "prayer," perhaps even more so when combined with music, the lost gospels of the title: "I am ready as a tuned string / to witness what is ravenous, mythic." Beautiful.

Barry McKinnon's *In the Millennium* details the disintegration of BC cities, Tumbler Ridge, Giscom[b]e, and even his native Prince George, subject of two long poems. As the body is equated to the city ("man a city"), the privation is even greater. This is a collection about the loss (and wisdom) that ageing brings: "cruel that body and mind sense their own demise. the city is organ. it sees itself. disintegrated."

Antidote to dislocation is his wife, central figure in "Joy (an Epithalamium)," as well as "Sex at 52" (part of a continuing series). Her pragmatism charms: of foreign places, McKinnon notes, "I write, 'a bit under construction.' Joy says, 'a rathole.'"

Consolation is also in other people, especially writers (as with Neilsen Glenn), especially poets, especially Canadian. In an assemblage about a trip to Bolivia (which won the bpNichol chapbook award), he notes the previous presence of Al Purdy and Earle Birney. Other poets invoked, quoted, written about, responded to, include Sharon Thesen, Ken Belford, George Stanley. McKinnon situates himself as a piece of poetry's history; such is his place.

The most intriguing piece, "Head Out (a Letter, Essay, Poem—to Cecil Giscombe)," consists of the six-page "Head Out," accompanied by fifteen pages of Preface, Endnote, Notes/Works Cited for *Head Out* and Endnote, Post Response: Supplement to *Philly Talks* #18, Works Cited for Post Response, A Note on the Photographs [taken by his wife], and three separate appendices: a literary Ouroboros. In it, McKinnon asks and attempts to answer, "What is it to be *out of dislocation*?" building on the work of American poet Cecil Giscombe with whom he did a talk in Calgary a decade ago. He writes of the precipitating event, "our answers, or at least mine as I remember them, went out by the seat of my pants." He is able in this sequence to answer more reflectively, more fully.

McKinnon says, "The poem is verb," and "once a thing ceases to move it is easier to kill (literally or metaphorically)—the poet included." Fascinating.

For McKinnon, where is there is here—in Canada, the body, in the now, "where desire contains / the description of its loss." Such might be the case for the cryptic Benson ("Cold axis. Interminable trip"), but it is certainly the case, too, for both the beautiful Joseph ("the way a body / relinquishes its hold as it / sinks, unguarded, / to the earth") and the evocative Neilsen Glenn ("We can't track this country; / It's our lonely planet").

Transitions in Poetry

Nina Berkhout
Arrivals and Departures. Buschek $17.50

Priscila Uppal
Traumatology. Exile $19.95

Priscila Uppal
Winter Sport: Poems. Mansfield $16.95

Clea Roberts
Here is Where We Disembark. Freehand $16.95

Steve McOrmond
The Good News About Armageddon. Brick $19.00

Reviewed by Susie DeCoste

Each of these diverse collections involves a transition. There is an emotional transition from love to grief to calmness in Nina Berkhout's collection as the speaker traces the aftermath of a breakup, a transition between seasons in the Canadian north in Clea Roberts' collection, and the cusp of a transition in Steve McOrmond's collection as human beings face the end of the world. The transitions in Priscila Uppal's two collections are those of the body in motion: during play in *Winter Sport: Poems*, and between aspects of the self in *Traumatology*.

Berkhout's *Arrivals and Departures* is a charming, compelling poetic journey that depicts a relationship as it transitions toward its end. The book is a poetic sequence broken into three parts: the first is concerned with the speaker alone in her home, constantly reminded of her lost love; the second recalls the trip to Prague that culminated in the break up; and the third sees the speaker back home, transitioning toward acceptance. Imparted in each carefully crafted piece of the sequence is a sense of the quiet, intense, fully present moment in which the speaker resists her impending solitude.

The poems work best embedded in the sequence. Their part within the whole allows the echoes throughout the collection to properly reverberate. One such echo is the idea of order and purpose within chaos. "Everything has an order," Berkhout writes, "Five years ago your eyes / crashed into me with more force / than a ship-breaking yard." Because readers know the relationship will end in the Prague section, and because it was described with such raw force earlier, the sense of understatement is more powerful at the breakup itself: "You choose a pretty ending for us. / On a day of touring castles / your confession blossoms / from your perfect mouth: / a flower's dark centre." This collection has the compelling raw emotion of works like Elizabeth Smart's *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept*.

Roberts' collection *Here is Where We Disembark* has a different emotional quality, one of contemplation and curiosity. The book comprises of two sections, one that transitions through the seasons in poems about domestic life in Canada's north, and the other that explores the people and landscape during the Klondike Gold Rush of the nineteenth century. The most striking feature of the poems in the first section, in which the speaker interacts with all aspects of her environment from the gardens to the incoming mail, is the sense of atmosphere that they build. The landscape is part of that atmosphere, and so is the quiet and focused nature of the contemplative voice. In a particularly evocative description, the speaker imparts the experience of distance as winter sets in: "You were suddenly content / with your diminishing, / frayed boundaries / — the weather, its intent / and randomness / too big for you." As spring unfolds, it brings with it a sense of hopefulness. Even though this is a theme that readers have seen many times before, the nuance of Roberts' voice creates the sense that the elements of spring are entirely new. In "Seasonal Adjustments," "so many things grow / unasked / Garlic in the kitchen / crocus in the compost. / And love, it waits in the cupboard / with the potatoes / its eyes exploding with flowers."

Where Roberts' book is a witness of beauty, McOrmond presents a world of doom. He informs readers directly in a

poem that he does not want to write poetry about trees or the way light hits things. The voice is almost always frustrated. Perhaps the poem "The Poet" is a set of instructions for reading this collection: "To read his poetry is to grasp that the wisdom / of the ages is lost on us, misfiled somewhere / in the office of obscure patents. To describe / the way the light falls on this surface or that / is not the same thing as enlightenment." Instead of enlightenment, then, McOrmond focuses on the intentions and ultimately flawed nature of human beings. Human faults and failings only increase at the end of the world as humans are faced with their mortality. I don't know what McOrmond sees as a redeeming feature of humanity, unless it is art itself. In his final poem, one of the strongest ones, he addresses the poems of the collection, sending them off as "fledglings, / my little vanishings. . . . Everything is fine, the sky has been falling a long time."

The collection opens with a sequence of ghazals on the subject of the apocalypse. The sequence contains a mix of voices, arranged episodically, cutting out and cutting in suddenly, and resembling an impatient channel surfer. McOrmond describes the restless lifestyle people lead, their disconnection from others, and their complacency with keeping it that way, even during the time of an impending apocalypse: "Accustomed to instant gratification, / we wanted our apocalypse now. / How many times could we say goodbye before we grew bored, turned a blind eye?" These poems are indeed part lament, but they are also unfortunately part judgment, and part cynicism.

Winter Sport: Poems is the culmination of Priscila Uppal's tenure as the Winter Olympics' first poet in residence. Strengths of the collection include the play with sport vocabulary, and the way that the words themselves at times become sensual in their description of sensual movement. In the essay preceding the collection, Uppal discusses her role at the games and her hope for the book. The poems are for the athletes, she explains, and she likes to think of the project as extending poetry beyond the elite literati toward athletes who might not read poetry otherwise. In short, she sees athletics as severed from poetry and writing. The essay neglects the vast collection of art and texts on sport, including a body of philosophy on sport and aesthetics. One weakness of the collection is that some of the poems simply resemble lists. "Opening Ceremonies" consists of two columns of two word phrases, all of which contain the word "opening," and "Ode to 4th Place" consists of phrases mostly beginning with the number four. But there are also some terrific pieces that showcase Uppal's poetic skill such as "The Ice Dance is Perfect" in which she writes, "Your back, my darling, / your back, surrender to it— / like the dream lover you / never dared approach / in the light, or like that God / you once believed in who / now reaches for you." Here, there is a melding of metaphor, sport imagery, sensuality, and individual experience. As she does in many of the poems of this collection, Uppal focuses here on the raw physical body and the material details of the body in motion.

Uppal separates *Traumatology* into four parts: mind, body, spirit, and "[to hide]," and transitions through these aspects of the self in the poems. The poems of the body section share many of the characteristics of the physical poems in *Winter Sport*, but in this case the focus is on the limitations of the body as it deals with illness or age. Uppal interprets each of the themes loosely and inventively; the "Mind" section contains poems on marriage, the vocabulary of a father, and the difference between knowing and understanding death in the family. In one of these evocative poems, the speaker describes several family members who have died before her but whose

presence she continues to feel. Regrettably, a few poems read as anecdotes and use metaphors that do not work. In the poem "When the Soul is Tired," for instance, the speaker describes the soul as a body that needs exercise in order to avoid growing "slack and fat": "The thing about the soul is it gets tired / too often. To keep it working / at an optimal level requires devotion / three to five times per week." The voice is always bold and direct, and it never hesitates. In that way, the poems are perhaps part of that project Uppal mentions in her introductory essay to *Winter Sport*: "the world of art . . . ought to be open and accessible to all."

Ordinary People

Sandra Birdsell
Waiting for Joe. Random House $29.95

Trevor Cole
Practical Jean. McClelland & Stewart $29.99

Reviewed by Alison Calder

Waiting for Joe opens in a Wal-Mart parking lot in Regina. Joe and his wife Laurie are living in a stolen RV while Joe tries to make enough money for the gas to get them to Fort McMurray, where they hope to make a fresh start. Casualties of the post-9/11 economic slump, Joe's business has gone bankrupt and they have lost their house in Winnipeg. Joe's elderly father Arthur, who seemed to stabilize the couple, has had to be moved into a care home as a result. The couple's credit is maxed out; their relationship, weakened by affairs on both sides, is deteriorating further; and they have only a few dollars left.

But *Waiting for Joe* is not asking us to feel sorry for Joe and Laurie. Their "disaster," as the novel makes clear at every turn, is the loss of race- and class-based privilege. Joe's business, selling RVs, reflects a life of toys and consumption and parallels Laurie's constant, compulsive shopping. Even completely broke, Laurie cannot stop purchasing, spending the last of their money on flowers and frivolous clothes. The text is full of images of garbage, excess, and waste, from the luxury items Joe and Laurie try to sell in their garage sale, to the overflowing clothing donation bins at Value Village, to the very idea of Wal-Mart. The concept of consumption is reflected in the environment as well. The urban prairie landscape is marked by strip malls and chain stores, industrial areas and parking lots. The rural landscape is the site of abuse and sexual exploitation, from the pedophile arrested in a farmhouse to the victimized youth Joe discovers while hitchhiking on the TransCanada. That Canada's biggest and arguably most unethical environmental disaster, the Alberta oil sands, is seen as salvation, shows the complete bankruptcy of North American consumer culture. The novel is thus a valuable examination of complicity, as readers may see their own privilege reflected in disconcerting ways.

Birdsell has set herself a challenging narrative structure. Because nothing much happens in the novel's present—everyone is, after all, waiting—the action has to take place in the backstory, happening largely in the characters' memories. This structure presents problems, particularly in relation to character development and reader sympathies. None of the characters here are particularly likeable: they make stupid choices, and the narrative repeatedly emphasizes that their problems are of their own making and that they are, in fact, much better off than many people around them. If readers are to develop sympathies for these characters, and to see them as more than metonymic representations of late-twentieth-century greed, then readers need to see what makes these characters unique, and that information is not revealed until flashbacks well on into the text. It may be that we are intended to see a character like Laurie as pathetic, endlessly buying things to fill an emotional or spiritual void: as a

reader, I could see this rationale for Laurie's activities, but I felt nothing for her.

Trevor Cole's novel *Practical Jean* also shows us ordinary people in extraordinary circumstances. *Practical Jean* opens in a small Ontario town, where Jean Horemarsh has just finished nursing her mother through the final stages of a merciless illness. Jean's relationship with her mother had never been an easy one—Jean, a ceramic artist, seemed to lack the practical nature valued by her mother, a successful veterinarian able to dispose of small animals without a single qualm. Now middle-aged, Jean is left to grieve her loss and to reflect on whether her mother's suffering could have been prevented. When she invites her three best friends over for drinks one evening, she is struck by sadness at the idea that these women, whom she loves best in the world, will inevitably decline into sickness and pain, as did her mother. If only there were some way she could prevent this from happening to them, she thinks. And then, she realizes, there is.

To describe *Practical Jean* as black comedy is only to scratch the novel's surface. Several pages into it I began to wonder if I was a bad person for enjoying the book so much; a few pages later I chastised myself for giving in to weak sentiment as I shed tears for the death of some stuffed animals; and a few pages after that, I wished that I didn't have to read the rest of it. The problem for me was that Cole is a very good writer. I liked all of his characters so much that I didn't want bad things to happen to them, and Very Bad Things are what the book is all about. As a reluctant reader, I fought against Cole's fast-paced, witty narrative, which sped Jean along through a series of escapades that were simultaneously hilarious and horrifying. I tried reading the book slowly. I tried reading it a bit at a time. But these efforts were no use: Jean was set on her course.

Practical Jean asks the kinds of questions that North American culture confronts (or denies) all the time: how are we to deal with suffering and aging? How do we best serve the people we love? When are we happiest? What exactly is a good death, and how are we going to get it? Jean's solution, while extreme and certainly not legal, does have the virtue of being practical, in the same way that a practical solution to the environmental crisis might be for all humans to off themselves. One difficulty for readers, I think, is that Jean remains an appealing character even after she embarks on her deeply problematic mission. It's impossible to revel safely in her villainy, because she doesn't revel in it herself: she's actually a very nice person who makes some deeply regrettable decisions. At the same time, though, she really does need to be taken off the streets. If only she had decided to "deliver" her obnoxious elder brother instead! Then I could have really gotten behind her. Instead, I have to keep worrying about the characters long after I've finished the story.

Practical Jean is very good. That said, I'm not sure I'd recommend it—especially to my best friends.

Performing Community

Linda Burnett, ed.
Theatre in Atlantic Canada. Playwrights Canada $25.00

Julie Salverson, ed.
Popular Political Theatre and Performance. Playwrights Canada $25.00

Reviewed by Joanna Mansbridge

"It takes a community to support a voice," insists Yvette Nolan in Len Falkenstein's essay on Mi'kmaq playwright John Barlow. Falkenstein's essay concludes *Theatre in Atlantic Canada*, volume sixteen in the twenty-one volume series, Critical Perspectives on Canadian Theatre in English. General Editor Ric Knowles hopes that this archive of both reprinted and new

essays "will contribute to the flourishing of courses on a variety of aspects of Canadian drama and theatre in classrooms across the country." The publication of *Critical Perspectives* marks the consolidation and legitimization of a field that Knowles describes as "still, excitingly, young."

Theatre in Atlantic Canada intersects in multiple ways with volume seventeen, *Popular Political Theatre and Performance*, particularly in their emphasis on theatre's role in making (and remaking) communities and representing a diversity of voices. Written by a combination of practitioners and scholars and ordered chronologically according to original publication date, the essays collected in these two volumes span the period from 1978 to the present. Extending far beyond the regional and generic foci suggested in their titles, these volumes cover a wide range of topics and perspectives that reveal the richly textured history of Canadian theatre, along with some of the gaps waiting to be filled by both criticism and practice. Both volumes will be invaluable resources for scholars, practitioners, and teachers working in Canadian theatre.

Despite the dearth of criticism on Atlantic theatre (no critical work exists on the plays of Daniel MacIvor!) and the folding of many of the theatre companies that flourished in the 1970s and 80s, Linda Burnett, editor of *Theatre in Atlantic Canada*, insists in her Introduction that "there are lots of reasons to be optimistic." From the "women's dramaturgy" of Mulgrave Road Co-op cogently described by Knowles to the innovative "kaleidography" of Newfoundland's Artistic Fraud deftly outlined by Denyse Lynde, theatre in Atlantic Canada is a vibrant scene. The seventeen essays in this volume illustrate the aesthetic ingenuity, political commitment, and cultural heterogeneity of Atlantic theatre.

Francophones, First Nations, Anglophones, and African Canadians each have a different relationship to the region, to the nation, and to the histories of both. Maureen Moynagh's essay "Can I Get a Witness?" underscores theatre's role in constructing communities, however provisional. Moynagh invokes the Brechtian mode of witnessing to suggest how many African Nova Scotian plays foster a relationship between audiences and performers, thereby creating "a community that does not depend on belonging to a nation, an ethnicity, a particular gender or sexuality but creates a sense of belonging by bringing actors and audiences in relationship to the dramatic action."

The Mummers Troupe of Newfoundland acts as a thread of continuity between these two volumes. Alan Filewod's essay in *Theatre in Atlantic Canada* outlines the dramaturgical strategies and internal schisms of the Mummers, and works well as a critical counterpart to the praxis essay by Mummers co-founder and artistic director, Chris Brookes, published in *Popular Political Theatre and Performance.*

In her Introduction, editor Julie Salverson points out that *Popular Political Theatre* is a companion to volume nineteen, *Community Engaged Theatre*. Of the twenty-two essays in this volume, six are from the 1980s, two from the 1990s, and fourteen from the 2000s, an inconsistency due, perhaps, to the dominance of identity politics in the 1990s. Jan Selman provides a useful definition: "a popular theatre project starts from a community need, the theatre being a response to the need for change." All of the essays here in some way affirm popular theatre's capacity to create, teach, and transform communities, both global and local, and can be grouped into three categories: practice, pedagogy, and criticism.

Many of the essays grapple with the complex relationship between politics and aesthetics, fiction and reality, and academic and theatre work. Geraldine Pratt and Caleb Johnston describe the "irresolvable but fascinating tensions between academic and

theatre work," particularly regarding differences in the purpose of research, mode of representation, and intended audience. Linda Goulet et al. describe the challenges of working with Aboriginal youth in workshops that straddle "the line between fiction (theatricalizing lived experience) and reality (the lives of the participants)." Ian Filewod describes how NGOs often "undervalue the essential artistic integrity" of the theatre companies that they mobilize for their development work. In "On the Political Importance of the Aesthetic," Catherine Graham posits "three aesthetic strategies" that might enable theatre activists to intervene in "the political life of their respective societies . . . *as artists*." Graham emphasizes neither universal subjects nor eternal values, but rather a commitment to "a concrete and local public."

Many of the essays productively problematize the presumption that popular theatre work is intrinsically progressive and community-oriented. Ingrid Mündel's "Radical Storytelling," examines not only "how popular theatres in Canada aim to use stories to challenge received notions of Canadianness, but also . . . the ways in which particular theatre performances may unwittingly *reproduce* hegemonic Canadian narratives." In "Three Cultures, One Issue," Jan Selman highlights the contradiction of popular theatre work: "As a theatre company forms, its focus moves away from community and towards the production of theatre." Here, Selman identifies the paradox of community formation itself, which depends as much on processes of exclusion as inclusion.

The volume concludes with Patti Frazer's Zen-inspired commemoration of Augusto Boal, whose Theatre of the Oppressed and Forum Theatre have been influential models for many of the practitioners included in this volume. In the penultimate essay, Sharon M. Lewis redefines the notion of "physical interactivity" to persuasively suggest that "Forum Theatre has inherent structures built into it that invite digital interactive possibilities." This essay points toward the future of the field, a future that will continue to unfold in the annual publication of *New Essays on Canadian Theatre*, the first volume of which was launched in May 2011.

National Pasts, Posts, and Futures

Andrea Cabajsky and Brett Josef Grubisic, eds.
National Plots: Historical Fiction and Changing Ideas of Canada. Wilfrid Laurier UP $42.95

Gunilla Florby, Mark Shackleton, and Katri Suhonen, eds.
Canada: Images of a Post/National Society. Peter Lang $61.95 US

Karin Ikas, ed.
Global Realignments and the Canadian Nation in the Third Millennium. Harrassowitz Verlag $85.85

Reviewed by Robert Zacharias

In her introduction to *Global Realignments and the Canadian Nation in the Third Millennium*, Karin Ikas notes the recent surge of nationalist rhetoric in the discourses of economics, security, and environmentalism, and concludes that the nation is one of the "ideas and concepts whose swansongs were sung not long ago [but which] have returned." Indeed, despite the oft-announced death of the nation-state and the growth in alternative critical paradigms—including hemispheric studies, globalization, transnationalism, and diaspora studies, along with a resurgent regionalism in literary criticism—three recent collections on the question(s) of Canada affirm the enduring import of the nation in humanities scholarship.

Andrea Cabajsky and Brett Josef Grubisic's collection, *National Plots: Historical Fiction and Changing Ideas of Canada*, is a vital and welcome contribution to the ongoing critical consideration of

historical fiction in Canada. The book is divided into three parts, with the essays in Part One, "A Usable Past? New Questions, New Directions," making the most significant scholarly intervention. Essays by Cynthia Sugars and Kathleen Venema demonstrate how contemporary historical novels may ultimately reinforce the limitations of the received history that they ostensibly aim to interrogate, especially when their critiques appeal to ideas of geo-political "authenticity" or conform to the most problematic conventions of a given genre. Along with pieces by Robert David Stacey and Tracy Ware—and with Shelley Hulan's piece, included in Part Two of the collection but probably better suited to the first section—the opening essays productively revisit and revise the common postcolonial reading of contemporary historical fiction as unearthing the forgotten injustices of a distinctly national past.

Despite its title, "Unconventional Voices: Fiction Versus Recorded History," Part Two is the most conventional of the three sections in *National Plots*, largely employing the critical approach being usefully interrogated by the opening essays. Nonetheless, several of the contributions—including Herb Wyile's essay on *Three Day Road*, along with Pilar Cuder-Domínguez's survey of African Canadian historical writing—are valuable reminders of the political possibilities of racialized historical fiction. The essays in Part Three focus on regionalism—the fiction of the prairies, Newfoundland, Vancouver, and what Dennis Duffy names the "Munro Tract" of land in Southern Ontario, respectively—demonstrating that, in the function of historical literature in Canada, the two terms in the titular concept of *National Plots* need not overlap. This is an important point, for it shows an awareness of the various scales at which the landscape of the nation is being imaginatively mapped—something that is otherwise missing in the collection. Despite the editors' efforts to situate Canadian criticism of historical fiction into a larger international context in their lengthy introduction, the limitation of *National Plots* is its surprising lack of engagement with larger, more fluid scales and sites of identity. Given the collection's announced focus on the position of historical fiction among the "changing ideas of Canada," one might have expected some engagement with the fact that one of the most important changes in the idea of "the nation" over the past decade is its position—or even its relevance—in an age of globalization and transnational capital.

While the postnational and the global are largely beyond the purview of *National Plots*, two other recent collections address them directly. The strengths of Gunilla Florby, Mark Shackleton, and Katri Suhonen's *Canada: Images of a Post/National Society* are in its offering of a wide-ranging, multidisciplinary set of critical perspectives on Canada at the present moment; its self-conscious entry into an unfinished debate about the postnational in relation to Canada and Canadian studies; and its collective resistance to the celebratory rhetoric that has occasionally plagued discussions of postnationalism to date. Several of the contributions point in valuable directions for discussions of (post) nationalism, including those identifying a growing split between "economic nationalism" and "cultural" or "political nationalism" in Canada (Wilton, Robinson), and those turning to the conflicted position of "the North" in Canadian discourses of tourism and sovereignty (Grenier, Walecka-Garbalinska). There are also notable contributions from George Elliott Clarke, Carole Gerson, and Janice Kulyk Keefer, with the latter's compelling reading of work by Ukrainian Canadian painters holding particularly significant implications for critics interested in competing nationalisms in a multicultural context. Unfortunately, with twenty-seven essays that differ widely

in focus, length, perspective, and quality, *Canada: Images* suffers from its diversity. While its many contributions offer a productively broad set of perspectives, the collection lacks the editorial framework necessary to negotiate the significant questions and challenges that arise from such a wide-ranging conversation.

The focus of Karin Ikas' *Global Realignments and the Canadian Nation in the Third Millennium* is similarly broad, but a firmer editorial hand has structured its contents. The sixteen essays productively examine both Quebec (Lammert, Ertler) and First Nations (Eigenbrod, Hatch, and Gottfriedson) as specifically national contexts that problematize state-based nationalism, and they show a consistent engagement with other competing scales of identity—including the global (Hoerder), the hemispheric (Braz), and the regional (Grace, Gross). Perhaps most importantly, given its stated focus on the "Third Millennium," the collection demonstrates that Canadian cultural production was already recognizably transnational when it emerged in the second millennium (Gerson, Martens, Mount). Regrettably, the arguments of several of the essays, including Ikas' lengthy introduction, are occasionally undermined by very awkward syntax, and, given the forward-focused nature of the volume, it is unfortunate that the weakest section—notwithstanding strong essays by Löschnigg and Gross—is the one titled "The Future of the Canadian Nation." What is more, several of the most valuable essays have been previously published, and, as useful as they are, they feel somewhat out of place beside those contributions that were clearly written specifically for this volume, and which engage directly with its organizing frame. Although to a lesser extent than *Canada: Images*, then, the value of *Global Realignments and the Canadian Nation in the Third Millennium* lies most clearly in individual essays, rather than in what it achieves as a collection.

Each of these volumes contains useful examinations of the position of Canada in the contemporary moment, and, given their engagements with the postnational and the global, both *Canada: Images* and *Global Realignments* are valuable for their juxtaposition of work by Canadian scholars with that of scholars from other national contexts. It is *National Plots*, however, with its cumulative interrogation of the assumptions that underpin the historical novel as an object of study in Canada, which is most consistently rewarding. It may well be that the best way to understand the uncertain future of the nation is to attend more closely to the promises and pitfalls of renegotiating its present by turning to its past.

Personalities and Place

Trevor Carolan, ed.
Making Waves: Reading BC and Pacific Northwest Literature. Anvil & U of the Fraser Valley P $20.00

Allan Casey
Lakeland: Journeys into the Soul of Canada. David Suzuki Foundation & Greystone $29.95

Reviewed by Brooke Pratt

In *Making Waves: Reading BC and Pacific Northwest Literature*, Trevor Carolan brings together fifteen selections that were generated by a public call for papers on a "broad spectrum of topics" relating to the literature and literary history of the region that is sometimes referred to as the "North Pacific Rim." Focused primarily on poets and poetry from the city of Vancouver, the collection consists of works written by a wide range of contributors, several of whom hail from the University of the Fraser Valley (whose new university press co-published the volume).

Making Waves is an eclectic mix of "essays, interviews, memoirs, and critiques" on the poetics and politics of British Columbia and the Pacific Northwest. While this variety makes for dynamic subject matter

presented from a diversity of perspectives, it also means that the collection as a whole is somewhat uneven. Carolan's hope is that this "compendium" of works will stand as a "constructive addition" to current scholarship on the region and its literature, in part by acting as a preliminary step toward future research. *Making Waves* is thus most useful in its privileging of the "North-South" relationship between BC and the American Northwest as an area of study worthy of critical consideration that stretches across national borders.

Given Carolan's claim in his editor's introduction that writers from the region are noticeably attuned to "the particulars of local flora and fauna" and "the unconscious natural rhythms of the land and sea," the collection's overall lack of detailed attention to the nuances of place, environment, and nature is somewhat surprising (although there are a few exceptions, including Carolan's own contribution along with essays by Chelsea Thornton and Martin Van Woudenberg). Despite its subtitle, the book also contains fewer literary analyses than might be expected.

Ultimately, *Making Waves* is more about profiling noteworthy personalities than establishing any sort of definable regional sensibility. Hilary Turner, for instance, provides an informative essay on the "personality clash" between Roy Daniells and Earle Birney that led to the development of the Department of Creative Writing at the University of British Columbia. In a related discussion, George McWhirter offers an inside look at UBC's Creative Writing Program and the tensions that often divide academics and professional writers on the subject of university education. Sticking with the theme of political antagonism, Ron Dart supplies a clearly written assessment of the "poetry wars" between social anarchists (such as George Woodcock and Jerry Zaslove) and Canadian nationalists (such as Milton Acorn and Robin Mathews) that helped to shape west coast poetry from the 1960s to the mid-1980s. Of all the appreciation pieces and personal essays printed in this collection (a few of which read as little more than puff pieces or catalogues of private literary acquaintances), Joseph Blake's interview with a candid P.K. Page in the final year of her life stands out for its intrinsic value to scholars interested in Canadian modernism and literary community.

In contrast to Carolan's collection, Allan Casey's *Lakeland: Journeys into the Soul of Canada* is far more concerned with place than personalities. Winner of the 2010 Governor General's Literary Award for English-language non-fiction, *Lakeland* is a personalized account of the author's travels to some of the country's most significant lakes. As a journalist writing in response to an unforeseen absence of existing material on the subject (with the "thousands of published resources on the Great Lakes" as a notable exception), Casey offers readers an important avenue into the heart of Canada's "lake-rich landscape." But *Lakeland* goes beyond classification as a work of "simple travelogue." Driven by a deeply felt attachment to lakes of all shapes and sizes, Casey's larger aim with this book is to examine "how we use lakes, what we demand of them, and what they may require of us in return." He takes pains throughout the volume to emphasize our collective responsibility when it comes to better understanding and protecting Lakeland as "a country unto itself," not least because of the pressing "ecological threat" posed by our own colonizing presence in this "proximate wilderness."

With an estimated three million lakes to choose from, *Lakeland* focuses on eleven major Canadian lakes and their surrounding communities. The chapters are arranged by season and each offers a thoughtful portrait of a particular lake and a related theme. In the course of his nationwide investigation, Casey travels to lakes in nearly every

Canadian province, from his own family cottage on Saskatchewan's Emma Lake to the freshwater fjords of Newfoundland's Gros Morne National Park. He documents numerous conversations with local residents from each of the lakeside communities he visits in order to flesh out the relevant cultural, ecological, and political issues, including tourism, waterfront development, Aboriginal governance, agriculture, citizen science, biodiversity, and fisheries management. "The approach," Casey explains, "is as much about finding commonalities across Lakeland as it is about celebrating variety." Based on the diversity and scope of Lakeland as an invaluable national resource, he determines that "lakes are quintessentially Canadian in a way that the country's other signature tableaux are not."

Casey's intimate tone and informal style make for engaging reading material. While some readers might bristle at the underlying essentialism of a few of his introductory remarks—for example, his sweeping assertion that "happy associations with lakes are part of the Canadian collective unconscious" or his confident claim that "recreational use of lakes . . . is *the* national pastime"—it is difficult to deny (after reading *Lakeland* in its entirety) that "ready access to lakes for pleasure is one of the great perks of citizenship in this country." In the end, his sincere and reflective approach invites readers to consider our own relationships with lakes so that we too can begin to comprehend their allure and articulate their value. For Casey, "Canadian lakes cast a spell. A certain lake will lay a hold upon you, begin to flow in your veins. If this happens in childhood, as it did for me, you are imprinted for life."

La beauté est nue

George Elliott Clarke
Illuminated Verses. Canadian Scholar's $24.95

Reviewed by Kevin McNeilly

According to George Elliott Clarke, it took eleven years to find a publisher willing to issue this volume, a set of poems composed, as he puts it, in the *shadows* of Ricardo Scipio's photographs of nude black women. The challenge, as both poetry and preface speculate, was that, maybe, "the idea of the unclothed black *feminine* seems too brazen, or just too *dark* a concept for a society addicted to depictions of elect whiteness." This racially toned pushback recalls the reactive cultural politics of Negritude in late colonial Africa, particularly the poetry of Léopold Sédar Senghor. Senghor's "Femme nue, femme noire . . . ," while never quoted directly in the sequence (which, like all of Clarke's verse, nonetheless overflows with iterations and echoes), seems to be roiling underneath each poem, as Clarke effuses with deliberate excess over the luminosities of exposed melanin-hued female flesh. As a project, the sequence feels a bit old-school, as if Clarke and Scipio were offering an aesthetic challenge to the broad problematic of racial and sexual representation that ought to have been addressed decades ago, after Senghor. Clarke's vernacular formalism and Scipio's shadow- and sepia-saturated portraiture seem to re-do and to intensify techniques derived from a mid-century, second-generation modernism. The point, however, is not that these texts and images are nostalgically out-of-step with their time, but that their cultural problematic has persisted into the present, where it continues to be either suppressed or masked; in response to such a pervasive disavowal of undressed blackness, Clarke calls for an "honest" poetic adoration of an "out-of-print," "shining" femininity. While cooked-up lines praising how one wet, warm image "rouses

drowsy azure and drizzles sizzling copper" might not strike a reader as particularly direct, "treating hard facts," as Clarke himself put it, "to a soft focus," neither poem nor photograph ever strives for blunt social realism, but wants instead to open the gates and let loose a necessary, unacknowledged libidinous surplus; to be honest means to celebrate and to objectify his own richly objectifying gaze—categorically not a voyeurism, but instead an erotics of representation, the "bare-naked eye stroked by light"—and also to open the visual and verbal surfaces of these pages to give those black women's bodies license to push back, to speak: "But hear her speak, as always, for herself." Neither Clarke nor Scipio shies away from looking, nor do they conceal the sexual politics of that eye—"Don't every eye gravitate toward your abundance, gal?" he asks, shamelessly. But the images, poetic or photographic, are neither diffident nor deferential. "I ain't readily shook," Clarke has these exposed women say: "I can't easily break." Clearly, he's offering a ventriloquism, a projection of the poet's voice onto what are, after all, mute images, but what's important to recognize in these poems is that they never claim absolute advocacy, and affirm instead the boldness of black femininity "beyond all photography" or poetry, texture or text. "Make love with her," Clarke writes—not *to* but *with*—"so you make song with her." These poems and photographs want to recover and celebrate that intimate collaboration: fiercely flaunted, a beauty unabashed.

Les voyages forment le Québec

Annie Cloutier
La Chute du mur. Triptyque 23,00 $

Janis Locas
La maudite Québécoise. Triptyque 20,00 $

Diane Vincent
Peaux de chagrins. Triptyque 20,00 $

Compte rendu par Laure Tollard

Dans *La Chute du mur*, Annie Cloutier alterne le récit de la vie de Liv avec celui de sa fille Sabine, entre 1989 et 2001, entre le Québec, l'Allemagne et les États-Unis. Le lecteur découvre ainsi le parcours de Liv, partie en Allemagne dans le cadre d'un échange international et qui assistera à la chute du mur de Berlin, et celui de Sabine qui, habitant la région new-yorkaise avec sa mère, sera le témoin des attentats du 11 septembre.

Ce double roman d'apprentissage développe le thème de l'adolescence, et décrit la façon dont deux jeunes femmes vont se construire dans le tourbillon de l'histoire occidentale de part et d'autre de l'Atlantique. L'insertion, les problèmes d'identité, la barrière de la langue, la fragilité des amitiés de longue date et les relations amoureuses rythment ce roman où le lecteur est balloté d'une génération à l'autre. Mais Sabine saura tirer profit des mauvaises rencontres qui ont forgé le caractère de sa mère et dont elle est elle-même le fruit. Le roman nous invite à découvrir la façon dont les deux femmes tentent de se construire et se reconstruire au fil du récit.

Lier l'histoire d'une mère à celle de sa fille à travers deux faits marquants de l'histoire est un pari osé, la chute du mur et celle des tours du World Trade Center revêt un caractère allégorique qui peut paraître quelque peu alambiqué et l'alternance entre une focalisation interne et externe saccade la lecture.

Ce roman n'en reste pas moins touchant et saura plaire aux adolescents et aux

nostalgiques de cette étape de la vie. Il retrace aussi avec beaucoup de justesse les premiers pas à l'étranger dans le cadre d'un échange international et la façon dont les plus jeunes sont les témoins sensibles des événements qui façonnent l'histoire occidentale.

On connait l'expérience que peut ressentir un « maudit français » fraîchement débarqué au Québec, mais que se passe-t-il lorsqu'une Québécoise se rend dans l'Ouest du Canada et se sent elle-même étrangère dans son pays ? Lorsque même le français, sensé rassembler les Canadiens francophones à travers le pays, est source de conflits ? Pour répondre à ces questions, Janis Locas nous propose un « roman nationaliste », *Maudite Québécoise*. La maudite Québécoise en question, c'est Geneviève Morin, journaliste de peu de talent et championne des fautes d'orthographe qui n'a d'autre choix que celui de s'exiler là où on lui propose du travail. Ainsi, à la fin de ses études en communication, Geneviève quitte la belle province pour l'Ouest du Canada et rejoint l'équipe du *Francos*, journal francophone de la région. Avec beaucoup d'humeur et de réalisme, l'auteur décrit à travers Geneviève les relations qu'entretiennent les francophones du Canada et le sentiment d'exil des Québécois en dehors de leur province. Tous ont en commun l'amour de la langue française et le souci de sa pérennité, mais tous ne voient pas les choses de la même façon. L'arrogance de Geneviève agace ses nouveaux collègues qui, eux, tentent tant bien que mal de valoriser les droits des francophones et d'obtenir le soutien financier du gouvernement.

Un seul bémol cependant pour ce roman qui se termine par une succession d'analepses sur cinquante pages. Mise en abîme par le personnage de Geneviève lorsqu'elle envisage d'écrire un roman sur son expérience, cette originalité offre certes quelques éléments de lectures supplémentaires, mais donnent au récit un aspect redondant.

Pour leur deuxième enquête sous la plume de Diane Vincent, la masseuse Josette Marchant et l'inspecteur Vincent Batianello voyagent entre Montréal et Dunbrook, ville imaginaire au sud du Québec. Tout comme dans *Épiderme*, le premier roman de Diane Vincent, *Peaux de Chagrins* a la peau pour fil conducteur. La peau comme celle de Sandro, ami de Josette, dont le dos a été lacéré et marqué au fer rouge, détruisant ainsi une œuvre dessinée par un maître tatoueur japonais, mais aussi ces lambeaux de peau retrouvés au cours de l'enquête et qui mèneront Josette et Vincent de l'histoire des camps de concentration en Allemagne au recrutement de jeunes néo-nazis au Québec.

Pour découvrir ce qui lie ces deux affaires, le lecteur doit être très attentif au grand nombre d'indices disséminés tout au long des 236 pages du roman. La lecture pourrait être fastidieuse, mais c'est sans compter sur la qualité des dialogues et des personnages de Josette et Vincent, deux enquêteurs aux techniques très distinctes et au caractère bien trempé. Dans le domaine du roman policier, cette enquête est des plus originales et le duo Marchant / Bastianello reprendra bientôt du service puisque Diane Vincent est déjà en train d'écrire la suite de leurs aventures.

Telling Stories

Jan L. Coates
A Hare in the Elephant's Trunk. Red Deer $12.95

Cathleen With
Having Faith in the Polar Girls' Prison. Penguin $18.00

Reviewed by Gisèle M. Baxter

Two recent novels follow the journeys, personal and physical, of a boy forced from his village in Sudan by military invasion, and a teenaged mother awaiting trial in a detention centre in Canada's Arctic. Both witness death and suffering; neither has an assured future for most of the narrative, and the girl's future is still quite uncertain by the end of her story. Yet neither story is depressing, and neither is preachy or over-simplified (though the educative function of Coates' novel is more emphatic). Both offer a window into a realm of experience probably largely outside that of the primarily young audience they seem to assume (and that of their authors). The effect, in both cases, owes much to the choices made with structure, diction, and voice.

Coates' novel (a fictionalization of a real-life story) is probably more outside the range of knowledge of much of its presumed readership, yet she avoids over-exposition and artifice through a third-person narration that keeps pretty close to young Jacob's perspective. This allows Jacob to age from seven to fourteen (from 1987 to 1994) without concern over accuracy of voice. As well, much of the story is told through dialogue (significant as Jacob discovers skills as a storyteller and contemplates becoming a reporter) rather than description, and what description there is, even of heartbreaking events such as a soldier's murder of a teacher, is kept spare: "The sound was like a lion crunching bone. Matthew crumpled silently to the ground and lay motionless. Jacob sucked in his breath, then clapped a hand over his mouth." Consequently, while the implications remain clear, the novel maintains a strong dramatic pace. (It would be interesting to compare *Hare* with Doris Pilkington's *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence*, about the journey of three Aboriginal girls forcibly removed from their families in 1930s Australia.)

Having Faith seems more ambitiously "literary" in its aspirations, narrating from the perspective of troubled, semi-educated fifteen-year-old Trista (whose name suggests sadness), both in the present tense of her detention and eventual trial, and a mix of past and present tense as she lapses into memory or daydream or a hybrid of the two. She is an intriguing narrator with a deceptive simplicity: significant events are recounted with a flat compression of observations, while deeper inside, she perceives things with a keen appreciation for often tactile, always visual detail: "The Snow Nanuks push me like I'm a tiny sandpiper that's burrowed and burrowed and has finally found some seeds left after the cold has seeped itself out of the ground, found its wandering way to the large runoffs that rush to MacKenzie River in June." Her story arc is shorter, her growth more subtle (for example in her dawning realization her sexuality might be more complicated than she'd assumed). Trista's future is less assured than Jacob's: *Hare* leaves Jacob as a fourteen-year-old student, but an interview with the real-life Jacob Deng at the end of the book reveals he is now a student in Nova Scotia, married with a family. With's tale creates an ending that is tentatively hopeful more than it is a resolution. Both stories impart a great value to the maintenance of a storytelling tradition, as a way of interpreting even traumatic and incomprehensible experience, as a way of remembering, as a way of coping.

Both books include interviews with the authors, where they speak of the extent to which their stories were derived from observation of and research concerning real-life people and situations, and the

choice they made to tell these stories as fiction. The question might arise of whether the emphasis on one, or a few, likeable and sympathetic characters and their experience might divert attention from the enormity of the situations they represent. One response might be that then the statistics might be approached less as big masses of faceless people, and more as collections of numerous individual stories, each in its own way as relevant as that of Jacob or Trista, and a desire to know more of those stories, while learning more about their origins.

Poetic Off-roading and the Roads More Travelled

Stephen Collis
On the Material. Talonbooks $17.95

Tom Henighan
Time's Fools. Stone Flower $15.00

Zachariah Wells, ed.
The Essential Kenneth Leslie. Porcupine's Quill $14.95

Glen Sorestad
What We Miss. Thistledown $17.95

Reviewed by Joel Deshaye

If ever a reader wanted four new books and a distinct voice in each of them, these four would qualify. Kenneth Leslie's poetry, though not new (he died in 1974), is reviewed here with previously unreleased material by three others. The starkest contrast with *The Essential Kenneth Leslie* is *On the Material*, by Stephen Collis, and these are the two I recommend. Although one poet is old-fashioned and the other avant-garde, they both work well in their chosen forms.

For Leslie, the Shakespearean sonnet is the form that helps him to be critical of modernity and modernism. Editor and poet Zachariah Wells has made a fine selection of Leslie's work, including a sequence of twenty-eight sonnets entitled "By Stubborn Stars." At the end of that sequence, Leslie's "Street Cry" asserts the speaker's determination to "hammer away and shout [his] wares" even though "no one stops to buy." But Leslie's stance of non-radical anti-modernism is appealing. It almost never seems stuffy, partly because his voice comes from outside the academy, and partly because he also has a facility with looser forms and tends to use them, instead of sonnets, to express his political concerns. He laments for example that "modern schools" condition students until they are docile and brainless: "their wills are like the blown pigskin that drools / November muck around a soggy field." At his best, as he is here, Leslie is evocative and smart.

Leslie's traditional values are mostly rooted in the country, not in academia or other elite cultures, yet he never stoops to the Romantic cliché of exalting pantheistic nature above people. As the rather self-explanatory title of "Beauty Is Something You Can Weigh in Scales" suggests, beauty is "earth-bound, / seen, heard, smelled, tasted": "Beauty was my mother's porridge in a bowl. / Milk, oatmeal, and molasses built my soul." These lines are refreshing because, in rejecting modernism, Leslie has not uncritically adopted the earlier Romanticism as a substitute. He does, however—and with an ironically modernist juxtaposition—express a strongly environmentalist complaint about industrial practices similar to those that the Romantics objected to: he notices "the belching trawler raping the sea, / the cobweb ghosts against the window / watching the wilderness uproot the doorsill with a weed" ("Halibut Cove Harvest"). In our era of idiotic and disheartening exploitation of the Earth, this is a germane image.

My only frustration with Leslie's poetry is with his occasional tendency to end poems with exclamation marks that try to force a stronger emotional response—but Collis hardly ever uses punctuation, and in

various additional ways he defines himself in contrast with traditional poetics. Calling attention to the almost complete lack of punctuation in *On the Material*, Collis asks, "Is disjunctive irony all we can expect / From poets now no question mark there." He uses either line breaks or internal quadruple spaces instead of commas, often also employing enjambment, fused sentences, and fragments to unbalance the reader momentarily. This effect is superb given that the most prominent section of the book is a long poem, "4 x 4," in which the speaker is doubtful of the vaunted stability of off-road vehicles and the economies they represent.

I have the same doubts about capitalism (sometimes outright disbelief in its sustainability), so I was interested to know that Collis extends his eco-criticism to poetry. "4 x 4" is a series of forty-four poems of four quatrains each—more like "44 x 4 x 4." He is as interested as Leslie in the formal meanings of poetry, but Leslie surely never imagined his poems as "superduty" trucks with names like Escape, Liberty, and Explorer, as Collis does in ending "4 x 4" with "The Ark of Resistance." He argues earlier in the series that "We 'feel free' because we lack / The gears to shift down to / The articulation of our unfreedom" and that "The paradox of autonomy is / It doesn't drive beyond itself." I appreciate the parallels that Collis identifies between the illusions of freedom-loving drivers and freedom-loving poets; language has constraints, too, such as ideological thought controls and quatrains in poetry. When he imagines that the 4x4 poem is stuck, he writes, "But maybe we could still winch this rig / Out of the ditch," implying that poetry still has a hope of going somewhere good, as if capitalism might yet save itself, too.

When war and consumerism come together in his series, when "on-line trading and wars flash on flat screens / As 4x4s cool and ping mud covered in double garages," it is easy enough to imagine how poems are as suburban and protected as those 4x4s—vehicles of false freedom and hypocrisy that are involved in wasting too many of our resources and lives. It is more difficult, however, to imagine how poetry is as excessive as such vehicles, even if we do cut down "21.5 billion / Board feet (2005)" of trees to make paper and build things. Nevertheless, I appreciate Collis' willingness to be critical of his own work. When "each tree is introspection," I also empathize when he says, "I want trees a place to plant them." You might say that he has installed a green roof on the 4x4, though off-roading enthusiasts won't buy it.

Although Glen Sorestad's *What We Miss* is not as compelling to me as the aforementioned books, it is more accessible to a non-academic readership. Its poems are less abstract, more narrative. There are also moments of subtle poetic artistry in *What We Miss*: meaningful rhymes (as with the assonance in "The Road to Heaven" and consonance in "Winter Barn"), an occasional iambic rhythm that befits the speaker's constant walking, and vivid images that help to set the narratives, as in "Morning Declaration": "Trees shake their leaves / like pompom quotation marks." I especially like the poems "Now That I'm Up" and "There Was a Time," which reflect on younger days with memorable difficulty and matter-of-factness. Unfortunately, some poems seem like prosaic exercises in describing bygone things for the purpose of cultural memory, as in "The Ice House." Sorestad reminds me of Raymond Souster in those nostalgic moments. When poems such as "A Teen's First Car" and "Buggywashers" end with platitudes, the sentimentality is too easy.

Tom Henighan's *Time's Fools* is both too easy and too hard. Sometimes Henighan's metaphors are as direct as bricks thrown through windows: "Love, my friend, is the seeing-eye dog of the blind soul" ("Attention

All Passengers"). Sometimes, they are too abstract, as when the speaker in "Pilgrim" compares his mother to "a bird of new consciousness / fledged by singular attentions / to the small mercies of give and take." In a related poem, the speaker suggests that his mother-in-law "outran / the hoofs of [her] convictions / into spring." Henighan often free-associates to introduce ambiguous new images that do not always become interesting. This amateurish enthusiasm and willingness to take risks is both a weakness and a strength in an established poet. Greater editorial moderation might be helpful, especially in the forty pages of notes and praise for his other books at the end of *Time's Fools*.

A Poetics of Spatiality

Jeff Derksen
Annihilated Time: Poetry and Other Politics.
Talonbooks $29.95

Reviewed by Michael Roberson

Annihilated Time: Poetry and Other Politics collects over ten years of cultural criticism by one of Canada's premier contemporary poets, Jeff Derksen. Derksen organizes the book around three main, but articulated, hubs (anticipated in part by the subtitle of the book): "Other Politics," "Spaces," and "Poetics." While most of the fifteen essays within these sections represent revisions of previously published and/or presented works, Derksen offers a broad context for them in the introduction: "The Spaces, Times, and Culture of Neoliberalism." In fact, the introduction provides a scope to a much more comprehensive and ongoing project, investigating "the changing possibilities of culture" in what Derksen calls the long neoliberal moment. The paradox at the core of this label stems from Derksen's account of neoliberalism as a "long social and economic project," beginning even before the early 1970s, "that has a cultural drift finally brought into clear focus by the events and reactions of 9/11." Neoliberalism, as a force behind globalization, tends to diminish the role of the nation-state and emphasize the role of the individual and of the global.

But, according to Derksen, this "rescaling" provides opportunities for cultural critique of the sociopolitical and economic dynamics within and across those spaces. For example, in the first section of *Annihilated Time*, Derksen foregrounds the spatial in discussing the "transnational" orientation of certain poets responding to 9/11, and certain poets critiquing the "culture-ideology of neoliberalism," as well as the "nationalistic" orientation of the Language poets. In one of the most compelling examples from this first section, Derksen describes the sculptural work of Brian Jungen, who dismantles Nike shoes and reconfigures them into "Northwest Coast Indian . . . ceremonial masks." Here, Derksen notes, Jungen "opens the relations of the global and the local," which challenges the ideology inherent to both spaces.

In addition to political geography, Derksen employs spatial terminology to address discourse and textuality. In the second section of essays, for example, he examines the relationship between "subjectivity" and "structure" in a comparison of twentieth-century megastructures and Lyn Hejinian's long poem *My Life*. This section also includes a poignant essay on the "temporal, spatial, and discursive split" after the destruction of the World Trade Center in 2001. In following from essays that seem more organized around discursivity than "Spaces," this section concludes with works on "multiculturalism" and "cross-culturality." In the last section, "Poetics," Derksen offers statements that might satisfy readers of his poetry, who are looking for instructive clues about the allusions, decontextualizations and recontextualizations at the heart of any of the

three books of poetry also available through Talonbooks. For example, he posits "art as research" and poetry as a "form of knowledge" in the final essays.

Derksen closes *Annihilated Time* with a historical and ideological account of his own engagement with the Kootenay School of Writing. This essay, as he notes, is previously unpublished, and so an invaluable contribution to scholarship on the contemporary Canadian poetry scene. The same might very well be said of this collection.

Permanence de la fissure

Patrice Desbiens

Poèmes anglais. Le pays de personne. La fissure de la fiction. Prise de parole 14,95 $

Compte rendu par Élise Lepage

La réédition de trois recueils de Patrice Desbiens dans la collection « Bibliothèque canadienne-française » des Éditions Prise de parole marque la fin d'un cycle de réagencement des recueils dits « sudburois » du poète. Deux autres projets éditoriaux avaient déjà repris les cinq autres recueils issus de la même veine : *L'homme invisible / The Invisible Man* suivi de *Les cascadeurs de l'amour*, paru en 1997, et *Sudbury, Poèmes 1979-1985*, paru en 2000, qui comprend *L'espace qui reste, Sudbury* et *Dans l'après-midi cardiaque.* Il s'agit donc ici des recueils les plus récents, soit *Poèmes anglais, Le pays de personne,* et *La fissure de la fiction,* publiés respectivement en 1988, 1995, et 1997. Les textes n'ont manifestement pas été retravaillés et, compilés de la sorte, il est frappant de constater la continuité entre les deux premiers recueils, pourtant initialement publiés à sept ans d'intervalle, et la singularité de *La fissure de la fiction*, publié deux ans seulement après *Le pays de personne*.

Dans les deux premiers, nous retrouvons le Desbiens éternel, celui qui « donnerai[t] / n'importe quoi / pour que Desbiens / ne soit pas obligé / de jouer à être / Desbiens » et être « prisonnier de ce poème ». « Je veux écrire maintenant », scande-t-il dans les *Poèmes anglais*, quand bien même « Dans mon pays / poète rime avec . . . / . . . rien . . . » et qu' « On essaie d'oublier / que demain sera / encore / hier ». Dans *Le pays de personne*, à relire quelques passages d'anthologie—« je suis un bum / un sans-abri de la poésie »; « Je suis le pays de personne / je suis un Canadien erreur / errant le long des rues de / Québec »—, on se surprend de la prégnance de nombreux vers de Desbiens. Avouons-le : il fait bon les relire ancrés dans leur texte d'origine où ils tirent toute leur force. On ressent le passage du temps : le pittoresque des formats des années 1980 cède le pas aux pages soignées d'une collection qui marque une reconnaissance définitivement acquise.

Le pays de personne s'essayait déjà, ici et là, à quelques brèves explorations narratives, mais c'est véritablement dans *La fissure de la fiction* que la tentation de la narration est pleinement assumée : « Il sait qu'il est venu à Montréal / pour écrire un roman », mais il ne peut se détacher de la poésie : « La poésie / c'est le fast-food de la / littérature. / Il aime le fast-food. / C'est la littérature des pauvres. » S'il y a somme toute assez peu de fiction dans ce texte, on approche d'une forme de récit qui, par ses lacunes et ses silences, en dit long sur la création littéraire, notamment en milieu minoritaire ou dans une situation de déplacement hors du milieu d'origine.

L'ensemble est précédé d'un « Scénario pour une préface fissurée » de Marc Larivière—dont le ton complice et la forme fragmentaire en fait un texte ajusté sur mesure à l'œuvre de Desbiens—et est suivi d'extraits critiques ainsi que d'une biobibliographie conséquente. Nul doute que Desbiens a gagné ses lettres de noblesse.

Rééditer le mystère

Ronald Després
À force de mystère: Œuvre poétique 1958-1974.
Perce-Neige 19,95 $

Compte rendu par Ariane Tremblay

Si les critiques actuels ont tendance à bouder les productions littéraires francophones du Canada hors Québec—celles-ci pouvant apparaître comme des phénomènes marginaux ayant peu d'importance et de signification—, il demeure impossible d'ignorer certaines voix bien singulières comme celle du poète acadien Ronald Després. L'écrivain, rappelons-le, représente un jalon important de la modernité acadienne en littérature. Lorsque, en 1958, il publie son premier recueil aux Éditions d'Orphée, Després permet à l'Acadie de s'ouvrir littéralement à l'existence d'une individualité poétique; le poète dépasse habilement, au sein de *Silences à nourrir de sang*, les célébrations du passé et les chants d'allures patriotiques qui caractérisaient jusqu'alors la poésie acadienne.

À force de mystère regroupe l'œuvre poétique complète de Ronald Després, composée des recueils *Silences à nourrir de sang* (1958), *Les Cloisons en vertige* (1962), et *Le Balcon des dieux inachevés* (1968), suivis de quatre poèmes publiés en 1972 et en 1974. À la lecture de ces poèmes, de ces mariages de mots et d'images débordantes, le lecteur comprend ce qu'ils ont de déroutant. La nette brisure d'avec la tradition littéraire acadienne est, de fait, claire. Ces poèmes, en n'investissant ni le plurilinguisme souvent propre à l'espace acadien ni ses accents folkloriques, témoignent d'une modernité naissante, mais mordante et affirmée.

Silences à nourrir de sang, qui mérite à l'auteur le deuxième Prix de littérature de la province de Québec, présente une forme qui rompt brutalement avec les modèles existant en Acadie. Le recueil élude habilement, par ailleurs, la question de la survie culturelle—vaste remémoration d'un passé perdu—pour explorer l'intériorité humaine et ses exultations profondes. Després comprend que l'homme, pour trouver son unité, doit dépasser les luttes sociales : « Le silence a tombé sur ma joue / Et mes mains ont effeuillé le vent / Ma nuit est jonchées de cadavres / Qui me délivrera? »

Le recueil des *Cloisons en vertige,* s'il contient encore quelque peu la marque de la préciosité du langage présent dans *Silences à nourrir de sang*, s'inscrit en continuité avec l'œuvre précédente; il arrime encore bien davantage le poète à son présent. Le sujet lyrique est de nouveau franchement affirmé; le lecteur y retrouve des errances affectives et existentielles poignantes, « jours sans lumière » et « sentiers brouillés ».

Dans *Le Balcon des dieux inachevés*, Ronald Després expose au lecteur une poésie sans contraintes, dans laquelle la violence délibérée de son recueil précédent, *Les Cloisons en vertige*, est toujours palpable, même si elle apparaît mêlée, cette fois, à un lexique délicat. Si la poésie de Ronald Després semble là encore souvent empêchée, retenue, comme le soulignait Gilles Marcotte, elle reste intimiste, mystérieuse, avec ce que cela a de sensible et de profondément humain.

À force de mystère réunit ainsi en un seul volume les volets d'une œuvre marquante pour l'espace acadien. Cependant, cette poésie invite également—et c'est là peut-être sa plus grande raison d'être—à redécouvrir un poète universel et intemporel.

National Storytelling

Esi Edugyan
Half-Blood Blues. Thomas Allen $24.95

Marina Endicott
The Little Shadows. Doubleday Canada $32.95

Reviewed by Brenna Clarke Gray

In Esi Edugyan's *Half-Blood Blues*, the protagonist, an aging former jazz musician from Baltimore, observes, "Canada kills any conversation quick, I learned long ago. It's a little trick of mine." Protagonist Sid claims Canadian citizenship to end awkward small-talk with an overzealous cabbie, but his comment metaphorically seems to speak to both Edugyan's Giller-winning novel as a whole and Marina Endicott's Giller-nominated *The Little Shadows*. Both novels are part of the far-reaching global scope of Canadian literature, extending beyond Douglas Coupland's definition of CanLit as "when the Canadian government pays you money to write about life in small towns and/or the immigration experience."

Edugyan's novel tells the story of expatriate black American musicians Sid Griffiths and Chip Jones in Europe at the opening of the Second World War and their engagement with the brilliant young black German horn player named Hieronymus. The novel moves dizzyingly between 1939-40 in Berlin and Paris and 1992 in Berlin and Poland, following Sid as he copes with choices made, lies told, and regrets held around Hiero's arrest by Nazis in 1940. It is a fresh, fast, and engaging novel, and perhaps is CanLeast to Coupland's definition of CanLit. The only Canadian in the novel is Delilah Brown, Louis Armstrong's partner in Paris and the woman he sends to scout the talented Hieronymus Falk; Delilah, as Armstrong's travel companion, is far more a citizen of the world than of Canada, though her placement as a Canadian is a constant echo in the novel.

Likewise, Endicott's *The Little Shadows* is set against a similar backdrop of music and wartime. Aurora, Clover, and Bella Avery, along with their mother Flora, are left to fend for themselves after the suicide of Flora's husband, quiet schoolteacher Arthur Avery. With no other idea of how to support her family, Flora returns to the vaudeville world she came of age in, and her daughters become the song-and-dance act The Aurora Belles. The novel follows their successes and failures as the young women come of age and find love and tragedy within the backstage world of vaudeville just at the outbreak of the First World War, and the narrative scampers across the Canada-US border with little interest or question about citizenship. The girls use their Canadian birth to sell themselves as a French casino act at one point, but there is little attention paid to their nationality otherwise.

Indeed, in both novels we are given characters on the fringes of society who find themselves effectively stateless. Sid and Chip leave Baltimore for Berlin to escape the racism of their homespace, only to discover themselves in the midst of Nazi Germany and then Occupied Paris. Forced from their home by poverty, the Avery women move from city to city in western North America, hoping to break into vaudeville, but become so desperate they eventually must offer to work for free. In both novels, the families—both biological and constructed—the characters build become more defining than any national identity. In wartime, of course, this lack of connection with their home nations becomes problematic; in *Half-Blood Blues* it leads directly to Hiero's arrest, while in *The Little Shadows* the draft and conscription make nationality a very real issue for people who have previously not been invited to identify as national citizens. When Sid does find comfort and a settled life back in Baltimore, his past awakens him and he finds himself travelling to Berlin and then Poland to try to put some of his demons to rest. Aurora eventually finds a calm and

protected life for herself in Qu'appelle, Saskatchewan, but the road calls to her and she has a hard time saying no. For all of the characters in *Half-Blood Blues* and *The Little Shadows*, nation is both not an issue and, simultaneously, an enormous one.

That two books of such international scope and with such an interest in the slippery and troubling idea of nationality and citizenship were both nominated for the Giller Prize—one of the most important Canadian book awards—suggests a continued interest in the limits of national identity in an increasingly global society. Edugyan and Endicott celebrate and embody an international and cosmopolitan arm of Canadian writing that is of course not new, but that we occasionally need reminding of.

Edugyan's *Half-Blood Blues* is certainly worthy of all the praise it has received. The narrative's scope allows Edugyan to stretch her skills of description, bringing vividly to life all the locations in the text, from Sid's stuffy flat in Baltimore to Paris after the fall of France. The prose here is beautiful, but more importantly it is elegant, and through Edugyan's facility with language the musicality of the lives of the protagonists comes through without losing the bleakness and sadness at the heart of the experiences of these musical nomads. The novel is very much about regret and absence, and the true beauty at the heart of this novel is really in the simple evocation of these ideas. And as the characters do what they feel they have to do in order to survive—or, more importantly, in order for the music to survive—they all retain their honesty and humanity in the face of painful and sometimes seemingly unforgiveable choices. Edugyan weaves a complicated narrative that searches to explore how our decisions shape our identity and our sense of what we are owed.

Endicott's *The Little Shadows* shares much of the same musical and anxious pre-war backdrop as *Half-Blood Blues*. *The Little Shadows* is not as epic or sweeping, but instead Endicott builds her narrative out of carefully researched details about the world of vaudeville. The reader can sense the backstage experience, and how it shifts and changes (yet stays amazingly similar in many ways) as the girls move from their impoverished first stages to some of the great halls of vaudeville. The world-building in this novel is letter perfect, and Endicott leaves no detail unexplored. At times this novel feels more as if it is about vaudeville than about the characters, but it works because this world is as all-encompassing to our protagonists as it is to Endicott. The continually beckoning stage means that we as readers are compelled to long for it as much as Aurora, Clover, Bella, and Flora do, and that Endicott succeeds in this evocation is truly a triumph of her charming prose.

The central question at the core of each novel hinges on the value of art. In *Half-Blood Blues*, Sid finds himself deciding whether art, in the form of a perfect jazz recording by an emerging legend, is more important than personal freedom or, ultimately, human life. In *The Little Shadows*, the women work tirelessly to improve their craft in an undervalued art form that nevertheless has the capacity to thrill, charm, and move audiences; each of them must decide if the stage is worth more than finding love or being together. For all the characters in both novels, art in any form is worth putting one's whole self into, and their commitment to their various art forms becomes both their greatest strengths and their most obvious Achilles heels. For Sid in *Half-Blood Blues*, the decision he makes is something he has to live with forever, and much of the novel is his coming to terms with that choice; in *The Little Shadows*, the girls are constantly required to renew their commitment to their art, even in the face of unimaginable hardships.

That two such interesting, different, cosmopolitan, outward-looking novels

should be nominated for the Giller Prize in 2011 can only be a reminder of the strength, variety, and complexity of the literatures that make up contemporary writing in Canada. Both texts demonstrate that CanLit cannot be reduced to any one entity. Edugyan and Endicott are testament to the vibrancy of Canadian storytelling in whatever form it takes, whether consciously asserting its "Canadian-ness" and waving a flag or quietly interrogating the idea of the nation from a space outside our own borders.

Not Quite Sunnybrook Farm

Sarah Ellis
The Baby Project. Groundwood $9.95

Rosa Jordan
The Last Wild Place. Fitzhenry & Whiteside $12.95

Marsha Forchuk Skrypuch
Call Me Aram. Fitzhenry & Whiteside $10.95

Reviewed by Hilary Turner

Hardship, misfortune, and struggle often bring out the best in people; they also furnish the mainspring of some of the most satisfying plots in Western literature. In these three recent works for children, difficulties of various kinds are realistically presented. Some are overcome, while others (as adults know) must simply be lived with.

The most ambitious of the three is *The Baby Project*, in which the illustrious Sarah Ellis ventures into the sad terrain of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. The story, however, does not wallow in grief nor call for boxes of Kleenex; rather, it focuses on the intertwining lives of members of the Robertson family as they acclimatize themselves first to an unexpected addition to their numbers, and then to a baffling loss. Eleven-year-old Jessica responds to the announcement of her mother's pregnancy with a baby project of her own—a school project, that is, undertaken with her slightly madcap friend, Margaret. As the girls research the existing scholarship on babies (appearance, food, habitat, enemies, natural defenses, life cycle), the process of gestation and parturition proceeds in counterpoint. After Lucie's birth (her name is an ominous hint to the discerning reader), Jessica is surprised by the depth of her attachment to her new sister, and by her mother's sudden tiredness and vulnerability. The family adjusts, and then adjusts again when Lucie's short race is run.

Ellis has prepared the ground well for her portrayal of family sorrow. The major characters are three-dimensional, each with strengths, weaknesses, and quirks. Dad tries to hold things together. Mum retreats numbly into herself, while Jessica responds with anger—cutting her cherished project to pieces with scissors—and then by drowning her feelings in an orgy of Nancy Drew books. Strange as it may sound, Ellis seems to have had fun writing this book: among many comical touches, she finds occasion to satirize the cult of reading and playing music to the unborn, and (through the character of Margaret) argues spiritedly against "Kidism," the set of prejudices that keep children socially powerless and resentful. Though the novel ends with only the gentle suggestion that "life goes on," *The Baby Project* is a rewarding and good-humoured treatment of family relationships.

A similar awareness of the complexity of family, friendship, and community entanglements can be found in the third volume of Rosa Jordan's series about the Wilsons and the Martins and their south Florida neighbourhood. *The Last Wild Place* (a sequel to *Lost Goat Lane* and *The Goatnappers*) catches up with Kate, Justin, and Chip, and Chip's pal Luther Wilson, as they join forces against a local developer. With help from Lily Hashimoto, a pint-sized soccer star and all-round ball of fire, they succeed in using a mild form of civil disobedience to protect one of the last remaining vestiges of natural swampland outside the Everglades. Though the book is

in part a plea for environmental awareness and activism, Jordan handles these issues with a light touch. Indeed, the scenes in which Chip retreats from the hurly-burly of schoolyard politics to his secret patch of jungle are pastoral in the classic sense of the word. For this reason, the reader finds it easy to care deeply about the plants and animals (especially a Florida panther and her cubs) whose existence is at stake in the conflict.

Like Ellis, Jordan is interested in intergenerational relationships as well. As a backdrop to the children's campaign, both mothers in the story are planning remarriage—an event in both cases which threatens to uproot the younger characters, in the same way as the endangered species are threatened. *The Last Wild Place*, though mostly upbeat (and with a triumphant ending) nevertheless acknowledges that there are some things one can only accept.

Call Me Aram, a well-researched, nicely illustrated account of one aspect of Canada's relief effort in the Armenian genocide of 1922, provides a more serious look at hardship and struggle. The title character, Aram Davidian, is one of a hundred boys accepted as refugees on a farm in Georgetown, Ontario. The watercolours of Muriel Wood capture the relief with which the boys welcome the green peaceful setting, as well as the social situations in which they remain ill at ease. Uprooted in the worst way possible, orphaned and confused, Aram and his compatriots slowly adapt to a new country, a new language, new foods and routines. And although their Canadian hosts are well-meaning, the cultural divide is a challenge for them as well. In the Canadians' insistence on renaming the boys—so that Aram Davidian must answer to "David Adams," for example—Skrypuch subtly conveys the lack of mutual understanding that overshadows the process of acclimatization. In a scene that is based on historical documents, the boys eventually succeed in reclaiming their identities. Pointing to his friend Mgerdich, Aram says: "he has lost his father and mother. He has lost his homeland, too. All that he has left is his name. Please don't take that away from him."

Such moments of self-assertion make each of these books a valuable study in contending with obstacles. Though no struggle is complete, each protagonist finds unexpected inner strengths. Readers will be encouraged to do the same.

Casting a Reflexive Light on Theatre

Alan Filewod, ed.
Theatre Histories. Playwrights Canada $25.00

Natalie Rewa, ed.
Design and Scenography. Playwrights Canada $30.00

Reviewed by Kailin Wright

Two recent volumes of the *Critical Perspectives on Canadian Theatre in English* series—*Theatre Histories* (edited by Alan Filewod) and *Design and Scenography* (edited by Natalie Rewa)—consider the complex interconnections of playwrights, designers, actors, audience, and historians. Almost every essay is a demonstration of the collaborative effort involved in theatre production and scholarship. In these two volumes, "all the theatre's innards lie exposed."

The series was established in 2005 "with the intention of making the best critical and scholarly work in the field readily available to teachers, students and scholars of Canadian drama and theatre." The volumes, as a result, collect prominent criticism on a specific topic and organize the work chronologically by publication date, which reveals a historical narrative of scholarly development. Although the series does not contribute original criticism, Filewod and Rewa seem to be very aware of the canon-making potential of volumes that try to hand-pick the best of the best, and, as a result, question the contribution of their

volumes. Filewod, for instance, examines the trajectory of Canadian theatre histories within his volume, which is what distinguishes this book from others in the field.

Due to the critics' interdisciplinary approaches, the essays in these two volumes complicate the categories that contain them. According to Filewod's introduction, there have been three distinct approaches to Canadian theatre history, and the essays represent these trends: a "recuperative" methodology that valued "empiricist archival work" (Plant, Wagner, Sperdakos), a categorization of theatre according to political "movements" (Filewod, Duchesne), and, finally, "new poststructuralist methods" that "required reconsideration of the master narratives, and of their defining parameters" (Bennett, Knowles, Salter). The last method helps to explain the significance of the pluralized title—*Theatre Histories*—that destabilizes any master narrative while also speaking to postcolonial contexts that challenge hegemonic systems. While the volume is framed by a rejection of master-narratives, *Theatre Histories*' chronological organization of the "best" essays threatens to create its own master-narrative about the development of theatre and historiography in Canada. The volume asks: what, in Filewod and Salter's terms, would a "poststructuralist" or "postcolonial theatre historiography" look like?

Exemplifying a form of postcolonial historiography, *Theatre Histories*' closing piece of criticism is actually a play script: Optative Theatrical Laboratories' (OTL) *Sinking Neptune* (2006), that was written in response to the quadricentennial celebrations of Marc Lescarbot's *Le Théâtre de Neptune en la Nouvelle-France* (1606) as Canada's "first play." The *Sinking Neptune* script was never actually performed as it appears in *Theatre Histories*, however, and adding an explanation about the changes to the script as it is found in the volume would have helped to avoid any confusion about this important dramatic piece. *Sinking Neptune* includes Filewod as a character and problematizes the volume's recurring topics of the historian's authority, colonial master narratives, and intercultural politics. Straddling the line between history and theatre, the play is not only about the so-called "first" documented theatrical performance in Canada, but also about the historicization of that production and the need to revisit the values involved in making histories. *Theatre Histories*' final piece, then, is the perfect conclusion because it demonstrates the chiastic relationship of theatre and history: the two are mutually constitutive.

Design and Scenography also questions its own defining categories: "theatre," "design," and "scenography." As Rewa's introduction reminds us, "Design and scenography are yoked together in the title for this volume so as to emphasize their distinctness and their complementarity." In the first essay, Herman Voaden and Lowrie Warrener's critical piece on their "painter's ballet" *Symphony* (1930) demonstrates the use of light and sound as plot and character, which blurs distinctions and hierarchies between dramatic narrative and theatrical techniques. *Symphony* exposes the often marginalized aspects of drama—staging, lighting, music—as a piece of theatre unto itself. Rewa's volume features work by Michael Devine, Ronald Fedoruk, Reid Gilbert, Kathleen Irwin, Edward Little, and Rahul Varma, among many others; and their pieces range from critical essays to personal accounts of theatre experiments to acceptance speeches. One of the volume's notable features is its sixteen pages of colour photos and illustrations, including sketches by Voaden and Warrener, Ken MacDonald's scenography for Morris Panych's *7 Stories*, Astrid Janson's costume designs and installations, Axel Morgenthaler's lighting and set designs, and Michael Levine's sketches for *Candide*. These glossy illustrations are a rarity in scholarly publications due to the cost of printing, and gesture towards the

larger financial demands of design, scenography, and its accompanying scholarship. In fact, some of the sketches were never fully realized due to financial or structural limitations, exemplifying the gap between a conceptual idea (as sketched or planned) and the practical realities of the theatre space and funding. Rewa's volume sheds a much-needed spotlight on the current struggles and successes of theatre designers.

These two volumes examine the collaborative, interdisciplinary, and self-reflexive methodologies involved in making both theatre and theatre histories.

Les éclats de la lumière

Sylvie Maria Filion
Mon temps d'éternité. Prise de parole 18,95 $

Michèle Blanchet
Sous la lampe-tempête. David 15,00 $

Compte rendu par Laurent Poliquin

En ces temps où les discours économiques dédaignent certains mots oiseux qui ne lui sont d'aucune utilité, tels qu'âme, *Dieu* et *lumière*, le courage de *certains* poètes apparaît avec une force impétueuse, surtout quand on connaît le travail de déconstruction de Derrida et consorts, il y a plus de quarante ans, autour de notions métaphysiques du même acabit. Dans *Mon temps d'éternité* de Sylvie Maria Filion, qui a valu à l'auteur le prix littéraire du journal *Le Droit* en 2008, la poésie s'autorise un souffle tout en réflexion et en connivence audacieuse avec Dieu, mais sans la bondieuserie. Le texte rythme ses délires et ses angoisses sans chercher à faire beau. Si le poème plaît, il n'en tient pas à la qualité de son expression, mais à la démarche de la poétesse qui ne craint pas l'affluence du mot pour questionner les mouvements de sa conscience instable. Une attitude qui transparaît à la lecture du recueil et dont la voix authentique et la pratique poétique incarnée ne peuvent qu'être soulignées. Quant à l'auteure, elle est franco-ontarienne et a signé plusieurs recueils de poésie, dont la suite, *Mon temps d'éternité II,* publiée chez le même éditeur en 2010, a été saluée par une mention du jury du Grand Prix Quebecor du Festival international de poésie de Trois-Rivières.

L'audace de *Sous la lampe-tempête* de Michèle Blanchet est tout aussi porteuse, même si le chemin emprunté est plus classique et que l'auteur modère les expérimentations langagières qui ne serviraient pas le propos. Le titre rappelle ces lampes à pétrole d'une autre époque, mais qui font toujours la joie du campeur. Il exprime avec justesse le rôle complexe du poète, capteur de lumière, de gestes menus, de paroles inespérées dans le vacillement de la vie que souligne la métaphore de la flamme. Le poème de Blanchet s'inscrit dans une tradition poétique qui accorde à la parole le pouvoir de suppléer à l'éphémère, ce à quoi des écrivains discrets comme Jean Grosjean, Lydie Dattas et Jacques Gauthier nous ont habitués. Ainsi : « ne faut-il pas / longuement nommer / ce qui ne sera jamais plus / afin que cela soit / encore un peu / encore un peu » (23).

En somme, dans ces recueils qui cherchent à leur façon à cristalliser l'éternité, bien que les souffles qui les animent diffèrent, nous retrouvons des écrivains qui veillent et font du mot et du poème un moyen de comprendre l'affluence des émotions, voire des perversions, pour donner à la littérature autre chose qu'un regard tourné vers elle-même.

Reclaiming the Lost

Carole Gerson
Canadian Women in Print, 1750-1918. Wilfrid Laurier UP $85.00

Reviewed by J.A. Weingarten

Carole Gerson's assiduous study of writers, publishers, editors, and journalists provides a panorama of predominantly nineteenth-century Canadian women. Her book joins a growing list of print-culture studies that have emerged recently, most notably Dean Irvine's *Editing Modernity: Women and Little-Magazine Cultures in Canada, 1916-1956* (2008) and Janice Fiamengo's *The Woman's Page: Journalism and Rhetoric in Early Canada* (2008). Although groundbreaking, such studies cover far fewer years (and figures) than Gerson's text, which effectively narrates over 150 years of women's history and thoughtfully frames major female literary figures. With admirable frankness, Gerson argues that "it is not possible to alter the historical record and claim that female poets or fiction writers outnumbered or outperformed men, [but] it is possible to reconfigure the literary field so that the arenas in which women achieved a presence receive greater acknowledgement." In order to achieve this goal, she focuses on "the context in which writers worked, rather than detailed analysis of their words." Yet, as a text meant to "reclaim the lost"—to borrow a line from Andrew Suknaski's *The Ghosts Call You Poor*—and to challenge "the cultural authority" of literary canons, Gerson's study could only have benefited from representative critical readings. While it is regrettable that Gerson decided against this approach, she nevertheless offers the proverbial open door on which feminist scholars can lean.

Conceived of as a response to recent criticism that demands the recognition of "the varied historical roles that women have played in the world of the book," Gerson's text develops a "progressive and celebratory" narrative through two integrated lenses: women's oppression under patriarchy and their personal agency in "the public and private spheres available to them." This hybrid approach permits a broad outline of women's professions and the challenges faced in each one. Mapping this territory, Gerson tends to resist employing cultural or literary theory, though some familiar critics (such as Misao Dean, Linda Hutcheon, and Elaine Showalter) appear throughout the study. Instead, Gerson's approach is predominantly historical; she seeks to "reconstruct [women's] engagement with print within the terms of their lived experience." The chiefly historical frame keeps the text readable, because Gerson rarely adopts complex theoretical idioms; her language is consistently straightforward and clear. Though few, her occasional theoretical invocations are somewhat distracting, if only because they are not well situated: Gerson casually invokes "Linda Hutcheon's querying of national models of literary history" and "what Elaine Showalter terms '*ad feminam*' criticism" without providing much in the way of definition. While footnotes accompany such allusions, some clarification would be more useful in the body of the study itself.

The range of Gerson's study is vast. She divides *Canadian Women in Print* into three parts: 1) a broad introduction to women's print culture, 2) various writers and publishers until 1875, and 3) the publishing, non-fiction, and creative writing of the New Woman's era. Each section contains subcategories that address one aspect (an arena, a historical movement, et cetera) of print culture, which are further divided in various ways: regions (such as Montreal, New York, or London), genres (including "the woman's preface," the diary, and others), historical figures (to name only a few of many: Susanna Moodie, Nellie McClung, Agnes Maule Machar, and

Madge Macbeth), and numerous literary contexts (such as canons, celebrity, professionalism, domestic education, temperance, and racialism). Such sectioning occurs quite often, but it rarely feels detrimental to Gerson's flow. In fact, more often than not, her numerous headings keep the study's pace consistent and its emphases focused, both of which are necessary in a study of such an expansive era. That being said, Gerson's narrative is meticulous and impressive. Through statistical data, a plethora of explanatory footnotes, and well-supported historical evidence, she succeeds in reconstructing a percipient vision of this pre-1918 epoch. She also includes photos of nearly every major figure in her study, which symbolically puts faces to the names. And despite her study's quick pace, little seems sidestepped or too briefly considered, with the exception of a formal approach to the poetry and fiction itself.

In that regard, the absence of formal analysis in Gerson's study marks its major limitation. The vague defense of this conscious omission is ultimately unconvincing, especially when one considers how critics such as D.M.R. Bentley, Dean Irvine, Stephanie McKenzie, and Brian Trehearne have similarly sought to reclaim unacknowledged writers in their scholarship: they provide ample historical context to frame their close readings. I stress this point because Gerson is (rightfully) quite critical of androcentric canons; she laments that most of her selected writers "are relatively obscure and . . . still quite uncanonical." But to maintain that Deborah How Cottnam was "Canada's first notable woman poet," that Mary Ann Shadd Gary was "Canada's first significant Black woman writer," or that Madge Macbeth was a "consummate professional woman author" without any analysis of their talent is problematic. The text could easily accommodate even a few representative examples of these writers' virtuosity: two separate anecdotes about Susanna Moodie and Gabrielle Roy are repeated almost verbatim in different chapters, and the several photos of Mina Hubbard could have been replaced by one. Moreover, the actual number of *creative writers* in the study is quite small; Gerson more typically chronicles the lives of journalists and editorial figures. In other words, some strategic editing would have left ample space for a few succinct analyses to demonstrate the calibre of Gerson's relatively small number of novelists and poets.

Even if such absences seem glaring, Gerson's primary goal, to broaden the frame of literary history and to make known the women that populate this enlarged scope, is certainly well realized. This achievement is due partly to the confident, clear style of *Canadian Women in Print*; its conversational tone would seem inviting to any audience. Gerson's historical anecdotes, especially in her section on women's prefaces, prove similarly captivating, as well as illustrative. Moreover, the text is erudite, yet skillfully distilled to only its most significant conclusions. As such, the critic's wealth of knowledge never overwhelms the page or the reader, but her bibliography still provides a myriad of other historical, literary, or critical resources to aid scholars. Despite its aversion to alternative and equally helpful critical approaches, Gerson's project is fundamentally accomplished and instructive. It reclaims many lost figures and offers a foundation for future studies of a gradually enlarging historical lens focused on Canadian women in print.

Clichés and Landscapes

Elizabeth Greene
Moving. Inanna $18.95

Jane Munro
Active Pass. Pedlar $20.00

Debbie Keahey, ed.
Unfurled: Collected Poetry from Northern BC Women. Caitlin $22.95

Di Brandt
Walking to Mojacar. Turnstone $17.00

Reviewed by Alexis Foo

In her collection *Moving*, Elizabeth Greene's narrative voice provides a clarity that almost "hits the reader over the head" with its personal revelations and epiphanies. Readers are taken on a voyage that spans Cairo, Santiago, Mount Parnassus, and even the seedy Chelsea Hotel. Greene's sense of place is both haunting and imagistic, and she successfully transports readers into each poem with natural ease, whether it be the "underworld cathedral" of a cave in Greece, or the "tangle of tiny winding streets" of Old Cairo. The strongly autobiographical collection is laden with moments of self-proclamation. In "Wires of Necessity," the speaker heals and triumphs after her broken marriage has ended: "Step by step, my days enlarged: coffee / downtown; days in Toronto. I learned to heal; / my tears (mostly) dried. . . . Now I float down the steps, fling open my arms. / *World, here I am!*" In "Imaginary Music," the speaker recollects her desire to recover "Vinteuil's petite phrase / that short run of notes Swann / hears and falls in love, finally, / with Odette." She laments, "I thought / if I could find those notes, I'd find love, / like Swann, art like Marcel, but now / I know I must dive deep into / Imagination, feeling the thickness of water / as I descend, then emerge, gasping for air." The self-awareness of the speaker that is ever-present in this collection is rather blatant; it as though the poems of *Moving* are almost too aware of themselves as being "profound" and "exalting," leaving little to be deciphered or pondered by the reader.

The poems of Jane Munro's collection *Active Pass* resonate with zen-like sensuality. Munro invokes twelfth-century Indian poet Mahadeviyakka in her poem, "Like the moon, come out from behind the clouds. Shine!" in which the speaker envisions the poet "gripping silks of sunlight / daylong / layering leaves licking wind / six colours aflicker creepers / lush trysts." Munro even pays homage to the practice of yoga in "Empty your hands and your feet, your words and your thoughts"—a poem divided into six sections, each dedicated to a specific pose. In "Mountain Pose," she amalgamates the body, mind, and natural world. "A sacrum drops, floating ribs rise . . . Flesh at the edge of mind's light-well / tingles, bells as it hollows." The twenty-one poems under the title "Active Pass" provide a disjointed array of lines that question mortality, memory, and loss. From the decaying carcass of a doe—"the ravens are bloodying her, but she still has fullness," to "human fat—pale, dimpled— / in a jar on a shelf in St. Paul's hospital," Munro does not hesitate to provoke readers with her abject images. Her language is lush and her voice is at times darkly ironic as her poems manage to find solace in raw imperfection.

Many of the poems of *Unfurled*, an anthology of poems of northern BC women edited by Debbie Keahey, rely on clichéd phrases. From the line, "I am from cold silences and scathing rages," in a poem exploring the emotional scars of domestic abuse titled "Fragments," to the deliberate announcement in the poem, "I stand in the Shower"—"its flow washes over me and I / do not resist the power / of memory / or of metaphor." In "Wishing you Bread, Wishing You Roses," "this is for / you / for all the times you act honourably / even when nobody is looking / when you fearlessly fight injustice and ignorance." Some

poems in the collection push beyond the contrived. "Wet Siren" laments, "a cigarette is such a long time to sit still. / yes, love is a truck with no windows," and "Ode to tea drinkers" stands unique in its examination of the mundane habit: "Deep Roiboos sucks in the drinker, / fooled by a name so inflated and round, / it won't release you / until every syllable of its flavour is drawn in like pipe smoke." These moments of originality, however, are scarce in this collection. I would recommend *Unfurled* to a reader who is looking for a light, feel-good read and does not mind a few large doses of sentimentality.

Di Brandt demonstrates a variety of poetic styles as well as translations in multiple languages in *Walking to Mojacar.* This rich collection speaks with an unwavering confidence, with the brash, sometimes sarcastic voice of each poem challenging the reader to discover the multiple worlds that the poet inhabits. From the streets of Barcelona to the "barbed wire gates" of Detroit, Brandt's poems manage to create unity in disorder and a strange serenity in destruction with an undercurrent of bravado. "Hymns for Detroit" invokes German hymns from the poet's Mennonite childhood, often contrasting nursery-rhyme sounds with the urban backdrop of a city in ruins. The voice behind these poems is often sardonic and slightly jarring. "Jesus saves. / Mummy said don't eat / The fish, / Watch them on TV." The "Eliotique" influence throughout this collection is clear. In the first hymn, "Nine river ghazals," the poet alludes directly to Eliot's famous line from *The Waste Land*, "by the waters of Leman I sat down and wept," with "on the banks of the Assiniboine we sat down and wept." "Gracias," the final poem of the collection, echoes *The Waste Land* with its disjointed landscape of "blooming, jasmine-scented, / in the desert" and "this valley / of the shadow of the heart, / where the world / begins / and ends." The "cicadas" of "What the Thunder Said" even make an appearance in this poem that reads like an amalgamation of Eliot's *Waste Land* and *Four Quartets.* The span of *Walking to Mojacar* is impressive, and the poet proves that she is widely read as she invokes a sense of literary consciousness and history by alluding to a pantheon of well-known poets such as Dorothy Livesay, Leonard Cohen, and Rilke. There is a feeling of heaviness that comes with the constant need to decipher references as well as the many translations that are present in this collection. Brandt's strongest voice emerges with rhythmic momentum in "Poets in New York": "And now here come / the beautiful / cowboys of New York, / equally at home / chasing bulls in Pamplona."

There is something undeniably Canadian about the naturalistic landscapes of these four collections of poetry. I confess that I keep hoping for Canadian poetry to push beyond the confines of familiar themes such as mourning, solitude, and the recognition of the self in relation to the natural world that is often present in our literary culture. I found glimmers of expansion beyond these tropes, of boundaries being pushed in these collections, but we might not be quite there yet.

Uncomfortable Angels

Steven Heighton
Patient Frame. Anansi $22.95

Daryl Hine
&: A Serial Poem. Fitzhenry & Whiteside $16.95

M.T. Kelly
Downriver: Poems With a Prose Memoir and a Story. Exile $18.95

Reviewed by Daniel Burgoyne

"Learn from the new / and uncomfortable angels" (Heighton, "Dream").

The range, diversity, and frankness of the five sequences in *Patient Frame* are well worth reading. From disfigured soldiers and the graphic horror of the My Lai massacre to the comical discomfort of watching home

movies, from lists of "just ones" to a baseball game in Havana, Heighton leads the reader to witness the death of King Harold at the Battle of Normandy, a wounded soldier in Kandahar, and selected monsters—emperors, pedophiles, and racists.

The fourteen approximations of poets such as Borges and Neruda are delightful dialogical performances in sound and sense that elucidate other moments and movements in the volume, such as the metrically compelling "Found Lately Among the Effects of Catullus" or the voice of Marina Tsvetaeva in "The Neither Life." Further, in "SOME OTHER JUST ONES / a footnote to Borges," Heighton hails the "printer who sets this page with skill, though he may not admire it," "frightened ones who fight to keep fear from keeping them from life," and [those who] "attempt to craft a decent wine in a desperate clime" or "master the banjo."

Hine's volume came as quite a shock to me. When Robin Blaser, Robert Duncan, and Jack Spicer first articulated their approach to serial poetry, they did so as a reaction against the closure of the lyric, to imagine a continuous song that would remain open. As Blaser puts it in "Image-Nation 18 (an apple," "'you have to find it'— / the structure—of life," which means that you can't simply repeat ten lines of accentual verse cut to a persistent rhyme scheme of abbaabcabc three hundred and three times. For Blaser, the moving from one thing to another requires attention. Not an ampersand. For an antidote, one needs to return to the first volume of *The Martyrology* and then proceed to Leslie Scalapino's *Way*.

This isn't to question the craft, the expertise, and nuance of these poems. Reading *&: A Serial Poem*, I recall American broadcaster Jim Lehrer saying that we would be better people if we read a single poem every night before bed; I think Lehrer suggested keeping a volume of poems on the night table. I can imagine doing exactly this with Hine, only the poems need to be read first thing upon awakening, preferably just before sunrise: "Waking too often, too often waking early / As sunrise cast its shadow on the sky."

There is an uncanny effect that sets in early on with these poems, as if each poem emulates the progression of time: "the order of the day / Minutely as it varies day-by-day." Observations seem cast in the shadow of dreams, transfiguring daily life in the progression of time: "Open this envelope: a stanza, an enclosure / of dated prose, days-old frivolities that froze days / Ago, both overwrought & underdone / All subject to evening's closure and disclosure."

Former editor of *Poetry* and author of at least fifteen books of poetry, Hine is an accomplished Canadian poet, whose commitment to formal verse both limits the possibility of his poems—what could be a series—and yet sometimes strikes an uncanny chord. This most recent addition to his body of work might be summarized with the lines from poem 213: "Loss, with its protocols & privileges— / For even desolation brings some gifts."

Downriver is a curious assemblage. Moody, almost discordant poems punctuated with occasional sharp images are followed by a short memoir of Kelly's childhood and a short story. Some of the poems, such as "Mother," strike me as weakly constructed or, as in the case of "Euridice," almost clichéd. Others, such as "Ossossané," draw me back repeatedly, curious, unsure. "Pastoral" is another one of these: "But it's only wind, the / Dead bright light that tells us / That."

While I find Kelly's poems almost deliberately incomplete, often enigmatic, they also offer vivid, arresting images: "Linoleum reflects her retreat / the light that follows weakens." Especially through the early poems, these images are often violent or almost graphic in their focus on scenes of death. In "Danse Macarbe" [sic], the images

pile up, almost randomly—ranging from fifteen dead school children on a road to a bear with its "nose blown off"—leaving me unsettled, frustrated that I can't gain more perspective on these incidents.

More interesting, the memoir at the end of the volume reads like an elegy for Kelly's father. The focus is so clearly on mourning and remembering his father—Kelly is even startled by how powerfully writing the memoir affects his memory—that the subsequent foray into his school years and concluding inclusion of a short story seem digressive, almost evasive. Kelly succeeds in creating an authenticity of memory, largely indebted to his focus on architecture and geography, but then he drifts into some sort of school chronology that forgets itself. The early part of the memoir is worth reading for the particular quality of memory.

Les enjeux de la littérature franco-ontarienne

Lucie Hotte et Johanne Melançon, éd.
Introduction à la littérature franco-ontarienne.
Prise de parole 34,95 $

Compte rendu par Mélanie Bennett

Introduction à la littérature franco-ontarienne se veut un survol des oeuvres les plus marquantes depuis les années 1970. Une longue introduction situe le lecteur quant aux critères retenus pour qualifier un auteur franco-ontarien, soit la naissance ou la résidence en Ontario et le fait d'y vivre de façon permanente au moment de l'écriture. Dans ces pages introductives, on aborde aussi les écrits de l'époque coloniale française et du Canada français avant la provincialisation des communautés.

Rassemblés sous la direction de Lucie Hotte et Johanne Melançon, des spécialistes en littératures francophones minoritaires étudient une variété de genres, tels le théâtre (Jane Moss), la poésie (François Paré), la chanson (Johanne Melançon), le roman (Lucie Hotte) et la nouvelle (Michel Lord).

Le projet des deux éditeurs est de démontrer que, bien qu'elle soit jeune, variée et abordant souvent la fragilité de l'identité et de l'avenir, la littérature franco-ontarienne mérite bien le statut de *littérature*. Ce qui distingue leur recensement est le fait que sont exposés les enjeux qui ont permis à la littérature franco-ontarienne d'évoluer : de la littérature porte-parole de la conscience collective aux écrits intimistes et individuels, de la revendication de l'oralité du français populaire à la recherche d'un français standardisé, de l'espace traditionnel du terroir ou du Nord à l'espace urbain. L'exploration des thèmes de la misère associée à la classe ouvrière et de la déprime liée à la possibilité d'une éventuelle disparition de la communauté cède la place à des écrits modernes, voire postmodernes, abordant la bourgeoisie, l'élite franco-ontarienne, l'expérience immigrante, et enfin l'identité biculturelle et le bilinguisme qui peuvent être émancipateurs plutôt que signes d'assimilation.

Bien que l'espace soit un thème privilégié dans tous les genres pratiqués par les auteurs franco-ontariens, l'axe Ottawa-Sudbury-Toronto et les régions de l'Est et du Nord dominent. On retrouve bien sûr les fondateurs et les grands noms (Jean-Marc Dalpé, André Paiement, Daniel Poliquin, Patrice Desbiens, Jocelyne Villeneuve, Hélène Brodeur, Marguerite Anderson, etc.) ainsi que des voix plus récentes : Aurélie Resch, Didier Leclair, Michelle Dallaire, Angèle Bassolé-Ouédraogo et les groupes musicaux Deux Saisons, Konflit Dramatik, Swing, etc., pour n'en nommer que quelques-uns.

Hotte et Melançon font preuve de beaucoup d'enthousiasme dans l'expression de leur intérêt pour la littérature franco-ontarienne : « . . . tous cherchent à en savoir davantage sur cette littérature qui a su capter leur attention ». Mais cet enthousiasme contraste avec le réalisme de François Paré, collaborateur et lauréat

du prix du Gouverneur Général pour *Littératures de l'exiguïté* : « . . . Parce qu'il n'y pas la moindre espèce d'intérêt! » L'absence de tels cours dans les écoles franco-ontariennes est le reflet d'une réticence de la part des habitants de cette province à consommer leurs propres productions culturelles et littéraires. L'ouvrage de Hotte et Melançon comble ce besoin urgent d'initier les populations concernées et tous ceux qui s'intéressent à cette littérature minoritaire.

Chewing Through Poetry

Ray Hsu
Cold Sleep Permanent Afternoon. Nightwood $17.95

Amatoritsero Ede
Globetrotter & Hitler's Children. Black Goat $17.95

Kaie Kellough
Maple Leaf Rag. Arbeiter Ring $14.95

Reviewed by Zoë Landale

Ray Hsu, Amatoritsero Ede, and Kaie Kellough all have two things in common: they are young writers with new books of poetry. Some of this is poetry that even English Lit majors would run shrieking from, were it on an exam. What actually happens? You want a narrative throughline? Don't be so like, old.

Ray Hsu's work in *Cold Sleep Permanent Afternoon*, his second book, falls into this category. These fiercely intelligent poems lack the kind of poetic goodies that many readers crave, namely the use of imagery, metaphor, simile. The jacket blurb tells us that the book "uses the grammatical concepts of singular and plural" as well as exploring "the borders between civic engagement and domesticity, dissent and accord. . . ." This reader would not have known from reading the contents. Is it a question of "my bad," or are the poems themselves as difficult to chew through as a six-pound loaf of German rye?

Hsu's first book won the Gerald Lampert Award and was short-listed for the Trillium Book Award for poetry. When he's introduced at a reading, the presenter speaks of Hsu as "a writer to watch." Certainly the energy in the book is engaging. Since the reader is deprived of the delights of conventional poetry, we spend our time trying to figure out what the writer is actually doing. The space commonly used for a title is used instead for an identifier of perspective; we have repeated poems from a King, a Citizen, a Chorus, On-Stage, Off-Stage and the like. But what is a Border? Is it significant that the Atrium/Ventricle, a four-part concrete poem appears on page 69 where the writer uses the words "I" and a "you" plus the words "adore" and "chastity"? This as close to a sex/love poem that the book gets. "A long passage, / a crack in a sentence. A pure / octave to set the mattress / on fire."

There are often promising lines like, "When he swaggers in on the hoarfrost / it's bible and brine," but without a setting, imagery, or any hint of narrative, Hsu uses his tight lines to throw the reader into a wilderness of blank abstractions. This is death by PhD, a no-salt diet.

Does a life of the mind mitigate against the use of nouns? Are images lowbrow, and the reader who pines after their rich chocolate hit vulgar? Count me among their number. *Globetrotter & Hitler's Children*, by Amatoritsero Ede, is a first book. Ede is from Nigeria, studied in Germany, and came to Canada in 2005. The opening section of the book is about immigrating to Toronto and cautiously taking root there: "toronto / city of rainbow and covenants / under the shade of the maple leaf." How do I love thee? Let me count the generalizations in pretty stanzas such as, "and let green laughter tree / between neighbouring jowls / justled together."

The second section, *Hitler's Children*, deals with Ede's revulsion at the neo-Nazi presence in Germany today. "How did it transpire!" is the repeated refrain. Ede uses

more "O"s in this book than a box of Cheerios. Combined with an awkward syntax, as in, "caught in the claws of popinjays / because birds do dance / and flirt with flowers" the general language, expository content, and multiple exclamation marks keep the reader at arm's length. At least there are some nouns and Ede has a sense of humour, "O America / land of milk / and horny."

The later poems in the book about language are reminiscent of Dionne Brand's work, though looser in form and content. Brand's poetry, however, really gives readers something juicy and substantial to sink our teeth into. Ede's poems are more like puff pastry.

Is it wrong to wonder if there is a connection between the book being published by Chris Abani's poetry series and the fact that Abani, a respected American poet, like Ede, is originally from Nigeria?

Kellough's *Maple Leaf Rag* is significantly different: the contents are fun to devour. Kellough, a Montreal writer, has significant credentials as a performance poet, but this is not cotton candy. The poems are delightfully crisp. Assonance, slant rhyme, perfect rhyme, eye-rhyme: the book is rocking and chock-full of mouth-fun for the reader. It begs to be read aloud. The rhythm is such that the reader may catch herself clapping hands and nodding as well.

The poems read just as cleanly on the page when the reader makes no overt sound effects. They are clever and polished. We enjoy double meanings in a number of poems, including one titled "kaie kellough meets the quebecois reggae vampirates uptown" which starts off, "irate / i rate you a pirate // a cracker patwa snatcher / a *kebek-* / wha?"

Maple Leaf Rag is playful. Just opening the book and riffling through the pages the reader spots prose poems, idiosyncratic typography, a crumpled brown bag background with a split poem that can be read across or up and down. The many styles wouldn't work without a driving sensibility behind them and we get that spelled out in the poem called "niggerock," another about an "unarmed brown boy." Kellough raps, he sing-talks for "we who slaved with the *panis* / bit frost in preston / broke and seeded frozen scotian ground." We, his readers, stand in for the "white / couple's white breath / that "frosts the glass" as we stare in at musicians who mouth to us "*entrez*."

These poems invite us in. Kellough says "with hexes for eyes / i stare through history" and the reader is happy to spend time with him. There's the occasional polemic poem but there is also wonderful assonance, alliteration, and images as bizarre and real as "dead-ringer butchers in blood-spattered doctor's coats . . . bleached blonde *pitounes* entrust their calluses to masked Korean manicurists."

It's keen cuisine.

Lesbian and Gay Plays for Posterity

Rosalind Kerr
Lesbian Plays: Coming of Age in Canada. Playwrights Canada $46.00

Sky Gilbert
Perfectly Abnormal: Seven Gay Plays. Playwrights Canada $29.00

Reviewed by T.L. Cowan

In her introduction to *Lesbian Plays: Coming of Age in Canada*, Rosalind Kerr explains one of her reasons for compiling this selection of eleven plays by and/or about lesbians: "As we move increasingly away from any fixed definitions of gendered and sexualized identities towards a queer postmodern Canadian society, it is important to know what part lesbian theatre has played in reflecting these historical developments back to us." In a similar vein, Sky Gilbert asks, in his introduction to *Perfectly Abnormal: Seven Gay Plays*, "What has gay identity meant historically, and why is it important—not only to gay

men, but to lesbians and transgendered people?" The problem of history is central to both collections under consideration here; both collections seek to document not only plays that are about same-sex desire or the lives of gays and lesbians, but also to consider what work that might have been understood as "gay" or "lesbian" tells us about the historical moments in which these plays were written and produced and, importantly, what they tell us about "post-modern queerness," and presumably postmodern queer theatre in Canada. Both Kerr and Gilbert fly close to an exasperated tone (with, as Gilbert writes, the "youth of today"), and seem to not have a particularly fulsome sense of what contemporary queerness means in relation to "gay" and "lesbian," but I am convinced that the critical and recuperative efforts of these collections serve an important purpose. Perhaps it is redundant to claim that these collections are "for posterity"; however, I want to claim here that *Lesbian Plays* and *Perfectly Abnormal* are particularly important historical reminders of gay and lesbian theatre of the 1990s and early 2000s because they put on record the ways that gay and lesbian-identified plays, over the course of the two decades covered in these pages, performed the politics and told the stories of gay and lesbian lives in the age of identity politics.

Kerr's selection of texts, which includes work by Alec Butler, Shawna Dempsey and Lorri Millan, Lisa Lowe, Vivienne Laxdal, Susan G. Cole, Lisa Walter, Kathleen Oliver, Natalie Meisner, Diane Flacks, Alex Bulmer, and Corrina Hodgson, was guided by the premise that "these play/performance texts represent lesbian subjects on stage who address themselves to lesbian spectators in the audience" and "that all the texts push the boundaries of representation and its heterosexualizing norms by making the lesbian subject and the desire that circulates around her the focus of attention." While I found the grouping of plays—into loosely configured categories like "coming out" stories and "fictionalized historical situations"—disappointing and wished that these lesbian plays could have been put into a more animated conversation with each other, overall I agree with Kerr's assessment that these "playwrights have all contributed to the creation of an alternative canon" that shifts attention away from the heterosexual imperative, and that this collection does chart "certain historically specific moments that represent a range of lesbian experiences over the past twenty years in various parts of Canada." Kerr's introductory analyses of each play are instructive, and particularly useful for students. While many of the plays collected here feel a bit dated, that, I think, is the point; biographical notes from the playwrights indicate that many of the authors themselves are revisiting this material after a long time. As the first collection of lesbian plays in Canada, this is an excellent and valuable start.

Gilbert's *Perfectly Abnormal* makes a specific case for the plays he brings together: his selection process, as his title suggests, was not simply to anthologize plays by and about gay men. It was, rather, to collect plays that "create their own gay worlds" and that do not conform to that "earnest, literalist, family-oriented, good-citizen-minded aesthetics," which produces "an art which is often boring and indistinguishable from the rest of mass popular culture." (It must be said that the luxury of this editorial specificity might be understood as a reflection of the historically disproportionate institutional support given to gay male theatre compared with lesbian theatre in Canada.) The plays collected here—by Harry Rintoul, Christian Lloyd, Shawn Postoff, Greg McArthur, Michael Achtman, and Greg Kearney—cover a wide formal range and are refreshingly not striving for any kind of moral respectability, or straight intelligibility. While *Perfectly Abnormal* does not seek any kind of national representation

(five of the seven plays were produced in Toronto, the other two in Winnipeg), the central theme of the collection does provide a kind of perverse coherence that lets the texts speak to each other in provocative ways.

Sous le signe d'Hermès: voyages poétiques …

Mona Latif-Ghattas; Teymour Toutounji, illus.
Miniatures sidérales. Noroît 23,95 $

Fulvio Caccia
Italie et autres voyages. Noroît 19,95 $

Nadine Ltaif
Ce que vous ne lirez pas. Noroît 18,95 $

Compte rendu par Mélanie Collado

L'écriture est une quête . . . Dans *Miniatures sidérales*, chaque poème est jumelé à un tableau aux couleurs vibrantes. Dans ce côtoiement, les vers de Mona Latif font parler les toiles abstraites de Teymour Toutounji et les tableaux de ce dernier font résonner les mots de la poétesse. Dès le début, le va-et-vient des vers à l'image et de l'image aux vers qui s'impose au lecteur, la poésie et la peinture combinent leur pouvoir d'évocation pour créer une troisième dimension. Au fil des pages, un « il » et une « elle » qui se découvrent entreprennent un voyage vers les étoiles et la beauté. Difficile de ne pas les suivre dans cette quête. Des trois recueils, *Miniatures sidérales* est celui qui me semble le plus captivant en raison de la danse à laquelle se livrent les mots, les couleurs et les formes par le biais du regard. Ce recueil nous entraîne dans un univers où la découverte paraît infinie.

Comme *Miniatures sidérales*, *Italie et autres voyages* de Fulvio Caccia mêle l'art pictural à l'art poétique, mais dans cet ouvrage les mots l'emportent sur les images car seules quelques esquisses sont insérées. Ces dessins se prêtent à des interprétations variées, mais la majorité suggère une recherche d'équilibre qui se retrouve dans les textes qui les accompagnent. Ce recueil, composé de trois séries de poèmes, « Italie et autres voyages », « Stances à Leila », et « Hermès » est dominé par un mouvement incessant. Que le thème soit l'Amérique, l'Italie, l'amour ou l'enfance, dans « Italie et autres voyages », les jeux sur le sens et les sons des mots ainsi que la multiplicité des formes confèrent aux poèmes une dimension ludique et un rythme précipité qui s'apparente à la farandole ou la tarentelle. « Stances à Leila » est composé de poèmes d'amour. Ces vers empreints de sensualité expriment aussi la perte de l'être aimé et le déséquilibre qui s'en suit. « Hermès » invite à un autre périple: une aventure urbaine. Les poèmes sont précédés d'un commentaire où le poète annonce son intention de « décliner la ville et son imaginaire à partir des graphes et des signatures glanées au hasard de [ses] pérégrinations ». La parole est ainsi un vagabondage. Dans l'ensemble, tous les voyages de ce recueil prennent l'allure d'une exploration d'exils et d'une quête identitaire vouée à l'échec car le moi qui domine est toujours écartelé. C'est un moi qui ne peut s'empêcher de regarder derrière lui tout en sachant que le retour en arrière est impossible. C'est un moi condamné à se défaire et à se chercher.

Dans *Ce que vous ne lirez pas* de Nadine Ltaif le voyage dans l'espace est indissociable du voyage dans le temps. Les lieux ne sont évoqués que dans leur rapport avec l'histoire ou l'attente. Que ce soit en Espagne, en Inde, ou au Liban, les pierres des villes visitées sont imprégnées du passé. Elles gardent les traces des luttes et des fusions entre civilisations et elles témoignent du lourd héritage des haines raciales. Dans les poèmes de ce recueil, le souvenir des guerres l'emporte systématiquement sur la beauté des paysages et des structures. Quant à l'écriture, elle est perçue comme un voyage immobile. Autre trace visible, bien qu'elle soit plus fragile, l'écriture est associée à l'attente, au présent et à Montréal. La poésie

permet d'exprimer la perte et la souffrance d'un être écartelé entre l'Orient et l'Occident, entre le passé et le présent. Écrire, c'est un moyen de lutter contre le déséquilibre et de peindre le réel aussi bien que l'imaginaire. Écrire, c'est également pour l'auteure, l'occasion de s'adresser une dernière fois à une poétesse disparue. Monique Bosco ne lira pas le livre de Ltaif, mais cette dernière peut quand même lui rendre hommage en revendiquant son influence. Continuer à écrire c'est continuer à avancer sur le chemin vers lequel Bosco l'a guidée et c'est perpétuer son souvenir, aussi douloureux soit-il.

Animal Laughter

Don LePan
Animals. Esplanade $18.95

Charles Demers
The Prescription Errors. Insomniac $19.95

Reviewed by Clint Burnham

While there has been a great deal of debate lately over the fate of books in the age of Kindle and the iPad, perhaps the greater sea-change currently upon us is not the material condition of texts but their epistemology. That is to say, perhaps the real threat to literature lies not in glowing screens but in how they seem to offer obdurate facticity. That, at any rate, is the argument behind David Shields' recent *Reality Hunger: A Manifesto*, in which he demonstrates, through a Benjamin-like collage of massaged quotations, that the novel, in order to survive the age of Wikipedia and sampling, must adapt (must appropriate) or die.

This same desire for reality, for reality bites in fiction, is a useful filter with which to approach these two texts under review. Don LePan's *Animals* is a manifesto on animal rights under the guise of a science fiction-ish "found" manuscript, while Charles Demers' *Prescription Errors* draws on the author's stand-up comedy background and psychogeographies, as well as featuring a DIY researcher character. Demers' is the more successful of the two efforts, but perhaps we can learn more from LePan's failure.

Why do I think *Animals* fails? For two reasons: first of all, it never provides a compelling reason for why it switches back and forth between fiction and manifesto. Thus we have the narrative of Sammy, a deaf child born sometime in the future when such deficient children are labelled "mongrels" and treated as some combination of pets and food animals. Sammy is abandoned by his noble working-class mother, Tammy, who mistakenly thinks that the yuppie family of Naomi (complete with ball-busting mother Carrie and henpecked painter-father Zayne) will provide him with a good home. Of course Naomi is a wonderful child—she ends up being a creative writing professor who writes this found manuscript—but equally inevitable is that, once we've endured the treacle of Naomi and Sammy's limited p.o.v., Carrie will come to abandon Sammy to the Auschwitz-like factory farms that populate this ponderous allegory.

Interpolated with this fiction that has all the subtlety of a PETA parable for preschoolers is an even more heavy-handed series of historical notes on how the twenty-first-century global extinction of food animals led to the breeding of human mongrels for that purpose. The problem is, of course, that these notes—by a now-grown-up member of Sammy's first family—are as one-dimensional and lackluster a piece of writing as is the fiction among which they're woven. What is finally so remarkable about these pseudo-non-fictions is their own lack of confidence:

> I started earlier to tell you something of the history of the mongrels and of the chattels—and, before that, of the farm animals. I'm going to carry on in that vein now, as I will continue doing here and

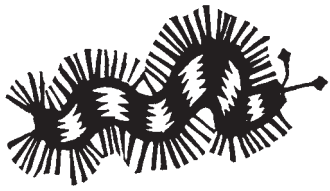
there throughout these pages. I guess I should make clear, though, that if none of this interests you—if what you really want is to find out about Sam and Naomi, find out how it ends and not hear all the whatnot about politics and the rest of it—that's perfectly all right.

Now, if only the novel had provided the option of not reading the story of Sam and Naomi as well.

It's a bit unfair to lump Demers' novel in with Lepan's. Funny where the latter is earnest, light where Lepan's is ponderous, *Prescription Errors* never takes itself too seriously, even as it deals with such contemporary issues as homophobia, multiculturalism, and working-class diets in the neoliberal city:

> Many years from now, well-fed anthropologists studying Vancouver at the turn of the twenty-first century will explore the ways in which a whole human substratum like me—unmarried men earning significantly less than ten thousand dollars a year—survived by dint of the city's wholly unique Buck-a-Slice economy. Denny—a former drug dealer in his fifties with whom I often stop to speak when I see him on his late-night, anti-war postering runs on the Drive—has a theory the cash-only, impossible-to-audit, Buck-a-slice industry grows out of Vancouver's throbbing, teeming marijuana economy.

Like his *Vancouver Special*—a look at the city's neighbourhoods and ethnicities that abounds with louche insiderism—Demers' *Prescription Errors* is less fiction than reality, served up for a buck a slice. I'll take *Errors* over earnest any day of the week.



Of Violence and Poetry

Ehab Lotayef
To Love a Palestinian Woman. TSAR $17.95

Antony Di Nardo
Alien, Correspondent. Brick $19.00

Addena Sumter-Freitag
Back in the Days. Wattle and Daub $15.95

Reviewed by Atef Laouyene

Combining emancipatory politics with the vulnerability of human sentiment is what constitutes the shared singularity of the three collections of poems here under review. While negotiating an ethical imperative that cannot be compromised and a political reality that cannot be ignored, each poet offers us a unique perspective on violence and its myriad manifestations.

In an effort to achieve a measure of testimonial truth and political urgency, Montreal-based Egyptian poet Ehab Lotayef decides not only to complement his bilingual collection (English and Egyptian Arabic) with his own photography, but also to preface it with a caveat to the reader to the effect that politics is above all the impetus that drives his creative endeavor. In "Brand New World," for instance, a poem written in November 2001, shortly after the US invasion of Afghanistan, Lotayef commemorates the fall of Kabul and laments the onset of a dystopian political order where "heroes become villains / And villains become heroes." In the brand new world that the poem proleptically describes, "the White House man" (George Bush) is hailed as the harbinger of a ravenous economic system erected on the altar of amputated civilian bodies and sustained by opium money. It is, however, in the collection's titular piece, "To Love a Palestinian Woman," that Lotayef's poetry unveils most movingly its ever-anguished political preoccupations. In fact, it is here that Lotayef's politics seem to run in the same groove as that of a host of other revolutionary Arab

poets, namely, Mahmoud Darwish, Nizar Qabbani, and Abd Al-Wahhab Al-Bayyati. (The influence of these poets, and especially that of the Egyptian vernacular poet Ahmed Fouad Negm, is particularly apparent in the Arabic section of the collection.) Drawing on the Arabic literary tradition of *ghazal* with structural and thematic variations à la Qabbani, Lotayef makes his Palestinian woman less an object of hyperbolized desire than an archetypal figure of loss and resistance, a figure whose "spirit of persistence" holds the promise of redemptive return for the hitherto stateless people of Palestine. Reading this poem and others in Lotayef's collection, one cannot but sense the tremulous longing of the exile, the sobering eloquence of the visionary, and the reverent sincerity of the *poète engagé*.

In *Alien, Correspondent*, Antony Di Nardo offers his readers a lyrical testimonial to the ravages of war to which the beautiful city of Beirut has been subjected. While it seeks to approximate the historical and political reality of war-torn Beirut, the collection's documentary quality does not by any means weaken the precarious sensibility of the poetic voice. Ever conscious of his foreignness (hence the first portion of the title, "Alien"), Di Nardo never sacrifices the ethical imperative of the witness for the political sermonizing of the popular media pundit. Part witness poetry and part personal reflection, Di Nardo's collection burdens its reader with claims at once ethical and affective. Moved to the level of "empathic unsettlement," to use Dominick LaCapra's phrase, Di Nardo's reader becomes a "secondary witness" whose ethical and emotional being becomes ineluctably intertwined with the trauma that is Beirut's. In "The Sacrificial Lamb," for instance, the reader stands witness to a *danse macabre* in which Beirut's lost denizens keep raising "the banners of Islam" and erecting "altars to the virgin." In this Blakean god-forsaken city, the broken "church bells" and the soot-sullied minarets summon "the godless and the fearful" to a gruesome "anarchy in prayers."

While some of Di Nardo's poems in this collection may remind us of Arthur Rimbaud at times, they rarely lapse into the romantic exoticism of the *poète maudit*. "The Tourist," for instance, is one of many other poems ("The Lonely Planet," "Down into the Royal Tombs of Byblos," and "A Muslim Woman I Met") that illustrate the perennially unsettling triangulation between the ethical integrity of the reporter, the aesthetic sensibility of the poet, and the exoticist sentimentalism of the tourist. Be that as it may, it is always the solemn voice of the poet-cum-reporter that we keep hearing in Di Nardo's lines. While they register the poet's personal response to the horrors of war in Lebanon, the poems in this collection steer clear of the potential exoticization of Middle Eastern violence that continues to permeate western popular media today.

In *Back in the Days*, the seventh-generation African Canadian Addena Sumter-Freitag takes us on a memorably intimate journey, relating her experiences growing up as a black girl in Winnipeg's North End in the 1950s. Deeply sorrowful at times and sharply acerbic at others, Sumter-Freitag's will undoubtedly become one of the most prominent poetic voices of Canada's black community. Although her idiom occasionally verges on the prosaic and the mundanely anecdotal (perhaps due to her theatre background), her emotional sincerity is little short of breathtaking. Playwright, performance artist, and poet, Sumter-Freitag brings her poems to life by fusing the poetically suggestive with the brutally honest and the brazenly humorous with the unspeakably tragic.

Back in the Days is a collection of poems gracefully interlaced with pieces of creative non-fiction and touchingly rendered by the same speaker in Sumter-Freitag's earlier one-woman play, *Stay Black and*

Die. Drawing on her childhood memories and stamping her idiom with black speech patterns, Sumter-Freitag succeeds in weaving a riveting, multi-voiced, and multi-generational family portrait, one that mirrors the collective lived experiences of racialized Black minorities both in the US and in Canada. A host of characters make their appearance in this family portrait: the uncommunicative but attractively melancholic father, with whom Sumter-Freitag has a special fascination; the strict but selflessly indefatigable mother; the shell-shocked cousins; the cousins who taught her the facts of life; the uncle who was assassinated by the "clan"; and the other uncle who enlisted in the Great War only to find himself building ditches and "shovel[ing] the shit in the latrines." Within Sumter-Freitag's poetic breath, these characters are generously accommodated, not because they have been part of her coming-of-age journey, but because their long-buried stories will hopefully bring to public consciousness the violence of racial politics that continues to structure the black community's social existence. That the book has made it into the school curriculum now is, without doubt, a plain testament to its relevance and merit.

Women in Sport

Arley McNeney
Post. Thistledown $19.95

Robin Stevenson
A Thousand Shades of Blue. Orca $12.95

Susan Zettell
Checkout Girl. Signature $19.95

Reviewed by Helene Staveley

Basketball, sailing, and hockey are sports that people play for the love of playing, if not for money, that rely as much on team dynamics as on the individual excellence of players. In Arley McNeney's *Post*, Nolan Taylor is on the "post" end of a prominent career as a women's wheelchair basketball player. Her profession and her personal relationships are equally at turning points as she faces a nebulous new future. Rachel is at the beginning of what promises to be a lifelong passion in Robin Stevenson's *A Thousand Shades of Blue*. She, her brother, and their parents set out on a year-long sailing voyage that their father, at least, hopes will strengthen their family bonds. Dedicated to all aspects of hockey from backyard rink construction to studying the techniques of her hero Bobby Orr, Kathy Rausch, the protagonist of *The Checkout Girl* by Susan Zettell, has trouble making hockey an important part of her life as a young woman in the 1970s. The desire to live a hockey life remains her anchor in a turbulent life tossed by the demands of problematic romances, an autistic sister, and unstable grocery store jobs made more unstable still by Kathy's commitment to unionize her sector.

Set in contemporary New Westminster, BC, McNeney's narrative is spare and pared down in focus and in style. Brought to wheelchair basketball by a degenerative bone condition called capital femoral epiphisis that made her a partial paraplegic before she became a teenager, Nolan, now in her twenties, undergoes hip replacement surgery early in the novel. Erstwhile musician Quinn is Nolan's life-partner, but she calls on Darren, her first basketball coach and first lover, to guide her through the complexities of a new career as public speaker and coach. A hoped-for but unexpected pregnancy complicates the healing process and adds yet more pressures to the already cash-strapped young couple. Nolan's first-person narration is deeply concerned with corporeality, with the body's often painfully sensual relationship to surfaces and depths both internal and external. The metaphors of surgery and recovery, excision and pregnancy evoke precariousness rather than balance, threatening to undercut and topple more than to heal,

amplifying the literal and figurative precariousness Nolan experiences as the radical surgery that should open doors for her seems ironically to close them instead.

A Thousand Shades of Blue is recognizably a young-adult novel, based on its style, its central conflicts, and the experiences of its young protagonist. Rachel's family does not function optimally and hasn't in some time. Tensions between their over-organized father and enigmatic mother have been building, and months spent together in the enclosed, pressure-cooker-style environment of the sailing ship do not bode well for this family unit, scarred by guilt of various kinds but most obviously over Emma. She is Rachel's older sister, left behind in Hamilton, brain-damaged since childhood and a perpetual source for each family member of anguished anxiety. Yet the Bahamian air adds an unanticipated romantic edge and Rachel meets two charismatic young people living the sailing lifestyle and entertains possibilities that had seemed out of reach. After witnessing her mother's struggle with the same problems she faces, Rachel gains a more nuanced comprehension of loyalty and betrayal, love, commitment, security, and stagnation. Stevenson treats the family dynamic deftly and contextualizes it with her evocative representation of sailing. In her hands the acts of learning to sail and learning to understand become graceful illuminations of the other.

Varnum, the setting of Susan Zettell's *Checkout Girl*, is instantly recognizable as a small Ontario town of the 1970s. Kathy is intimate with its limited opportunities, the way it clutches respectable veneers while drifting toward seediness, the simultaneously rich and oppressive texture of its community, the wildly transformative consequences that follow from its inhabitants' smallest decisions. She has few outlets for her passion for skating and hockey even though she excels at them, and is clearly adrift in a world that has no sense of how to accommodate her. Her job as a checkout girl is a dead end and she endangers her chances of keeping even that by working towards unionization. She's attracted to her landlord even though his involvement in the drug trade endangers him, his wife and child, and herself, and her autistic younger sister is attached to her with a strength that makes them both vulnerable. Wave after wave of small-town catastrophe washes over Kathy, obscuring or eliminating most of her choices until the only options that remain are the ones she began with: skates, ice, hockey.

Within fiction, team sport commonly figures the twinned demands for personal excellence and the ability to work well within a collective; these three novels achieve remarkably distinct inflections of this well-established trend. The characters of Zettell's *Checkout Girl* are compellingly realized and fully believable; its conflicts are complex with surprising and satisfying outcomes; its setting is finely drawn; its writing is rigorous, sophisticated, evocative, and clear. Kathy is sensual, flawed, resilient, thoughtful, and active, and no small part of her attractiveness is her volatile relationship with the town that sometimes abjects and sometimes gingerly embraces her. Since her relationship with her sport is tenuous, Kathy is in a curiously piquant situation: a player without a team, almost without a game. Observing that Stevenson's *A Thousand Shades of Blue* is markedly safe by comparison is not a real criticism—the love-acceptance-security messages of family romances form the backbone of young adult fiction, especially the coming-of-age variety. Stevenson accomplishes her version more than competently, with grace and compassion, through her depiction of this stumbling but increasingly skilled sailing crew. Rachel is an appealing version of the misfit teen whose experiences as a crew member equip her to deal more effectively with the world around her. Herself

a former world champion wheelchair basketball player, McNeney brings the authority of personal experience to bear on *Post,* which she writes with impressive control and ambitious structure. Through Nolan's increasingly uneasy relationship with her body, her sport, and her loved ones, McNeney produces a provocative reflection on the unexpected contradictions of embodiment, physical ability, and healing.

L'inexorable cri de l'art

Serge Mongrain
Insoumission. Noroît 15,95 $

Michel A. Thérien
Terre de faïence. David 17,95 $

François Turcot
Derrière les forêts. Peuplade 17,95 $

Compte rendu par Sylvain Marois

L'art aime l'art et, parfois narcissique, parfois réflexive, la poésie, entre autres, aime être le sujet de son discours.

Serge Mongrain est poète et photographe. Auteur d'une douzaine de recueils, il roule sa bosse depuis de nombreuses années; et *Insoumission*, publié aux Éditions du Noroît en 2008, bénéficie de cette maturité grâce à laquelle il *ose* se questionner sur l'écriture. Mongrain aborde l'acte créateur en nous ramenant continuellement au présent, à la création même : « Rivé à ma table / torse penché / à taillader les pages ». Plus loin, « Des pages entières / frappées à vif / un coup d'œil sur la table / . . . / un rituel / ne servant qu'à ça / faire don ». Ce « don » s'articule d'abord autour d'un savant passage du « Je » au « Nous » pour faire ensuite place à l'omniprésence de l'eau, des glaises, des liquides et autres sèves dans « un océan souterrain / un domaine d'écorchés / vifs ». Cette mer prend ici la forme des innombrables bouquins qui encerclent le poète insoumis qui souhaite « Écrire peu / écrire tout le temps » et mettre « la littérature / toujours / au défi ».

Né en 1947 à Ottawa, Michel A. Thérien propose une poésie qui exsude le travail et la rigueur de la réécriture. Poète de la francophonie, militant de la langue française minoritaire, il se fait, dans *Terre de faïence*, défenseur de notre environnement affaibli qu'il faut « aimer jusqu'à la cicatrice ». Publié en 2009 aux Éditions David, un éditeur qui se consacre à la diffusion des auteurs franco-canadiens, *Terre de faïence* évoque, par son seul titre, la fragilité de la terre et l'urgence nécessaire face à « L'argile fissurée / dans l'inexorable cri du monde ». Il n'est pas question que du seul effondrement de notre *vaisseau*, mais bien de nous aussi avec nos imperfections, notre histoire et « notre liberté / parmi décombres / et champs de guerre ». Les mots de Thérien sont riches, parfois inquiétants, mais aussi porteurs d'espoir lorsqu'ils nous invitent à marcher « en nous-mêmes / défroissés du vide et de son étreinte ».

Derrière les forêts, de François Turcot, est une invitation à suivre une singulière trame narrative « derrière la frontière / la palissade le seuil des certitudes / le baume des forêts ligneuses ». Publié en 2008 chez La Peuplade, *Derrière les forêts* s'est mérité le prix Émile-Nelligan en 2008 (prix qu'il remportera à nouveau l'année suivante pour *Cette maison n'est pas la mienne*, aussi publié chez La Peuplade). Stimulée par l'invisible, le poème s'incarne ici dans le descriptif : « Emportés par les tumultes / secondés par la fureur / des vies imaginaires / voir surgir ce qui reste caché ».

Dialoguing

Michael Nathanson
Talk. Playwrights Canada $14.95

Michael Healey
Courageous. Playwrights Canada $16.95

John Murphy
The Heretic. Talonbooks $16.95

Kevin Kerr
Skydive. Talonbooks $16.95

Reviewed by Katherine McLeod

Michael Nathanson's Governor General's Award-nominated play *Talk* lets us listen to the disintegration of an eighteen-year friendship sparked by the utterance of a single word. In attempting to defend the word, spoken by his girlfriend (who we hear about but never see or hear onstage), Gordon says, "I'm just talking about free-flowing dialogue, easy exchange," to which Josh replies, "It ain't free and it clearly ain't easy"—thus, infused within the politics of *Talk* are the affective and personal ramifications of disagreement. Through Nathanson's clever shifts between dialogue and asides to the audience, everyone becomes a listener in this conversation about what the conversation itself means, a process that Josh and Gordon call "dialoguing." Gordon describes this discursive process as "[t]rying to reach an understanding," but, even while trying to reach a common ground, neither friend can ignore the hurtful edge of words. Yet, the play argues that dialoguing is necessary even if difficult, thereby asking the audience not to resolve its discord but rather to listen to and *talk* about it.

In the opening scene of Michael Healey's *Courageous*, the lives of three couples intersect in a marriage license office at Toronto's City Hall. We meet Tammy and Todd (waiting to be married), Lisa (witness to the marriage), Tom (marriage officer), Arthur (a bystander talked into becoming a witness and who we later learn is Tom's partner). After Tammy and Todd are married, another couple, Brian and Martin, arrives, but the marriage officer, Tom, declines to marry them based on his religious beliefs. Brian, a lawyer, files a complaint against Tom and the scenes that follow stage a highly nuanced debate between Brian and Tom and then Martin and Arthur. As Tom concedes at one point, "you'll gain whatever compensation they feel is just, and I'll lose my job. But so what? What is the point of all of this?" Brian responds, "It will right a wrong. I have a duty to do that, don't I? As a responsible citizen? I mean, what if it wasn't me that day? I mean, not a lawyer, not someone who knows the law, but just, two guys." Act II begins with a jarring shift as Todd self-reflexively comments on his new role as narrator: "Everybody was like: 'Why do you get to narrate this part?'" As Todd narrates, we step into his turbulent married-life with Tammy, the same marriage we witnessed in the play's opening scene. The topic of religion, from Act I, returns when two new characters to the second act, Pete and George, secretly baptize Todd's daughter. Another parallel between Acts I and II is that both involve a character from outside of Canada, Arthur (from Sudan) and George (from Somalia), through whose eyes we are asked to reflect upon Canada's freedoms. For instance, George reminds Todd that the agreement of marriage depends upon context: "This place. It is a construction of yes. You make an idea into a real place by saying yes, over and over." In many ways, this dialogue that takes place at the end of the play brings us back full-circle to the discursive space of the marriage license office where the utterance of "yes" has a tangible and legal impact on the construction of reality.

A play that structurally and thematically circles back to the "beginning" is John Murphy's *The Heretic*. Opening with an unnamed "Mystery Man" suggesting, "I know, why don't we start at the very beginning" before switching to a

professor's lecture—"In the beginning was the Word"—the play shifts among several different voices, which Murphy suggests should all be played by one actor. As he states in the play's introductory notes, "There's something incredibly powerful about one person getting up, all alone, and saying, 'I believe this!'" Belief is the premise of the play: to explore the question of, as Murphy asks, "if there is a God, why would he create us?" For Murphy, or, rather, for his alter ego Jesus Murphy, the answer is entertainment. Billing himself as the "antidote" to religion, Jesus Murphy is the character Murphy *performs* while, simultaneously, raising concerns about performing this role onstage. Thus, *The Heretic* becomes a play about confronting the dangers of theatre and arguing for the importance of staging difficult subject matter. It critiques religious fundamentalism while turning to humour as a way of recognizing a shared humanity: "When you get a couple hundred people all laughing together, all saying yes together, it's a powerful feeling—a force of nature; it makes me feel like anything is possible in this world. I guess you could say it's made me a believer—in us."

All of the plays discussed in this review foreground the performativity of conversation, but one that stands out as challenging the way in which the body is implicated in this performative dialogue is Kevin Kerr's *Skydive*. The play began with the friendship of James Sanders and Bob Frazer (the two actors who played Morgan and Daniel in the first production) and their discussions with Kerr about wanting to expand the ways in which disability is represented onstage. Early in the play's development, Kerr experimented with the idea of having Sanders, a quadriplegic, flying onstage. Through the fulcrum-like technology of ES Dance Instruments, "the bodies of both performers, each with very different physicalities, were essentially equalized." Performers, as Kerr explains, "were liberated to move in ways that none of us able-bodied or otherwise could ever dream of, while at the same time they were restrained and dependent entirely upon the actions of the operators." What results, then, is a collaborative theatre rooted in physicality. Stage directions call for an imagining of aerial choreographies not only related to the recurring theme of flying but also to the repetition of childhood memories and enactments of Freudian dream sequences of swimming, drowning, and floating up into the stars. The play's premise is set in the opening scene—two brothers are skydiving when one parachute doesn't open—and, from this moment of falling, the play leads us through their relationship as one brother attempts to perform what he calls "paratherapy" in order to cure the other brother of agoraphobia and vertigo. For this reader, amid the spectacle of the paratherapeutic journey and its aerial acrobatics, what is most powerfully conveyed is the sadness of knowing that, when two lives are flying through time alongside each other, one will inevitably move ahead. Dialogue ends as life ends. As Morgan's poignant words to his brother articulate, "You've slipped ahead into the morning, somewhere unknown, and I'm left behind again, just stuck in darkness."

Mapping the Arc of Desire

Charles Noble
Sally O: Selected Poems and Manifesto.
Thistledown $21.95

P.K. Page
Kaleidoscope: Selected Poems of P.K. Page.
Porcupine's Quill $24.95

Anne Simpson
The Marram Grass: Poetry & Otherness.
Gaspereau $26.95

Reviewed by Kaya Fraser

In reviewing these three volumes, I find myself in a similar position as the writers and editors of each of these books, trying to present and synthesize a collection of

different written artefacts, making a case for their grouping while acknowledging their discreteness. This is a task that each book lays bare in its own way, as it struggles (like any selected or collected volume) with the problems inherent in anthologization. How do the selected texts suggest new meanings when regrouped this way? Why this way and not another? What has been left out and/or changed, and why? What audience does this selection serve or speak to? Two of the three titles—the selected poems—are relatively explicit in addressing these questions, while Simpson's volume, which is unaccompanied by any apparatus such as an introduction or afterword, must suggest its answers implicitly. On the surface, these are quite dissimilar books; but there is common ground among them, beyond the fact that they are collections, and as such participate in the special rhetorical complexities of that form. They all also document a striving towards a new poetics. The precise natures of these new poetics are different in each volume, as these are three entirely distinct poetic sensibilities. The striving is what they share. Each collection presents its author as dedicated to the quest for a new level of perception and artistic utterance.

Noble's work was the least familiar to me as I approached this review, I will admit. The sometimes-used epithet for him, "the farmer-poet," is only literally true: Noble is a poet who also happens to be a farmer. What one might expect from that nickname, however, is not exactly what one gets from his writing. This is not nostalgic, agricultural lyricism, but rather complex, postmodern inquiries into perception and place. Noble reveals in the book's "Afterword": "Earlier I was sometimes tagged with 'farmer-poet,' which sometimes I kind of liked wearing, albeit with some embarrassment, being always a little too alien for 'salt of the earth,' 'whole-some' never quite adding up." What does add up, from the crazy arithmetic of Noble's verse, are witty, arresting descriptions that put Noble in league with Kroetsch (when he's not being hyperintellectual) and Purdy (when he's not being sentimental). There are also shades of early Ondaatje, particularly in the longer excerpts.

The thirty-nine-page "Afterword" is an interesting addition to the text. Partly a spoof of jargon-laden, name-dropping theory-prose, the text is (deliberately, I'm sure) nearly unreadable. But the joke is also not a joke. In some of its lucid moments, the "Afterword" reflects on the collection, presenting Noble as self-effacing and not entirely convinced that this project is merited: "A selected, let alone a collected, poems had not interested me, on the one hand, for the problem of so many long to book-length poems, and, on the other hand, because I saw so much of my past work as failure, and just in a conventional sense of that word," he writes. It was in part Jon Paul Fiorentino's thoughts on "a poetics of failure," explored in an issue of *Open Letter*, that inspired him to think that a collection could be viable. What if, instead of looking at a collection or anthology as a carefully chosen "bouquet" of successes, we saw it as an archive of interesting failures? The idea is intriguing, and although it perhaps does not make up for the arduousness of reading the "Afterword" (to my mind the joke went on a bit too long), it nevertheless puts this record of Noble's work in a fresh context, suggesting a poet who has successfully pursued failure—that is, perhaps, a poetics of incompleteness, and therefore of possibility.

P.K. Page was seeking quite nearly the opposite—or at least this is Zailig Pollock's view, in the introduction to *Kaleidoscope*—when she fell into her famous "silence" in the middle of her life. Rather than fertile incompleteness, Page desperately sought completion: the missing piece for her was a "third way" between or beyond the sensual/intellectual dichotomy that bedevilled her early work, and that arguably stymied her

poetic voice for a decade. Pollock contends that it was Page's discovery of Idries Shah's brand of Sufism that unlocked this third element, spirituality: "Sufism rejects all forms of dualism in favour of Page's 'Triclopic view' of the unified self consisting of *nafs* (sensation), *qalb* (understanding) and *ruh* (spirit). . . . The spiritual discipline of Sufism, which Page took very seriously indeed, sanctioned her celebration of the sensuous world and provided her with an intellectual framework for this celebration." While some might accuse it of being overly schematic, this argument is well borne out in the work collected in *Kaleidoscope*. The poems are presented in order by date of composition (or editorial best guess), making the totality of Page's oeuvre, with its changing concerns and methods, clearer than in any previous collection. Pollock's editorial practice is sound and respectful, creating a text that fills a longstanding void in studies of this eminent Canadian modernist: a good, scholarly collection of Page's poems. *The Hidden Room*, a two-volume set also published by The Porcupine's Quill in 1997, is aesthetically pleasing but contains several editorial stumbling blocks. The poems are undated, for one thing. But more problematically, the copy texts are also questionable: Pollock finds that *The Hidden Room* "uses versions of poems from the earliest collections in which they appear, rather than the latest, even when Page had revised the poems for later publication and had repeatedly authorized their reprinting over the years in the revised versions." Pollock addresses this problem, having consulted with Page before she died in 2010 in order to choose source-versions with her assent; but more importantly, Pollock maintains a rigorous transparency and consistency about those choices. The book also provides tools useful to any type of reader approaching these poems: it not only has its own apparatus (introduction, textual note, composition dates, explanatory notes, title index, index of first lines, and short biography), but it is also to be accompanied by an exhaustive hypermedia edition of Page's work—although frustratingly, no details of this edition are to be found either in this book or on the publisher's web site. Still, even on its own merits, this collection is by far the most comprehensive and useful edition of Page's poems that I have yet seen.

Anne Simpson's book of essays is somewhat loosely collected under the idea of its subtitle: *Poetry & Otherness.* Very readable, interspersed with line drawings by the author, it meditates on language and the creative impetus in elegant, simple prose. The first essay, "A Hundred and Fifty Psalms at Twilight," is one of the most engaging ones in the collection, as Simpson considers what the language of the natural world might be, and how poetry might take this language into account when it tries to speak of the nonhuman: "In order to talk about the wild, we may need another way of speaking, or of writing . . . Or perhaps we simply need to expand our notion of language. But what would it be like, this enriched language? It would have an intimate connection with the body and the space inhabited by the body. It would embrace multiplicity. . . . Such a language is a richly textured tapestry of speech, a caterwauling of sounds." Simpson identifies poetry as the mode of human communication that allows the nearest proximity to this wild, or as she calls it, "tawny" language. The essay is thought-provoking, but problematically leaves out one important mode of expression that falls between the structure of language and the wildness of noise: music. It seems a curious lacuna in her argument, one that a more seasoned essayist (Jan Zwicky comes to mind) might not allow. The rest of the essays in the collection are similarly preoccupied with what poetry is, and its potential to supersede the boundary between self and other. This is sensitive and, at moments, poignant creative non-fiction.

I fear, however, that it dallies with theory in a way that will probably make it dismissible to some academics. Indeed, the question of the book's intended audience is vexed. Assiduous footnotes and references to numerous theorists suggest it is intended for academic reception. Some of the "explanations" given in the essays, however, are aimed too low for this readership (e.g., referring to "the epic poem *Beowulf*"). This uneasiness may eventually relegate *The Marram Grass* to a readerless limbo, which would be unfortunate. There is much merit in these essays, even if they raise further questions (and shouldn't an essay do just that?). Like Noble's and Page's, Simpson's collection probes the failings and possibilities of poetic language, not coming to a final conclusion, but "mapping the arc of desire" that keeps the pursuit possible.

The Poet's Novel (Un)framed

Ian Rae

From Cohen to Carson: The Poet's Novel in Canada. McGill-Queen's UP $95.00

Reviewed by Kevin McNeilly

Ian Rae's impressively cogent book aims to realign our critical approaches to the Canadian poet's novel—a sometimes tenuously, sometimes tendentiously hybrid form, practised by writers from A.M. Klein to Anne Michaels, that has become an uncanny staple of the contemporary Canadian canon. Rae asserts that, instead of concentrating on how the poet's novel fractures conventions of genre, we would do better—as he does, with considerable detail and care—to address how such writers establish distinct sets of methods and conventions. The poet's novel is not necessarily a genre unto itself, but Rae claims it's also important not to regard it simply as a dilution or a fracturing of novelistic narrative by lyric; rather, the poet's novel becomes, in various instances, a re-imagining of narrative temporalities in and through the figural. And the key figure running through all of the work Rae encounters and reads here is the frame.

At the book's core is a set of five case studies, of Leonard Cohen's *The Favourite Game*, Michael Ondaatje's *Coming Through Slaughter*, trilogies by George Bowering (*Autobiology*; *Curious*; *A Short Sad Book*) and Daphne Marlatt (*Frames of a Story*; *Zócalo*; *Ana Historic*), and Anne Carson's *Autobiography of Red*. Rae's reading list seems at first glance to be genetic and linear, tracing the recent development of the genre in historically successive texts, but this impression is deceptive: his investigation of what amounts to a non-linear temporality brings out not influences or successions among these writers, but resonant assemblages of shared compositional tactics. Rae's critical style is not especially postmodern or post- anything; the generic blandness of his title suggests that if we open the book, we're likely to encounter another thematic study in Canadian cultural nationalism—although, thankfully, this is not so. One of the blessings of Rae's work is his ability to handle the fraught complexities of our latter-day cultural hybridity with a deftness and directness. The trope of the frame, which he appears to take from Marlatt, is neither simply theme nor trait, but amounts simultaneously to figure and disfigurement, at once delimiting and unknitting representational economies: in these texts, each "act of framing" is also for Rae "an act of unframing"—and his insistence here on the kinetic, on a phenomenology of the act, is significant—"because," he writes, these moments of framing "reconfigure previous stories and narrative techniques, as well as undermining their own media." This double movement, which (in a brief but necessary gesture of terminological wit) he names (un)framing, comes to involve the creative exploitation by these writers of the "instability of the frame as a structure"

to discover a means out of the thoroughly reified and thoroughly commodified form of the late-twentieth-century novel. (As analogues, the work of Jacques Rancière on the image or of Jean-François Lyotard on the figural come to mind, although Rae appears to have encountered neither when he wrote this book, nor does he choose to take up their continental idioms.) His extended close analyses of these five poet-novelists are impressively detailed and thorough, and Rae's intention is clearly to demonstrate how those deconstructive doublings play out in practice.

In each study, he attends particularly to the writers' engagements with visual media, particularly painting and photography, although he does begin with a discussion of serial form that collides Jack Spicer and Pierre Boulez—a musical gesture that points toward the undoing of a spatial-temporal antinomy within such media, and within these texts. It seems to me that despite his insistence on a fractured visuality, Rae is actually interested in how narrative time can be poetically thickened, to create what he calls "a sense of duration," an attenuating of the lived time of speaking subject, which is a particularly pressing critical concern in the context of a North American culture of distraction, in which reading time, or even simply taking a moment to attend to our lived and living spaces, is increasingly rare and dissipated. Anne Carson offers the principal impetus for all of Rae's readings, when she asserts (and Rae quotes her) that "to keep attention strong means to keep it from settling." Despite their bookish exterior, their contingent frame, Rae's readings make a strong creative virtue of unsettling us.

A Barnyard Romance

James Reaney
A Suit of Nettles. Porcupine's Quill $14.95

Reviewed by Robert David Stacey

There are very few examples of conventional pastoral in Canadian literature. In poetry, other than the odd lyric here and there, we can find only a handful of longer works that are informed by a genuine engagement with or participation in the pastoral tradition and its associated tropes, *topoi*, and forms. A Virgilian model undeniably operates—though with varying degrees of authority—in texts such as George Elliott Clarke's *Whylah Falls*, Lisa Robertson's *XECLOGUE*, Erin Mouré's *Sheep's Vigil by a Fervent Person*, Steve McCaffery's "Some Versions of Pastoral," and Dionne Brand's *Thirsty*. But the relationship between text and the informing, or at least cited, tradition is here mostly insincere, ironic, if not fully adversarial. It is also a highly mediated one, based as much on contemporary pastoral criticism as on actual pastoral poems. To read these texts alongside James Reaney's recently reissued *A Suit of Nettles*—a more (unconventionally) conventional book, but one no less skewed by Reaney's own reading of Spenser, Yeats, Marvell, and importantly Northrop Frye—is to realize two things: (1) that, because an author's writing is only ever the trace of his reading, any conscious attempt to write within or with respect to an established genre is always going to be contingent, partial, and potentially incommensurate with others' attempts to do the same, and (2) there may well be no such thing as the pastoral, only disputes about its meaning. (For this reason, it is one of the few genres that has generated more interesting criticism than it has primary texts, even as we recognize that pastoral writing, so often "academic" in nature, itself tends to collapse that very distinction.

So we are very fortunate indeed that The Porcupine's Quill has put out this fresh (and I must say handsome) edition of James Reaney's *A Suit of Nettles*, which is simultaneously a powerful, albeit uneven, book of poems and a powerful argument about the meaning and function of literary pastoral. First published by Macmillan in 1958, when it won the Governor General's Award for poetry that year, it bears more of a resemblance to Jay Macpherson's *The Boatman*, with its own cycle of pastoral lyrics, "The Sleepers," than to any of the pastorals mentioned above—though, being a collection of eclogues, it shares with these a more dialogic and contrastive form. What it does share with *The Boatman,* arguably the better book in terms of technique, is what both Reaney and Macpherson derived from their mentor Northrop Frye: namely, a utopian view of the literary aesthetic as a transformative and redemptive space set against the fallen world of reality and a concomitant romantic/Christian understanding of pastoral as the image of this ideal, an Eden of peace, plenitude, innocence, unity, and immanent meaning.

Personally, this is not a view of the pastoral I much like, but it is *a* view, and likely still the most powerful one in Canadian literary culture, having drifted into the criticism via Frye (*Anatomy* and *The Secular Scripture* as well as the "Conclusion" to *A Literary History of Canada*), Renato Poggioli (*The Oaten Flute*), and Leo Marx's reading of nineteenth-century American literature (*The Machine in the Garden*). While Paul Alpers, for one, has written passionately, and I'd say persuasively, against Frye's romantic understanding of the pastoral on the basis of its basic incommensurability with the bulk of pastoral writing which, following Virgil, tends rather to explore inadequacy, weakness, dispossession, and relative—as opposed to ultimate—states of being, this other tradition must nevertheless be given its due, not only because it underlies a great deal of our modern poetry in Canada (and not only that which advertises itself as pastoral or, in this particular sense, romantic) but also because such a view can enable and condition the creation of art as interesting and sometimes beautiful as Reaney's *A Suit of Nettles*, whether or not we want to call it "proper" pastoral.

Loosely based on Edmund Spenser's *Shepherd's Calendar, A Suit of Nettles* presents a series of dialogues not between shepherds but barnyard geese, organized by month, from January to December. The new edition has further emphasized this connection by adding some fine woodcut engravings by Jim Westergard. Here, as with Spenser and a great deal of English pastoral verse after him, an allegorical bias tends to open the way to satire. Reaney's book begins with the following invocation:

> Speak, muse of Satire, to this broken pen
> And from its blots and dribbling letter-strings
> Unloose upon our farm and barnyard—medicine.

Yet despite a few scatological thrills and some arresting violence of the Swiftian variety (much of it limited to the invocation itself) the satiric eclogues are the least compelling of the book, full of tepid and somewhat mechanical references to Canadian politics, literary critics, and classical philosophers—though there's a bit more energy in Reaney's attacks on planned parenthood and Quebec's reactionary church politics in the May and September eclogues, respectively.

If the text provides any "medicine," it is not by way of its satire but by way of its more general appeal to an imagination that transcends and steps outside the very historical world that is the focus of the satire. As suggested by the calendar form itself, the book is chiefly concerned with time—not calendar time but mortal time, the linearity and finitude of human life set against the endless natural cycle of birth,

decay, and death. This cycle and other paralyzing circles are figured everywhere in the book. At the Mome fair (after Momus, god of Satire) to which the geese flock in the September Eclogue, there is the Ferris wheel, the merry-go-round, and the "caterpillar ride." This last "[g]oes round and opens up its dusty top: infants look out hardening and changing into old men & women; the brown hood closes down; goes round, opens up, young children looking out and so on." To be trapped in this cycle (which, it must be said, you can only experience the one time around) is to forever remain a caterpillar. What is needed, Reaney makes plain, is some sort of metamorphosis, something that catapults one outside the fixed circle.

All the various constraints and losses featured in the text derive their energy from and gain their ultimate significance in relation to the existential theme. In December, when the birth of Jesus is celebrated with the death of geese, some geese are spared from the general slaughter so as to repopulate the barnyard: those set aside are banded with a ring. When the ring of Branwell, the melancholic main protagonist who wears a suit of nettles as a sign that he has been crossed in love, is stolen by his adversary, the oafish George, the long-suffering but always hopeful Effie (whose name suggests both effervescence and the ephemerality of human life) gives away her own ring so that she might accompany him and ease his passage into the next world. Proclaiming, "Who knows, at the very least we become men / When we die. Take off the suit of nettles / Of our selves," she invites Branwell to "listen to the ring / You think might save your life. What does it sound like?"

> Branwell: It's the merry-go-round at the fair
> Or the Ferris wheel far far far away.
> Effie: Life inside of that is a crazed prison
> Of despair. You can't possibly want it.
> Branwell: I can't help it, I'm afraid, I want the ring.
> I can't see a path that leads between one's
> Head and one's body.
> Effie: When you are changed then
> One arm may always remain a goose wing.

The feeling here is rather more Ovidian than Virgilian, just as the caterpillar ride is meant to recall the final stanza of Reaney's "Invocation to the Muse of Satire" which promises a new vision, that of "astonished moths / Bursting from their unusual, foul, and dark cocoons." True to its underlying romantic paradigm, *A Suit of Nettles* is finally a quest narrative, a search for spiritual and mental transcendence, for the transforming vision that might redeem mortal life from futility.

Needless to say, such a view is consistent with a Christian understanding of sacrifice and heavenly reward. Accordingly, "November" dramatizes the cynic Mopsus' "deathbed" conversion (well, it seemed rather precipitous to me) from platonic rationality to Christian belief:

> A sun, a moon, a crowd of stars,
> A calendar nor clock is he
> By whom I start my year.
> He is most like a sun for he
> Makes his beholders into suns,
> Shadowless and timeless.
> At the winter sunstill some say
> He dared be born; on darkest day
> A babe of seven hours
> He crushed the four proud and great directions
> Into the four corners of his small cradle.
> He made it what time of year he pleased, changed
> Snow into grass and gave to all such powers.

Here again, natural time is crushed, but more obviously by an act of faith that is no less an act of the imagination.

The reader had been warned to expect some change in Mopsus in the Argument to "March," the effect of Effie's statements in that eclogue. Whereas Spenser's "Aprill"

eclogue, an allegorical tribute to Elizabeth, is often cited as the centrepiece of his calendar poem, in a *Suit of Nettles* it is surely the early spring poem "March." It is here that Reaney's pastoral vision is most clearly articulated, and in the same poem that establishes Effie, not Branwell, as the true hero of the book and the closest thing to a spokesperson for Reaney. Branwell opens the eclogue by voicing incredulity at the midwife Effie's implacable joyfulness despite being "the drudge and scullion of the place." She responds:

> I dreamt I saw a white walled garden once
> Where a child sat playing on a panpipe
> Made, it seemed, of twinkling golden straw.
> He stopped and asked me how I liked its shape;
> I said its like for grace I never saw;
> He said its straws were cut from a farm
> In which our universe of stars is but a stone
>
> Sulking in fields of dew it cannot see.
> Branwell, I took my heart and opened it
> To better hear this strange glad minstrelsy.
> The shortest straw did to that place flit;
> Its everlasting music makes me fit
> To live through all ingratitude and dread,
> Rage, boredom and soul-starving deficit.
> If I prevent these eggs from being addled
> You must not sneer; this egg may hatch a heart
> That will not close itself against a golden dart.

This is tremendous poetry, skillfully composed and informed by a consistent and still-powerful belief in literature's transforming power, a power symbolized by the pipe-playing child in the garden. And despite Effie's willing acceptance of death in the final poem, it is finally a power geared to—that is to say it is on behalf of—life and the fragile physical hearts on which the vision depends.

This pastoral has none of the strengths of the other more terrestrial and pragmatic tradition, whose concerns are more immediate and its sought-for justice less cosmic, but it has its own rewards. On the whole, it is increasingly difficult to be open to such "strange glad minstrelsy" and to the salvational aesthetic that underpins it, but it is good that a text like this should be back to make us try.

Updating the Trickster

Deanna Reder and Linda M. Morra, eds. *Troubling Tricksters: Revisioning Critical Conversations.* Wilfrid Laurier UP $34.95

Reviewed by June Scudeler

The essays in *Troubling Tricksters: Revisioning Critical Conversations* chronicle the shift the Trickster performs from a postmodern transgressor to a figure more grounded in Indigenous specificity. Co-editor Deanna Reder notes that it has only been since the late 1980s that an infrastructure developed to analyze Native literature, with the trickster being the preferred trope to discuss Native literature. The strength of *Troubling Tricksters* is its grounding in Native literary nationalism, studies that engage not only the literature, but the communities', ways of knowing and traditions from which the work grew. Many of the essays are situated in tribal-specific ways of knowing: Warren Cariou's (Métis) suspicion that his Uncle Morris really is a *rigoureau*, the Métis shapeshifter; Eldon Yellowhorn's (Piikani) rediscovering how Naapi created humans; and Reder's reading of Steve Sanderson's (Cree) *Darkness Calls*, a comic book published by the Healthy Aboriginal Network. By anchoring her reading of *Darkness Calls* in Cree values such as respect and the Cree trickster, Wesakecak, Reder illustrates the complexity that a nationalist perspective brings to Native texts. Linda M. Morra and Christine Kim investigate how non-Aboriginal authors such as Hiromi Goto, Sheila Watson, Mordecai Richler, and Gail Anderson-Dargatz employ trickster figures in their

work. As Morra notes, these authors use the "anti-trickster," which may have some Indigenous characteristics but ultimately embodies Eurocentric ideas.

Troubling Tricksters does an excellent job of providing context for the popularity of the Trickster in Native literature studies. Margery Fee and Kristina Fagan (Labrador Métis) investigate how using the trickster to explain Native literature ignores the agency of Indigenous writers and views Native literatures as monolithic. However, Fee notes that many Native artists coalesced around the trickster as a means to reconfigure social relations, such as the Committee to Re-Establish the Trickster, founded in 1986 by Tomson Highway (Cree), Lenore Keeshig-Tobias (Anishinaabe), and Daniel David Moses (Delaware). Reder and Morra include the Committee's 1986 essay "Let's Be Our Own Tricksters, Eh," which exhorts, "WE CAN TELL OUR OWN STORIES—IN OUR OWN WAY." Fagan troubles the trickster by noting the tensions between urban and gay Aboriginal peoples' pan-tribal use of the Trickster and the more tribally based grounded reading of the Trickster, differences that echo the conflicts within the larger Aboriginal community.

The collection moves beyond a purely academic lens to include creative works by Niigonwedom James Sinclair (Anishinaabe), Thomas King (Cherokee), and Jill Carter's essay on Spiderwoman Theatre. Sonny Assu (Laich-kwil-tach) in "Personal Totems" humorously recounts his obsession with pop culture. (He cites *Star Trek: The Next Generation*'s Lt. Cmdr. Worf's refusal to be assimilated by the Borg as the Indian response to the *Indian Act*.) He explains how Raven likes to "keep up with the Joneses" both in the consumption of pop culture and in the transformation of consumer culture into Assu's "Personal Totems" series of iDrums. Clearly, tricksters, in whatever guise, are still a force to be reckoned with.

Ectoplasmic Insanities

Joe Rosenblatt
The Lunatic Muse. Exile $22.95

Joe Rosenblatt; Michel Christensen, illus.
Parrot Fever. Exile $19.95

Reviewed by Catherine Owen

The Dogfather, former or current aliases Muttsy, Red Canoe, Moishe, Puggsy, Mandril Blue-Butt, The Loser, Padre Gregorious Luminoso and other devilishly apropos monikers, resists lengthy (and sometimes any) repartees on Canadian poets and their shrinking aquiferous habitat. "O Shaddap," he is wont to harrumph, pre-martini, if pressed on the subject of granting systems, writing departments, or the shenanigans of the once oft-soused Al Purdy.

He lets loose, however, in *The Lunatic Muse*, a collection of tributes, recriminations, confessions, and poetic theories all shaped by a piranha-fierce preoccupation: to laud the role that a non-economically motivated, deliriously outré insanity plays in the creation of poems, and especially throughout the oeuvres of such wildly vagabond bards as Milton Acorn, Brian Brett, Anne Szumigalski, and Gwendolyn McEwen, their Canadian brand of madness haunted, as is Rosenblatt's, by such loopy predecessors as Emily Dickinson, John Clare, and Christopher Smart.

The impetus for the project came partially from a series of lectures Rosenblatt gave in Italy, the culmination of which was a paper on poetic lunacy delivered at the University of Bologna in 1999. Yet the roots of Rosenblatt's obsession with the "demons fluttering about from neuron branch to branch" can be found at the naissance of his poetic vocation. Then he realized, much to Acorn's and even Purdy's disappointment, that his poetry could not emerge from a rational politic and would not thus exist to lend a "poetic voice" to public "grievances," whether of the Marxist-Leninist or the

common or garden anti-imperialist variety.

The Lunatic Muse is full of gripy echoes against the deliriously wily imperatives of Rosenblatt's poetics, in opposition to his forty years of poems from the cells of undersea asylums, the boudoirs of feline brothels, the squawks of feathered sociopaths, and the growls of canine matricides. Purdy grouses about Rosenblatt's seeming indifference to the Cuban revolution, an audience member questions the connection between Jewish identity and his bumblebee pieces, Acorn chides him about his lack of ambition to become a People's Poet, especially in the light of the prole experiences he gained in slaving as a freight handler for the CPR, and Seymour Levitan expresses bewilderment that Rosenblatt can't just pretend that the feral creatures populating his imaginative visions are "stunningly beautiful women" instead, to placate conventional expectations and thereby garner a larger readership. Rosenblatt, however, seems to respond to all these jibes with a hefty shrug of his mammalian shoulders as if to say, "Why limit the dementia that ferments in my mind's nitrogeneous climate?"

Why indeed? In poetry, of all the arts, a vocation for the most part unconstrained by economic reins, an art that exists, or should, beyond the puerile dictates of the marketplace and the mercantilistic boxings of brute saleability, why should lunacy not serve as a shaping force? Rosenblatt describes the lunatic impulse variously as a stubborn inaccessibility, an obsession with mysticism or the supernatural, a persistent predilection for escapism, a glee in the unadulterated oxygen of inspiration and freedom, a unique greenhouse, his zoo muse, the gift of a heightened state of awareness, the poet's dark side, an idiosyncratic cross-pollination, a sacred labour, psychic ecstasy, an induction by hauntingly alien voices, the creation of a private language, one ambiguous yet never obfuscating, spirochetes of delusion and, more conventionally, demonic possession.

Aware that "memorable poetry" cannot be created by individuals who are so "subjectively mad" that their roller-coaster psyches rise to mania and plummet to the "black dog" of depression within the span of a sonnet, Rosenblatt nonetheless glories in such poems of insane proportions as Acorn's "A Natural History of Elephants," Smart's "My Cat, Jeoffrey," and McEwen's shorter but still tipsy "A Breakfast for Barbarians." Emphasizing the spiritual nimbus that accrues around such seminal poems (and especially the elephant-semen-riddled Acorn piece), Rosenblatt refuses to shrink from words like soul, beauty, mystical, inspiration, death, truth, and eternity in his appraisal of these wacky opuses.

In a society riddled with a combination of New Age psychobabble, media blips, and academe's dry deconstructions, Rosenblatt relishes these words as syllabic anchors, mystical mouthfuls, their essence capitalized in his cortex as were all those words Emily Dickinson marked as significant, primary. Like the sand in the ill-fated chowder Rosenblatt once concocted for Anne Szumigalski on one of her visits to his curmudgeonly idyll in Qualicum Beach, the poets he extols are made of equally gritty and inextricable signatures. Beneath the slick bikini bottoms our society slides us, however yieldingly or convulsively into, is that sand, wedged uncomfortably in one's crevices, in the manner of all moon-addled poets, its presence somehow rendering us more alive, more connected, even if to the not always amenable aspects of existence.

Rosenblatt's latest long poem, *Parrot Fever,* makes this analogy especially vivid. Its book-length invective against Brett's parrot Tuco, whose strident whistle turned the dozy bard's double malt into a missile for tragic tipplers, becomes, in the fermentative muck of the poet's own lingua franca, a tribute to the musefying potency of such discordant, discombobulating elements as avian

screeches. The parrot's "canticle from Hell" turns Virgil on the initially irate Rosenblatt, leading him in a "sacred dance" of language towards essential, if rupturous questions of death, parentage, and the machinations of a world gone commerce-mad.

And herein lies the sacrality of the insane artist. They attend to incidents that others, outside of the lunatic realm, would dismiss, reduce, or expel with the emotion of the instant—"Damn that impertinent bird!" Rosenblatt, however, as Milt did with the elephants, or Mr. Christopher with his humble feline, elevates the moment into a spur, a catalyst, an inner hounding to match sound and texture to what transcends mere sense, thereby catching the shimmer of life beyond that of the narrowly human.

The poet says "yes," then listens, watches at a depth nearly killed by distractions, ownerships, speed, says "yes," again, then writes down the mysterious shapes of these joyous and difficult affirmatives. This holy pace, this epiphanic act, when achieved, albeit rarely, is perhaps the most sane dwelling one can inhabit. A "nobility of soul" (how arcane and naïve both crucial words sound!), in Theodore Roethke's formulation, is considered mad when it is "at odds with circumstance." Certainly such is the case with the poets that Rosenblatt commemorates in *The Lunatic Muse*, including his own flat-footed, daubing, lumpbacked, martini-quaffing, cleft-chinned, kitty adoring, persistently anti-party poetry-of-the-deeps scribbling persona.

Rosenblatt's first poetic mentor, the New York matron of the 1950s salon, Marguerite Harris, counselled him, after ensuring he could clearly distinguish between the neurotic excretions of the truly insane and the patterned caca of the artist, to remember to "put a little moon into what you do in your poems." Joe has certainly pledged fidelity to this dictum, linguistically, imaginatively, mystically. In his daily life too, I might add, he's been known to inject a little beam of lunacy into the most potentially mundane affairs.

Three spots of time rise from the murk of memory. In 1996, when I went on my first boating excursion with, as he was then dubbed, Moishe Redcanoe, he soberly dropped his line into the depths before suddenly, on feeling a wee tug, bursting out with a raucous guffaw and the invitation, "That's right my little League of Canadian Poets' members, come to papa." Still young enough to venerate the institution, I was pleasurably appalled. Long after this, on a Day of the Dead boat cruise with photographer Karen Moe and me in 2002, Rosenblatt disrupted the other party-goers by slumping on his duff in one corner of the dance floor, sporting a garish monster mask, deliberately positioned upside down—a gleefully humorless Caliban amid the frivolous sprites and sylphs. And one December, a year or two ago, there was the Dogfather, spryly clad in yarmulke and a fisherman's sweater, a faux-jeweled clip-on earring in his snout, responding to the perplexed Torontonian visual artist Don Jon Louis, who had arrived for dinner, only to be met by a poker-faced yet bespangled bard with, "What? Don Jon. Is there something wrong? What?"

Mortality and Memory

Stephen Rowe
Never More There. Nightwood $17.95

W.H. New
The Rope-maker's Tale. Oolichan $16.95

Brent MacLaine
Athena Becomes a Swallow and Other Voices from the Odyssey. Goose Lane $17.95

Reviewed by Paul Kennett

Never More There by Stephen Rowe is a collection of both long and short poems that are largely concerned with the meaning of place and identity: what it feels like to dwell in a place and to be from a place, often in and around Gander, Newfoundland. Other poems focus on an object, like an

axe or a wallet. In "Gathering Wood" Rowe writes, "I palm the axe that angles the wall, / stands taunting in stillness / and take it to the woodpile. Start hacking. / Its creature is ravenous, the way it rives." Many of the poems articulate a life that seems rustic and organized around "wild" spaces. In this respect the writing echoes a lot of what I think I know about Newfoundland, knowledge gleaned from Newfoundland literature: the land is beautiful but demanding, harsh, and majestic; the people are stoic and salt-of-the-earth; their lives are understood through their interactions with the land, like chopping wood.

The most arresting poems are the ones that compose portraits of the narrator's father and grandfather, poems that extend past the salt-of-the-earth meditations and grapple instead with the anxiety of a mortal lineage. The reader learns that the grandfather was a strong man whose physique and personality exceeded the merely human: "You're bent over, / legs solid as spruce trunks, holding a shovel in your large hands. . . . You're short, but broad in the shoulders; hunched over baring teeth, growling like a Kodiak." And yet this monster of a man succumbs to an early illness, "Nearing fifty, [his] legs weakened," and he dies while the narrator's father is still a teenager. We learn later in the book that the narrator's father also died young, and he confesses, "Now at twenty-five my knees give me trouble."

And yet, as though to avoid the easy pathos of inherited malady, the narrator admits to the problematic interactions of memory and imagination—storytelling is implicated as always incomplete, always grasping at straws, "Pieces of you have been elided, handed to me to decode, break down / and reconstruct. Never enough and I hate to fill in the blanks around your name."

The Rope-maker's Tale by W.H. New and *Athena Becomes a Swallow* by Brent MacLaine are similarly entwined with the past, but the literary past rather than a personal one. The poems in *The Rope-maker's Tale* are anchored around images of rope, circles, cycles, repetition, and the permeable nature of enclosure, and tell of a group of Travellers named for their roles (the Man, the Woman, the Waterwoman, the Keeper, etc.); in this respect the book recalls Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*. The Travellers inhabit a time and place that echoes the medieval, but that is also draped in the trappings of a somewhat shabby, somewhat sinister Circus (an example of New's play with *circle*, *circuit*, *rings*, and *enclosure*) populated with deceitful barkers and lewd carnies.

The Travellers articulate their stories one by one, and despite the quasi-medieval setting, manage to locate themselves in a relatively timeless space. The poetry grapples with enormous themes, and yet does so in a remarkably original, unsentimental fashion. In part III, "Birthing Brawling," the Keeper describes, "where women tell each / other husband-truths and when the river flows, how / to live with silence, how to boil soup from shoots of stone, and poison rats when the wet season comes." A muddy, somewhat tainted subtext lurks in the poetry, and New has the dexterity to work his themes into ingenious word play and even puns, "but they have watched how emperors / have coined themselves as deities." *The Rope-maker's Tale* is engaging, and as I read through the book, I was frequently reminded of two lines from part I, "Fairground": "Being human, they lied, / and therefore lived: / to draw figures, tell me tales, / and counsel what they reckoned they believed."

Brent MacLaine acknowledges in his Afterword to *Athena Becomes a Swallow* that the book's project was to "give voice to some of the minor characters" in Homer's epic *The Odyssey*. He believes that the lives of the coast-dwelling folk in Homer's tale have much in common with the

similarly located folk in Atlantic Canada. The poems are contemporary in language and place the various speakers in relation to the events of the great story in which they have been, up until now, only supporting players. "Elpenor's Soliloquy" begins with the lines, "I was sick to death of pigs—tired of looking / at their bristly skin, their rooting and rutting, / their dredging up the muddy sty." This concern with physical conditions permeates the collection, a welcome addition to Homer-inspired literature—what MacLaine terms "piggyback literature."

Otherworldly Canadian Collections

Nancy Kilpatrick, ed.
Evolve: Vampire Stories of the New Undead. Edge Science Fiction and Fantasy $16.95

Robert J. Sawyer, ed.
Distant Early Warnings: Canada's Best Science Fiction. Robert J. Sawyer $22.95

Reviewed by Carolyne Van Der Meer

Both these anthologies surprised me. I did not expect the quality I discovered in either of them, though my reasons for doubt differed in each case. A long-time appreciation for the Victorian gothic and specifically for Bram Stoker's *Dracula* has led to a continuing fascination with modern-day evolutions of the vampire. I looked to Nancy Kilpatrick's anthology with enthusiasm, though I did not recognize any of the Canadian authors whose work was published within its pages. However, when I read her introduction, I had mixed emotions. On the one hand, Kilpatrick shows herself to be immensely knowledgeable in vampire lore and an authority on vampire writings, movies, and television productions; to a find a true understanding of the breadth of the modern vampire genre (if one can call it that) and its roots was both useful and exciting. On the other hand, the colloquial nature of Kilpatrick's writing presented her knowledge in a package that could have been more attractive. Despite the excellent content, I found it hard to get past the unsophisticated writing style, and the often long and winding sentence structure.

In terms of the quality of the thirteen pieces that followed, my resistance was unfounded. Kilpatrick delivers on her promise to illustrate the ever-evolving nature of the undead through a series of high-quality stories. As she points out, the anthology represents all the Canadian provinces but for three, and only one of the three territories: vampire fiction clearly has a strong hold on this nation.

With stories that portray the vampire as do-gooder, sensualist, sexual deviant, moralist, trickster, and predator, *Evolve* covers the spectrum of vampire evolution. Favourites were "Resonance" by Mary E. Choo, in which vampire Peg befriends Sophie, a professional violinist who has been grieving her husband's death for more than a year. Despite Peg's growing loyalty to and protection of non-vampire Sophie, she still thirsts for human blood and gives in one time too many to her hunger. As a result, her vampire collective must change her identity and relocate her to protect the coven, forcing her to abandon Sophie.

"Red Blues" by Michael Skeet tracks a blues guitarist vampire's hunt for a young woman who comes to hear him play nightly at a club where he is doing an extended gig. Charming and magnetic, he reels her in, only to brutally feed from her and leave her corpse in an alley. Colleen Anderson's "An Ember Amongst the Fallen" is one of the most disturbing in the collection because it explores the notion of vampires raising humans for consumption, much in the way that humans raise various livestock. And as bestiality is forbidden in our society, so is it forbidden in this one to copulate with humans (actually referred to as cattle). In this story, the main character, Buer, must wrestle with the sins he has committed during a weak moment.

"Mama's Boy" by Sandra Wickham is another short but shocking exposé of the depth of vampire cruelty. Ruthie's husband Christopher finally reveals to her that he is a vampire and the son she is about to birth will feed on her and kill her in the process. Christopher's betrayal leads her to seek another solution, one that shows the human capacity for revenge. "A Murder of Vampires" by Bev Vincent has the comfortable form of a hard-boiled mystery but in a world populated by vampires. None of the selections disappointed me, and many of them made me reconsider my own notions of vampire literature—what I had believed it to be and what it has become.

The title of Robert J. Sawyer's collection *Distant Early Warnings* refers to the DEW Line, the Distant Early Warning Line, a string of radar stations in Canada's far north set up to detect incoming Soviet bombers during the Cold War. It ultimately revealed how little I know about science fiction, particularly Canadian science fiction. My first uncertainty came from the fact that the collection was published under Sawyer's own imprint. How could I take this seriously? What I didn't know but quickly learned is that Sawyer is a respected and known authority of the genre, and that is precisely *why* he has his own imprint. The next thing I discovered was that as much as Canada has a well-founded vampire literature genre, it also has a long-established and reputed science fiction tradition. As Sawyer points out in his introduction, every author in the collection has either won or been nominated for the Hugo Award, the genre's top international prize, or has won the Aurora, Canada's leading science fiction crown.

And so I embarked on reading this anthology with all my preconceived ideas shattered. The first story in the collection, "In Spirit," by Paddy Ford, could actually be called a novella, spanning eighty-eight pages. Politically relevant and emotionally charged because of it, "In Spirit" explores the development of a new technology called Deep Projection, which allows "the impacts of past transformations to be *directly re-experienced*—by allowing the past to be *directly revisited* from the present." It is the year 2033 and protagonist Raed is in his thirtieth year of incarceration at the Lewisburg Federal Penitentiary in Pennsylvania, serving one-thousand back-to-back life terms after having been convicted of being an accomplice to the World Trade Center attack in 2001. Raed has been selected by a group of psychologists to participate in the Deep Projection program, research into which has recently been allowed to continue following an international hearing at The Hague that has deeply questioned the potentially evil uses of such a technology. The research sanctioned at The Hague targets use of the program for exposing convicted criminals to the emotional havoc they have caused through their crimes by having them revisit virtual scenes from the fallout. We travel with Raed through his visits to various moments during this tragedy—onto the 767 at Logan International Airport in Boston, to the home of a victim from that very flight who leaves his final message to his wife on their answering machine, into the South Tower of the World Trade Center moments before its collapse, to the daycare his daughter attended and the ultimate impact his actions had on her—among others. There are twists and turns that we discover as Raed pieces together the rationale behind his participation in the program—and begins to set aside the fanaticism that drives him once he is exposed to the pain of his victims.

While there are many other stories in the collection worth discussing, this selection took centre stage and set the tone for the quality and the spirit of adventure in the whole anthology. Also superlative was James Alan Gardner's "The Ray-Gun: A Love Story," in which Jack and Kirsten

realize that their lives have been inexplicably formed by an alien weapon.They joke about the ray-gun having had the power to make things happen, of its desire to be abandoned to the ocean depths, where Jack and Kirsten dispose of it. But Gardner laces their speculations with the ray-gun settling near a long-since crashed alien ship on the sea bottom, suggesting nothing is coincidental after all.

Selections by Julie E. Czerneda ("Bubbles and Boxes"), Spider Robinson ("You Don't Know My Heart"), Nalo Hopkinson ("A Raggy Dog, A Shaggy Dog"), and Sawyer himself ("Shed Skin") reinforce the high quality of this collection. In addition, a final section entitled "Lightning Round," which features several two-page adventures, is a solid way to end the anthology, illustrating that curiosity can be piqued and tension created in strategically written short pieces. The collection culminates with a useful reference section on science fiction awards and online resources.

Contra-dictions des Amériques

Winfried Siemerling; Patricia Godbout, trad.
Récits nord-américains d'émergence : culture, écriture et politique de re/connaissance. PUL 34,95 $

Compte rendu par Emir Delic

Publié originalement en 2005 sous le titre *The New North American Studies : Culture, Writing, and the Politics of Re/cognition* et paraissant ici dans une belle traduction de Patricia Godbout, ce livre de Winfried Siemerling s'inscrit pleinement dans la renaissance que connaissent les études des Amériques depuis le tournant du nouveau millénaire.

L'ouvrage aborde, dans une optique interdisciplinaire, comparative, et transnationale, les modes d'appréhension de la différence et de l'altérité que représente le Nouveau Monde, et souligne l'ambivalence fondamentale des identités qui s'y créent et recréent. Cette ambivalence se donne à voir et à comprendre, selon l'auteur, sous la forme d'une dualité, car les constructions identitaires et culturelles des Amériques reposent sur deux cadres de référence : un cadre « ancien », d'où émanent des schèmes interprétatifs et cognitifs bien établis, et un cadre « nouveau », qui ne saurait être entièrement saisi à partir de schèmes existants. Aussi bien le « nouveau » révèle-t-il les limites de la connaissance de l'« ancien » et invite à leur dépassement. Pour rendre compte de cette collision et collusion de différents systèmes de référence et de connaissance—collision et collusion qui s'actualisent dans les « récits d'émergence »—, Siemerling avance la notion de « re/connaissance », laquelle permet de réunir les processus de reconnaissance (la réitération de savoirs anciens) et ceux de re-connaissance (l'élaboration de savoirs nouveaux). Sur cette notion clef, l'auteur greffe celle de « double conscience », qu'il emprunte à W.E.B. Du Bois et qu'il emploie en tant que figure paradigmatique de la coexistence continue de contraires.

Esquissé dès l'introduction, ce cadre conceptuel global est finement détaillé dans la suite de l'étude. Ainsi, le deuxième chapitre montre comment les recherches en histoire littéraire nationale ont accusé la diversité interne et les héritages multiples du Canada et des États-Unis, alors que le troisième chapitre retrace la genèse du concept de double conscience chez Du Bois et élucide l'approche anti-hégélienne de celui-ci. Les trois chapitres suivants portent, chacun, sur un contexte spécifique d'émergence culturelle et traitent respectivement des situations afro-américaine, autochtone et québécoise. Puisant dans une panoplie de discours critiques et théoriques, ces « études de cas » interrogent des procédés « traductionnels » de la différence et des « variations » de la double conscience en lien avec les questions d'identités ethniques, raciales et linguistiques et les enjeux liés au

postcolonialisme, au multiculturalisme et à la transculture.

Winfried Siemerling nous livre au final un examen rigoureux et original des formations et des transformations culturelles dans l'hémisphère nord-américain. On appréciera en particulier les divers points de convergence et de divergence qu'il établit aussi bien entre les trois contextes d'émergence culturelle à l'étude qu'entre les discours tenus sur ces champs. On pourrait cependant trouver dommage certaines omissions dans la discussion de la « différence » du « Canada français ». Il est surprenant, en effet, que cette discussion ne touche guère aux cultures et littératures franco-canadiennes hors Québec, omission d'autant plus regrettable que l'ouvrage est autrement doté d'une documentation riche et variée. En outre, on aurait pu souhaiter que l'ouvrage s'achève sur un texte de conclusion qui aurait suivi les trois « études de cas ». En dépit de ces quelques réserves, *Récits nord-américains d'émergence* fait brillamment entrevoir de nouvelles perspectives dans les études des Amériques et apporte une contribution importante aux débats sur le pluralisme culturel.

The Legacy of Oka

Leanne Simpson and Keira L. Ladner, eds. *This Is an Honour Song: Twenty Years Since the Blockades.* Arbeiter Ring $19.95

Reviewed by Tasha Hubbard

First Nations blockades in Canadian consciousness occupy the space between the politically charged and the misunderstood. What is known as the "Oka Crisis," repositioned by the editors as the Kanien'kehaka resistance, is entrenched as a part of Canadian and Haudenosaunee history. *This is an Honour Song: Twenty Years Since the Blockades*, edited by Kiera Ladner and Leanne Simpson, shows how the conflict influenced both contemporary Indigenous political action and non-Indigenous engagement with Indigenous issues.

Ladner and Simpson have collected personal essays, poetry, art, dialogues, and critical essays from an impressive array of activists, artists, academics, and community leaders. Most contributors begin by reflecting on the impact Oka had on their own trajectory into awareness, overcoming fear, and taking action.

A line from the first selection, "Bad Indians," a poem by Ryan Red Corn, sets the tone for the contributors who follow: "this is our song; and this is our time." In keeping with that idea, the editors chose to include several younger activists and writers who are continually contributing to the dialogue and struggle for land rights across Canada: Clayton Thomas-Muller, Harmony Rice, Wab Kinew, and Melissa Laboucan-Massimo. Hailing from the Lubicon Cree, Laboucan-Massimo lays out the real impact of the Tar Sands on her people's land and livelihood. For her, Oka became the impetus for her activism and willingness to be on the front lines to protect future generations. She also calls attention to the way in which the label of "terrorist" continues to be applied to instances of Indigenous activism across Canada. Her piece is a necessary reminder that Oka did not exist in isolation, that it is one of many continuing battles to protect the land and assert Indigenous rights to that land.

One perspective not often heard from is that of the media who covered the event. Former journalist Michael Orsini provides some astute observations into how the media and academic communities categorize and often minimize Aboriginal issues. One particularly poignant section exposes his struggle to confront the display of white violence against Indigenous peoples that occurred during the Oka Crisis.

Also included is a reflective essay by the late Patricia Monture-Angus, whose daughter died as a result of racist acts during the

writing process. Inspired by a conversation with her daughter held a few weeks before she died, Monture-Angus ruminates on the right to live life as a celebration, a timely addition to the current discussions surrounding human rights and Indigenous peoples. The recent loss of her voice to discussions such as these is immense.

That these battles for the pines, the waters, and the land are fought for the children already here and yet to be born echoes throughout the book. While a more diverse geographical selection would have been appreciated, *This is an Honour Song* is an important text that continues and enhances a necessary dialogue about the struggle for Indigenous land rights within an often hostile Canadian state.

Cool Water May Just Break Your Heart

Dianne Warren

Cool Water. HarperCollins $29.99

Reviewed by Lindy Ledohowski

Dianne Warren, accomplished fiction writer and playwright born in Ottawa, was awarded the prestigious Governor General's Literary Award for her first full-length novel, *Cool Water*. The novel offers an intimate, one-day portrait of a small Saskatchewan town. The first vignette tells of an epic one-hundred-mile horserace in the town of Juliet's cowboy past, and then the rest of the chapters follow a cast of characters through one night and day, ending with the second night. The style is sparse and hyper-realistic, and Warren's Juliet rings as true as Laurence's Manawaka or Munro's Hanratty, full of small, mundane details that reveal poignant truths.

The novel details a day in the life of a cast of characters whose lives are intertwined and intermingled, demonstrating the interconnectivity of small-town life and suggesting the interconnectivity of all lives, even those outside the town of Juliet, like the "government officials and environmentalists and representatives of the oil and gas companies" who are all "terrifyingly good at talking" or the "people in Ottawa and Toronto" who might one day have to "pay five dollars for a loaf of bread," which might, just might make "the politicians . . . come to their senses." As this day unfolds—Lee out riding a found horse echoing the epic ride that the novel opens with; Vikki and her six children driving from the farm to spend the day in town, even when there are farm chores to be done; Blaine, her husband, working on a road crew and dreaming of Justine the young girl studying engineering at university; Marian and Willard, the brother- and sister-in-law who have lived together for nine years, keeping their growing affection secret from one another; Karla spending her birthday alone, stood up again by her on-again-off-again fiancé, Dale; Lynn worrying about her husband Hank and the name and phone number of an unknown woman written on a scrap of paper in his pocket; Norval and Lila worrying about their pregnant eighteen-year-old daughter; and Joni the stranger who loses her horse and leaves her name and number with Hank—we begin to get a picture of the connected nature of simple lives being lived. And it is in the interconnectivity that the novel encourages the reader to recognize the profundity of human existence.

Every undergraduate writing course begins with some version of the advice to "show not tell," and Warren is a master of showing. She does not browbeat or bully her readers, but rather lures and lulls us in with her deceptively simple turns of phrase. With an uncomplicated and understated style, Warren creates people so real and rich in seemingly ordinary detail that we barely notice that the simplicity covers a depth of character that is at once both stunning and heart-wrenching. In 1954, Ernest Hemingway was quoted in reference to his novel *The Old Man and the Sea* as saying:

"I tried to make a real old man, a real boy, a real sea and a real fish and real sharks. But if I made them good and true enough they would mean many things. The hardest thing is to make something really true and sometimes truer than true." It is this "truer than true" in the everyday that Warren captures so powerfully.

By comparing Warren's writing to that of canonical greats such as Margaret Laurence, Alice Munro, and Ernest Hemingway, I mean not to gush and offer exaggerated praise, but rather to suggest that *Cool Water* is a work of fiction that can and will stand the proverbial test of time. It is a work that should be taught and retaught, discussed, and rediscussed. Quite simply it is a work of breath-taking simplicity and breath-taking beauty.

Crime Scenes

Michael Winter
The Death of Donna Whalen. Hamish Hamilton $34.00

Emma Donoghue
Room. HarperCollins $19.99

Reviewed by Robert McGill

The Death of Donna Whalen and *Room* are based on sensational real-life crimes, but both narratives suggest that no crimes are so remarkable as the everyday ones in which we are all implicated.

Michael Winter's foreword to *The Death of Donna Whalen* explains his compositional method: drawing on public records relating to a murder in contemporary St. John's, he has transformed what he found there by changing names, shifting first-person accounts into third-person focalized narration, and condensing thousands of pages of transcripts into a series of short testimonials from the people involved. Through their voices the case unfolds: Donna Whalen has been stabbed multiply in her home while her children slept; her lover Sheldon Troke, member of a St. John's family well known to the police, insists on his innocence but is immediately condemned by investigators and public opinion alike.

Winter compares his novel's polyphonic form to the sequenced confessions of William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*, but there are some key differences. Not least, Winter's novel eschews interior monologue in favour of public testimony. As a consequence, *The Death of Donna Whalen* foregrounds storytelling as a form of civic action, a mode of performance involving rhetorical flair and the creation of social personae. For instance, when Donna's downstairs neighbour Ruth recalls the night of the murder, she recollects not only what she's overheard above her but her own incidental bickering with her husband Pat. Ruth remembers saying: "[O]h, Jesus, he got the heat on again. I'm going to kill him in the morning"; she goes on to explain that "[s]he was on the pissy side. Most married couples fight over money, Ruth and Pat fight over heat like the devil." In this way, characters in the novel testify less about the case than about the sometimes comic, sometimes heartbreaking details of their lives.

Accordingly, the titular event in *The Death of Donna Whalen* becomes the catalyst for exploring the conditions under which such a crime takes place. The novel's real revelation is that the murder doesn't upend daily life for the community so much as hyperbolize it. The people who move in Donna and Sheldon's circle are already well acquainted with gossip and mutual suspicion. Even before the murder, characters engage in informal social policing, from Donna, who surreptitiously tapes Sheldon's rants at her, to the local Wendy's drive-through operator who leans over to smell customers' breath and calls the cops if he detects alcohol.

Moreover, characters bully and lie to each other well before detectives' questions seemingly prompt some of them to

start fabricating stories and intimidating witnesses. The characters' earlier, everyday mistruths and threats are of the sort many people might expect to get away with: misleading a partner about when exactly you headed home for the night, saying you feel like you could kill someone. The inspection of such remarks in a murder case, though, casts them in a different light and provides a certain thrill for readers by playing on our fear that even words spoken privately, in the heat of a moment, can and will be used against us.

Such hyperbolization of quotidian anxieties is part of crime fiction's appeal. We read it not only to enjoy the catharsis of justice served or to engage in playful ratiocination. We also want to hone our social skills in second-guessing people's claims, identifying lies, turning others' self-serving facts into self-betraying clues. We're fascinated by the ways in which criminal investigations force into public those details of private life that are otherwise only obliquely glanced at, partially overheard. In crime fiction we confront the violence and chaos that can erupt in ordinary life or are already there, undocumented. We're offered foils who act on our own taboo desires or dramatically counterpoint our venial transgressions. Reading about the suspects and accused, we imagine how we'd fare if we were under similar scrutiny, and we get to be glad we're not the ones being interrogated.

What's more, in a novel such as *The Death of Donna Whalen* we learn how people speak about others and themselves when under pressure to bear witness. Indeed, Winter gives us a picture of a community that is all the time confessing, even before its members are confronted by the law. Whether to friends, family, counsellors, or doctors, they speak to establish themselves before the world, to be heard and believed. But the novel's polyphonic structure destabilizes the authority of any one voice, so that by the end, when a seemingly authorial narrator offers startling, case-changing revelations, readers may be wont to distrust the move toward closure and wonder instead about this voice's own interests and careful concealments.

Emma Donoghue's *Room* is equally attentive to the unselfconscious revelations and unreliability of testimonial voices, but it explores these matters through a single monologue by a five-year-old named Jack. He was born to a young woman whom he calls "Ma" and who has been held captive seven years in a small room, never allowed to leave. Jack has spent his whole life there with her, knowing no other human beings except their captor, whom Jack calls "Old Nick," and who appears occasionally to rape his mother as well as bestow provisions. In these details the scenario echoes certain real-life stories, not least the recent case of an Austrian woman imprisoned by her father for twenty-four years. At the same time, the novel takes on the dimensions of a fairy tale.

The first half of the narrative vividly renders Jack's life in the place he calls "Room," which strikingly for him is a locus of plenitude, not privation, as he shares with Ma a dyadic relationship of mutual devotion, such that we're surely meant to read "Room" as "Womb." Although one might be tempted to compare Jack and Ma to Vladimir and Estragon in *Waiting for Godot*, amusing and consoling each other in their existential limbo, for Jack they're more like Adam and Eve enjoying prelapsarian bliss.

Accordingly, when Jack and Ma eventually escape halfway through the novel, *Room* turns to examining what it means for each of them to leave the place behind. Jack's challenge is not only to familiarize himself with the world that lies beyond Room; he must also confront his increasing separation from his mother. As for Ma, she has to re-establish relations with family members who gave her up for dead, and she has to reorient herself toward Jack, who until

now has been her sole support, but who is ill-equipped to handle the traumatic memories and violent thoughts she finds herself confessing to him. Ma's new-found freedom brings with it a confusion about what kind of stories she's free to tell her son, what kind of norms need to be established.

The novel is itself most normal and contentious in its implicit idealization of the mother-child dyad. For instance, in a TV interview after their escape, Ma insists that Jack was only a source of love and comfort for her; she claims that his birth meant "I was alive again, I mattered." There's one brief moment late in the novel when Ma threatens to become less of a cheerleader for maternity than she has been, declaring to Jack in a moment of upset: "If for once in your life you thought about me instead of—"; but neither she nor the novel can finish the thought. Instead there are mere glimpses of less idyllic aspects of parenthood, as when Jack recognizes in *Room* that Ma doesn't always share his energy for play, observing, "She gets sick of things fast, it's from being an adult." If Jack's detailed evocations of his life's minutiae in *Room* occasionally tax the reader, his excessiveness serves as a reminder that for grown-ups, while gaining a child's undivided attention can be an honour and delight, it can also involve a certain exhausting demand.

Otherwise, Jack's vivid descriptions of Room—with all its intimate pleasures and Gothic awfulness—make this novel keenly compelling, as do his subsequent attempts to comprehend the world outside. The pace slows near the end in a sequence involving Jack at his grandparents', for the first time living away from his mother, but if these passages seem relatively prosaic, that's precisely the point. In leaving the infant-like dyad with Ma he has enjoyed for such a long period, Jack is becoming a more prosaic, normal boy. It's left for readers to decide whether this increasingly ordinary life is a fairy-tale happy ending for Jack, a tragedy, or just an inevitable part of growing up, that crime of which we are all victims and perpetrators.

Puritan Morality Tales Return for Young Readers

Beryl Young
Follow the Elephant. Ronsdale $10.95

Charles Reid
Ghost of Heroes Past. Ronsdale $10.95

Reviewed by Lynn (J.R.) Wytenbroek

The days of *Harry Potter* seem to be over. Instead of delightful forays into the imagination with excellent writing, believable and lovable characters, and themes subtly woven throughout fantastic adventures, we seem to be on the brink of a new age of morality books for children, at least, if the two books reviewed here are typical.

Award-winner Beryl Young has written a new travel book, *Follow the Elephant.* In true travel literature fashion, we follow the protagonist and, in this case, his grandmother, from Toronto to India, where the grandmother is in search of a childhood pen pal she has lost track of. The travel format is a time-honoured one and, indeed, the travel side of the book is fascinating. There are many glimpses into Indian life, from the north to the south of the subcontinent. The sights and sounds of ancient cities and temples, the taste of the food, the dialect of the local peoples, the customs of people from different religions—all of these are beautifully portrayed in this book. If the reader has never been to India, this book is sure to inform the most ignorant of the wonders of this rich culture and huge country.

However, that is where the delights of the book end. The protagonist is Ben, thirteen, who has just lost his father. He is sullen, angry, or rude for most of the novel, making it very hard to like him, let alone

feel sorry for him. His grandmother is also bad-tempered and completely controlling, seeming to have no knowledge about how to deal with a thirteen-year-old, even though we are told she is close to the family. She makes Marilla Cuthbert look like an expert on child-rearing.

Thematically, this book would make the Puritans proud. Within the first couple of pages we are told Ben's father is dead from smoking. We are not told what actually killed him other than "smoking," so the moral is screamingly clear. This moral is reinforced again and again throughout the book. Further, whenever Ben deviates from his nagging grandmother's commands, disaster ensues. The morality tale is at its height here, with "obey your elders" lit up in flashing red lights. Whenever Ben is given the responsibility he craves, he inevitably screws up, reinforcing his grandmother's treatment of him as an incompetent child. Eventually he learns to control his anger and to be more responsible, rounding off the morality tale nicely. Ben and Gran go back to Canada, with Ben now determined to be a reformed character. This book is far too preachy and moralistic to be well-written, and features two of the most unlikable characters in modern children's fiction.

Readers will fare little better with Reid's *Ghost of Heroes Past.* Despite a clever premise, a boy taken by night by a ghostly, unnamed soldier to view heroic deeds of Canadians who fought in either the first or second world wars, the book is again somewhat moralistic. It sings the praises of Canada's forgotten heroes of both wars, showing them imprisoned, tortured, shot, stabbed, and beaten while repeatedly showing their courage. Indeed, courage is a noble theme in any book for young and old alike, but when almost every war scene contains unspeakable violence, the theme becomes a "message." Not only is this book unnecessarily violent (an attempt, perhaps, to appeal to the jaded appetites of young people brought up on violent video war games), but it seems to deal largely in stereotypes. Is it really acceptable in the twenty-first century to refer to Canada's First Nations people as "Indians" as Reid does in one place in the book? He compounds the racist term by telling the young protagonist, Johnny, that the "Indian" hero he is seeing will later drink himself to death once he is invalided out of the Korean war, as fighting is all that "makes him feel equal to the white man." Strangely, we never hear of any problems that the other, purely Caucasian heroes exhibit in later years. Not only is this racist stereotype of First Nations presented so baldly, but Reid shows repeated barbaric acts of cruelty, including torture and vicious beatings, at the hands of the Japanese throughout the book. Although he assures the reader that all soldiers are able to commit barbaric acts during war, he shows no other group, not even the Nazis, committing any. The appalling treatment of Japanese Canadians in Canada's "work camps" of the Second World War is never mentioned.

The book is fairly well-written although we never do find out why Johnny is chosen for this nightly honour or why the visitations end. There is no question that this book contains fascinating historical information about the two world wars plus the Russian Revolution and the parts that brave Canadians played in them. But the blatant and unrelenting violence of the book together with its unfortunate and repeated use of the worst racist stereotypes of two different groups of non-whites significantly weakens the book. For very different reasons, the Puritans would be proud of both these novels.

The "Thrill" of Not Belonging

Edith Eaton (Sui Sin Far) and Flexible Citizenship

Mary Chapman

During the era of North America's Chinese Exclusion Acts and Head Taxes, Chinese, regardless of country of origin, found it difficult or expensive to enter North America and were denied citizenship in both the US and Canada. The Chinese Exclusion Act, passed by US Congress in 1882, was the first US legislation to significantly restrict immigration. The Act excluded Chinese "skilled and unskilled laborers and Chinese employed in mining" from entering the country for ten years under penalty of imprisonment and deportation. Soon after the passage of this Exclusion Act, the Canadian government followed suit, passing legislation in 1885 (after Chinese labour was no longer needed to build the transcontinental railroad) that required all Chinese immigrants to Canada to pay a fifty-dollar head tax, which increased in 1903 to five-hundred dollars (or two years' salary).

Beginning in 1896, half-Chinese author Edith Eaton published fiction under the pen name "Sui Sin Far" that sympathetically portrayed the suffering caused by these policies and the anti-Asian racism that underwrote them. Less well known is the fact that Eaton also contributed a large body of anonymous journalism to the *Montreal Daily Witness* and the *Montreal Daily Star* that documented the experiences of diasporic Chinese in Montreal and other parts of Canada.[1] Although sympathetic to the Chinese, this early journalism challenges the common assumption that diasporic Chinese prior to the Chinese Revolution desired citizenship or, at the very least, it defines "citizenship" in terms of *economic* opportunities rather than *democratic* rights. Indeed, to most diasporic Chinese during this period, the privileges of what we now understand as citizenship—voting, democratic representation, etc.—were unfamiliar because power during the Qing Dynasty in China was concentrated in the hands of a very small number of people and no one outside of this group could be said to be "enfranchised." Those who left China sought their fortunes elsewhere precisely because they didn't have much power if they remained. Although the psychological and personal costs of legal exclusion from North American citizenship should not be minimized, Eaton's 1890s journalism complicates the presumed desirability of North American citizenship for diasporic Chinese, suggesting that the Chinese in the 1890s desire mobility—in terms not only of space, but also of class and identity—more than they desire formal citizenship. They covet what Aihwa Ong has called "flexible citizenship": the ability to move between spaces and benefit from the opportunities these spaces represent. Eaton makes this clear in "The Chinese Defended," an uncollected letter to the Editor of the *Montreal Daily Star* that was published on 29 September 1896—a week after her more well-known letter to the Editor "Plea for the Chinaman": "There is no danger of the teeming population of China overflowing this fair country.

. . . The Chinaman likes his own land too well—he is an exile here—he has no wish to remove—and if some Chinamen are coming in all the time—others are going out."

I have recently discovered over eighty-five works of fiction and journalism by Eaton that significantly complicate the critical orthodoxy surrounding the writer known as the "mother" of Asian North American literature, particularly because Eaton takes up a number of different authorial modes: from a third-person objective journalistic mode of authorship, to embodied stunt-girl/sob-sister narration, to what I am calling "stenographic" authorship—a kind of third way of authorship that performs the neutrality of the journalistic tradition while actually mimicking the feminine power a stenographer wields in her capacity as transcriber of authoritative discourses. Here, I offer commentary on "Thrilling Experience of a Band of Smugglers in the Lachine Rapids," an anonymous uncollected piece of journalism identified by Dominika Ferens as by Eaton, which was published in the *Montreal Daily Star* in July 1895. "Thrilling Experience" demonstrates a transitional phase between the mode of objective journalism Eaton practiced in her earlier articles in *The Star* and the more embodied mode of stunt-girl journalism that Eaton assumed in journalism published in *Gall's Newsletter* in Jamaica in 1896-97.

Like later fiction by Eaton that challenges the hallowed status of suffrage discourse among Progressives by pointing out its class and racial exclusiveness, "Thrilling Experience" questions assumptions about the desirability of citizenship by suggesting that the mobile subject position and discursive power of the non-citizen may in fact be more "thrilling" than the fixed identity position of the citizen. "Thrilling Experience" appeared on the front page of Montreal's most important daily newspaper and it covered a widespread problem within the Chinese community in Canada following the 1882 passage of the US Chinese Exclusion Act: illegal passage to the US through Canada. The reportage, however, does not follow the style of the other front-page stories that day: i.e., reports of finding gold in Russia; British election results; and news of the Vanderbilts' gaining control of railroads. The other front-page stories are objective factual reportage that participates in the "invisible reporter" tradition that became the journalistic standard in the late nineteenth century. "Thrilling Experience," however, as its title suggests, is written in a style that is the antithesis of objective "hard-boiled" news. Rather than criticize the illegal activities of the fourteen Chinese men and the three smugglers paid to transport these men from Montreal to the US border, it describes in sympathetic detail the great risks the men take in order to cross the St. Lawrence River near Lachine—a particularly treacherous point in the river because the notorious Lachine Rapids are mere metres away.

> Out into the current glided the canoe, and in several minutes the party was in the centre of the swift current of the St. Lawrence. Down, down, they sped, the paddlers working like Trojans, but making little headway to the opposite shore. Back in the wake towered the [Canadian Pacific Railway] bridge, and in the distance could be seen the white caps and spray from the turbulent waters of the Lachine Rapids. The canoe now and anon would rise on the heavy swells that were rapidly drawing it towards the cataract of rushing waters.

Eaton sympathetically identifies with the Chinese male travellers, following the movements of their bodies through space in great detail as they attempt to thwart US border officials who may be on the lookout at various points along the St. Lawrence River. Assuming a more feminine mode that draws on the tradition of sensation fiction, a mode that enables her to treat some of the facts of the story allegorically, tropically, the way a fiction writer would, Eaton writes:

> The occupants now, for the first time, realized their danger, and for a time lost their heads. The paddlers, worn out, quickly changed places with the more robust of the Celestials. Then commenced the race for life. With every plunge of the paddles the canoe rose on the heavy swells and cut its way through the small white caps. It was a case of life or death. On they went; the current getting swifter and the swells heavier. Less than a quarter of a mile off could be seen the raging cataract of the rapids. One hundred yards distant was the shore for which they had risked so much. The work was laborious, but slowly the canoe forged ahead, but as it did so it was carried down stream sideways. Nearer and nearer they approached, until finally the prow of the canoe rounded the reef opposite the rapids and grazed upon the sand of the cove.

The greatest shock for the reader comes with the realization that this "cove" that the Chinese men have risked everything to reach is not on the American side of the border; the "sand of the cove" is on the shores of the Caughnawaga Mohawk Reserve (now known as Kahnawake) just south of Montreal; the US border is another fifty miles south. Eaton's *Montreal Star* article neither narrates the Chinese men's safe arrival to the American side nor endorses the US government's prerogative to keep Chinese out; rather it keeps the Chinese men "in between," by focusing narratively on two moments at which the identities of smuggled subjects are most "up for grabs": the first, when they are on neither side of the river but rather, spatially dramatically, in the river "at the mouth of the Cataract"—and second, when they have successfully crossed the river but still haven't yet crossed the border.

Eaton's 1900 short story "The Smuggling of Tie Co" has a lot in common with "Thrilling Experience." Tie-Co is only able to attempt to cross the border with an experienced smuggler because he thinks she is a man. However, in "Thrilling Experience," the mobility of the Chinese men who are being smuggled into the US appears linked to their cross-racial masquerade as they paddle an "Indian war canoe" toward the Mohawk reservation on the south side of the river. Eaton's delight here is less in the achieved outcomes of this one effort at smuggling or many other historic smuggling efforts—undetected passage into the US—and more in the tremendous mobility—literal and metaphorical—that smuggled Chinese enjoyed in various parts of the country. In particular, Eaton seems entranced by their ability to hide themselves in various containers—from coffins to canoes—and to take on different racial and even gender identities. Later in the article, Eaton sympathetically profiles one smuggler as a wealthy Chinese man from Boston, a "son of the Flowery Kingdom [who] has a keen insight into the workings of the authorities. . . . This is the man that also . . . hit upon the hollow cane and umbrella handles for conveying . . . expensive drugs into the States." The ability to hide one's identity in different kinds of "containers"—this kind of flexible subjectivity—rather than citizenship is the ideal. "Thrilling Experience," like "Chinese Defended," does not accept the desirability of citizenship as much as promote self-making and self-transformation outside of formal citizenship.

Eaton's article ends without providing an account of the smugglers' successful crossing of the US border. Like characters Fabian and Tie-Co in "The Smuggling of Tie-Co," the Chinese men succeed in crossing the St. Lawrence, but they are still at risk of being caught as they hike the fifty miles south through the Eastern Townships of Quebec to the New York border. Yet why does Eaton represent their journey as if the Caughnawaga reservation is the travellers' final destination? "When arranging for this trip," she writes, "the Chinese miscalculated the danger of the St. Lawrence at this point, and let nothing come into their minds but their one ambition to cross

to the land of the free. . . . One hundred yards distant was the shore for which they had risked so much." The (still Canadian) space of Caughnawaga on the "shore for which they had risked so much" is the symbolic if not final literal destination of the smugglers and their human cargo. Kahnawake, as it is now known, is currently one of the most, if not *the* most, militant sovereigntist reservation in North America. Although the reservation has been technically under Canadian/Quebec jurisdiction since Confederation in 1867, its land has never been ceded to any European colonizer. For Eaton, then, Caughnawaga represents an imaginary extra-legal space of liberty and self-making for the Chinese, in which they are under the authority of neither state government. Once the Chinese men arrive there, they cannot be followed by US agents. In this article, Eaton turns the Chinese men's borrowing of a Mohawk canoe into an act of racial masquerade, and by so doing, grants the Chinese symbolic access to the rights of Mohawks and other members of the Six Nations Iroquois Confederacy, under the Jay Treaty of 1794, to cross the US-Canada border freely and to transport goods across that border without paying duty: the ultimate example of Ong's "flexible citizenship."

Appearing as it does in the midst of a discussion of smuggling, border-crossing, and US-Canadian relations, the Chinese men's masquerade also recalls an iconic event in American history in which North American settlers who desired life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness masqueraded as Native Americans in order to assert their independence from imperial authority: The Boston Tea Party of 1773 in which a group of thirty or forty male colonists disguised themselves as Mohawks and boarded three British ships and dumped their cargo of tea into the harbour. This dramatic act of civil disobedience was a response to laws that inhabitants of the Thirteen Colonies considered unfair: the taxation of British tea and legislation forbidding the importation of tea from other nations (something that encouraged the smuggling of Dutch East Indian tea into the Thirteen Colonies). These colonists—whom Americans call patriots now because their actions jumpstarted the American independence movement—dressed as Mohawks because, to them, Native Americans in general represented North American freedom from British tyranny. The democratic traditions of the Iroquois Confederacy, of which the Mohawks are a significant part, in particular served as inspiration for America's Founding Fathers.

Reading Eaton's "Thrilling Experience" in the context of an American Revolutionary racial masquerade figures the smugglers and their cargo as resisters of tyrannical state authority; it also turns the tables on the binary of the smuggled (non-citizens) and the US Customs officials (citizens), making the "smuggled" more legitimately North American than the US authorities by casting the Chinese men as revolutionaries—who value freedom, entrepreneurialism, and democracy. In this allegorical reading, the US Customs officials are placed in the role of tyrannical British authorities. This is similar to the move Eaton makes in her letter to the Editor, "The Chinese Defended," when she defends the Chinese in British Columbia against the racist criticisms of white settlers: "Why, the Chinese are the pioneers of British Columbia; they are the true British Columbians, and it is they and not the whites who should be claiming privileges from the Government" ("Chinese Defended").

The thrill of not belonging is one Eaton herself enjoyed: as a British-born child growing up in Canada; as an Anglophone living in a predominantly Francophone city; as a half-white journalist reporting on a predominantly Black Jamaica or a predominantly Aboriginal Northern Ontario; and finally as a Canadian living in the US. Eaton herself never achieved US citizenship or

even Canadian citizenship although she lived at least forty-four of her forty-nine years in these two countries. If she carried any passport at all, it was a British one, although clearly in terms of cultural citizenship and in terms of her contribution to an imagined community through a public sphere she made great contributions to both Canada and the US. But she enjoyed incredible mobility and travelled easily back and forth between the two countries throughout her life, even though one might presume that as a half-Chinese woman travelling alone, and as a non-American, she may have experienced some difficulties at the border. By 1895, when she wrote "Thrilling Experience," Eaton had crossed national borders (between England, the US, and Canada) many times—at least five trips are documented. She also achieved literary success—a kind of print cultural mobility that permitted her to comment publicly on politics in both countries. Even if she had been granted US or Canadian citizenship, as a woman she would still not have been permitted to vote. Yet the fact that she achieved cultural citizenship in both countries is clear by the attention we devote to her today.

NOTES

1 Ferens identifies four anonymous articles, including "Thrilling Experience," appearing in the *Montreal Daily Star* and one piece appearing in the *Montreal Daily Witness* between 1894-95 as authored by Eaton (201). I have located other articles appearing in the *Montreal Daily Star* from 1892-96 that I suspect are by Eaton, because the language and themes in the anonymous journalistic articles are echoed in Eaton's later fiction and/or because they appear to match descriptions in Eaton's autobiographical writings of articles about "murders, fires and smallpox outbreaks" to a "paper down east" from Northern Ontario.

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Thrilling Experience: Of a Band of Smugglers in the Lachine Rapids.: While "Running" Chinese Across the River at Caughnawaga Their War Canoe is Driven on a Reef at the Mouth of the Cataract.

[Edith Eaton]

Fourteen Chinamen, accompanied by three shrewd smugglers from this city, had a narrow escape from going over the Lachine Rapids early on Monday morning, while attempting to cross the St. Lawrence from Lachine to Caughnawaga on their way to Uncle Sam's domains.

The wily Chinese, finding that the new route to the United States via the Sorel Islands [further east] was discovered, abandoned that channel in quick order and directed their attention to pastures new. Together, with the smugglers, they hit upon an ingenious scheme, a little risky perhaps, but completely safe from the vigilant eye of the United States Customs officers and Treasury officials, as they thought.

This time they would run across the river a mile above the Lachine Rapids in a large Indian war canoe, and land in a cove dangerously surrounded by reefs, where pursuit would be impossible. When arranging for this trip, the Chinese miscalculated the danger of the St. Lawrence at this point, and let nothing come into their minds but their one ambition to cross to the land of the free.

On Monday morning, at 8:30, the party left Montreal for Lachine, comfortably ensconced in a large covered express waggon [sic]. They arrived at the place designated for their perilous trip near the Canadian Pacific bridge, and after scouting around for some time to

see that the coast was clear, embarked in a large Indian war canoe that was in waiting near the rendezvous. It was first arranged to make for a cove above the bridge, but the "guide" misjudged the current at this point, and instead of "striking out" a mile further up the river, let go the ropes from the hiding place. As soon as the big war canoe, with its load of human freight, caught the swiftly running current it swerved quickly round, and in an instant shot between the two shore abutments of the bridge with lightning speed.

Out into the current glided the canoe, and in several minutes the party was in the centre of the swift current of the St. Lawrence. Down, down, they sped, the paddlers working like Trojans, but making little headway to the opposite shore. Back in the wake towered the bridge, and in the distance could be seen the white caps and spray from the turbulent waters of the Lachine Rapids. The canoe now and anon would rise on the heavy swells that were rapidly drawing it towards the cataract of rushing waters.

The occupants now, for the first time, realized their danger, and for a time lost their heads. The paddlers, worn out, quickly changed places with the more robust of the Celestials. Then commenced the race for life. With every plunge of the paddles the canoe rose on the heavy swells and cut its way through the small white caps. It was a case of life or death. On they went; the current getting swifter and the swells heavier. Less than a quarter of a mile off could be seen the raging cataract of the rapids. One hundred yards distant was the shore for which they had risked so much. The work was laborious, but slowly the canoe forged ahead, but as it did so it was carried down stream sideways. Nearer and nearer they approached, until finally the prow of the canoe rounded the reef opposite the rapids and grazed upon the sand of the cove.

All round the spot raged the turbulent waters, and the noise of the rapids two hundred yards distant from shore caused many of the party to utter a word of thanks at their escape from such a narrow call. It is doubtful if another party of Celestials anxious to gain access to Uncle Sam's domains will undertake another such trip.

The whole party went onward with the evident intention of "crossing the line" near Hemmingford and Huntingdon.

Owing to the energy put forth by the United States Customs officers the smugglers are kept continually on the lookout for pastures new, for no sooner do they get two or three batches of Celestials safely "over the lines" than the officers are after them. The money now paid by the Celestials to get across is so tempting as to cause the smugglers, who are in most cases Americans, to devise schemes of the most hazardous nature to earn the rewards. Probably the shrewdest of this organized band of smugglers between Montreal, Toronto, and Boston is a wealthy Chinese resident of the latter city who visits Montreal quite frequently to arrange for consignment of "live stock," and to also give the smugglers "tips" as to the movements of the United States Secret Service men, as, strange to say, this son of the Flowery Kingdom has a keen insight into the workings of the authorities, and in many instances the smugglers' headquarters here are aware that a Secret Service man is on his way to one of their rendezvous before the train is two miles out of Boston. This is the man that also manipulated the strings for the smugglers of sulfonal and phenacetin, and was the first to hit upon the hollow cane and umbrella handles for conveying these expensive drugs into the States.

But now that the hot weather is on, there is a falling off in the demand for the dump, so the smugglers direct all their time to the Celestials, because there is more money in the latter at this time of the year. With the advent of cold weather commences the "running in" of the drugs and furs again by the "underground route" to Uncle Sam's territory.

In conversation with a *Star* reporter last night a prominent local Chinaman admitted that the coffin scheme originated with him and that they were manufactured here and shipped to St. John, NB, where they were put together and used in smuggling Chinese over the lines into Vanceboro, Mex. When spoken to regarding the Sorel Island rendezvous, the speaker laughed heartily and said that if it had not been for the United States officers getting on their track considerable money could have been made by this latter route. He boasted openly of the many exploits he had with the customs officials and concluded by stating that there were fully five hundred Chinamen here at present anxiously waiting to "cross the lines."

Moths in the Iron Curtain, or Roaming in the USSR with Al Purdy and Ralph Gustafson

Victor Pogostin

One may argue that that the Iron Curtain was not lifted, but simply that the West-East moths through decades of nibbling at it from both sides made holes in its fabric, holes so big that the curtain has become almost invisible.

In October of 1976, Al Purdy and Ralph Gustafson were parachuted behind the Iron Curtain under the aegis of an agreement between the Canadian Department of External Affairs and the Kremlin, with the USSR Writers' Union playing the host. Their wives, Eurithe and Betty, introduced to me by Al as "the female chauvinist chaperones," and by Ralph as "the indispensable," came along. The Writers' Union hired me, at the time a post-graduate student of American journalism at the Moscow University School of Journalism, to be their interpreter and travel companion for their twenty-one days of travelling.

Formally, the purpose of this three-week venture was for the first Canadian authors visiting the USSR to make contacts and familiarize themselves with the country. As Ralph put it, "humanness recovered, prejudice erased, misconceptions dismissed." Accomplished or not, the mission resulted in two books, whose titles alone tell much about the characters of their authors. Al Purdy's *Moths in the Iron Curtain* was first published in 1977 (by Black Rabbit Press in Ohio). Ralph Gustafson's politically correct nineteen *Soviet Poems*, gracefully filled with his sensitive judgments, was published in 1978. As far as I know, neither was translated into Russian. However, Al's book did attract Moscow's attention even before it was printed. In fact, the Union of Soviet Writers would have loved to stop Al from publishing the book. A few months after Al returned to Canada, I received a call from an official of the Foreign Commission of the Writers' Union.

"Do you and Purdy write to each other?"

We had. We exchanged letters and even smoker's gifts. Al smoked cigars and I a pipe; I sent Al Cuban cigars that were inexpensive in Moscow during the era when friendship between the two communist states was at its highest, and Al sent me Dutch pipe tobacco, a rare luxury in communist Russia.

"Did he write to you about his new book?"

He had. A few months after the trip, Al sent me a letter with the introduction to his new book of Soviet poems: "I enclose an article,"—he wrote—"which will be published with the small book [of poems]. There may be some things you won't agree with in it, but I'm sure you couldn't say the piece expresses anything but friendly feelings." I liked the article, but obviously some officials in the Union of Soviet Writers didn't. They especially didn't like the title.

"What exactly does he mean by the 'Moths in the Iron Curtain?' Who are those 'moths?' The Soviet people?"

"I don't think he meant that."

"We don't care what he meant, but we do care what he writes about us. And if that was the impression he was left with after his trip, then all of us and especially you are in trouble. Perhaps, at least he'd consider changing the title. If he is your friend, he'll understand."

I couldn't completely follow this "friendly" advice. My letter to Al was nothing but the usual "how are you"; only in the postscript, did I casually mention that the title seemed a little odd to the Writers' Union.

Al got the hint right away. Not that he was prepared to change anything (I could hear his "the hell I will . . ."). He didn't care much about his poems being translated into Russian, though he certainly remembered and even briefly mentioned in his introduction the story I told him about my experience with the translation of Arthur Miller's story "Fitter's Night."

In 1969, Miller and his wife Inge Morath, a photographer, spent a few weeks travelling in the USSR. After the trip Miller published *In Russia*, a book that offered his impressions of Soviet society, and highlighted his campaign for the freedom of dissident writers. Soon all Miller's stories and plays, even those that fully met all the requirements of "socialist realism" were banned in the USSR. Not aware of the ban, I translated his story, "Fitter's Night," and offered the translation to one of the national magazines. The editor liked it, but suggested we wait a few months; perhaps, as he put it, the wind of change from the "Old Square," a nickname for the HQ of the Communist Party Central Committee located in the Old Square of Moscow, would bring Arthur Miller back to the Russians.

One night, over the usual nightcaps I told the story to Al: "If you see Miller, tell the story to him." Al grinned and after a few more nightcaps added "I would, but Miller moves in much more cultured literary circles than me."

Years later, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, my translation of "Fitter's Night" was published in one of the last strongholds of the country's socialist past *The Socialist Labour Magazine*. But in 1978 when Al and I corresponded about his upcoming book, neither of us could have imagined that fifteen years later the wind of change would grow so strong that on its shoulders I'd relocate to Canada or that in the summer of 1993 Al and I would be laughing over our USSR memories in Ameliasburg sitting on the porch of his Roblin Lake house or that, much to my surprise, Al would be washing down his jokes with herb tea, not vodka.

Anyway, in his reply to my letter Al armed me with the interpretation that was meant to sweeten the pill for the Soviet officials. "Your postscript disturbs me," he wrote, "and apparently I have to explain the title. I suppose 'iron curtain' is a Western term, denoting the difficulty of entering the Soviet Union and that the West thinks the Soviet Union has an inflexible rigidity. Okay . . . we [Purdy and Gustafson] were moths in the sense that we had no difficulty entering the S.U., and that we chewed up a little of the iron curtain since relations were cordial."

Al's introduction was the only part of the book I read at the time. Thirteen poems written by Al after the trip (as well as Gus' nineteen poems) I read only eighteen years later when my family and I relocated to Canada. I was pleasantly surprised to see that my name was first in the list of those Al dedicated the book to "*With cordial greetings* . . ." Reading the poems brought back memories that seemed almost lost, and Al was right, the poems expressed nothing but friendly feelings, though some episodes we remembered differently.

Pre-impressions and Myths

Back in the USSR, we talked and joked about many things, trying to avoid politics: Al, because he thought that talking about

the ways the Soviets conducted their affairs would be in bad taste from a guest, and I, because I realized that both Al and Gus would write about their experiences in the USSR and their conversations with the people they befriended. I had to watch what I said.

In *Moths in the Iron Curtain* Al wrote "Victor . . . and officials from the Writers' Union quickly dispelled one pre-impression I had of the Russian character, that it was solemn and rather self-important." On my part the pre-impression I had about the Canadian character, that it was a silent type, was quickly dispelled by Al's openness and sense of humour.

In Moscow, the delegation stayed in the Sovietskaya Hotel, built around the once famous Yar Restaurant. Chekhov and Rasputin had dined there. In the Soviet days, the hotel was reserved for the communist apparatchiks and foreign dignitaries. As Al rightly noted, "it was slightly old-fashioned, but provided solid bourgeois comfort."

The first night we paid must-do visits to the Red Square, the Kremlin, and St. Basil's Cathedral. Al described it in his book as "of a size not overwhelming, its colours . . . like a child's first discovery of magic in ordinary things." He couldn't believe that "the supposedly dour Russian character have produced those flashing painted towers, so much like Disneyland without the vulgarity." I dared not dispel his bewilderment with the mysterious Russian character. The official history insists that the cathedral was designed by Russian architect Posnik Yakovlev, nicknamed Barma, "the mumbler," and that Ivan the Terrible put out his eyes so that he could never build anything so beautiful again. This may be no more than a myth. Between 1475 and 1510 Italian architects were employed by the Russian tsar to restore the Kremlin. Who knows, perhaps that explained "those flashing painted towers?"

Another Day, Another Myth Dispelled

For the trip to Yasnaya Polyana, Leo Tolstoy's country estate, which had been preserved as a national monument, the Writers' Union booked a Chaika, a big black powerful limousine usually used by high-ranking Communist officials and the military brass. Driven like a rocket by what Al called a "mad Soviet cosmonaut," the limo cut left of our lane of traffic with cops standing at attention: "They salute you," I pointed to one. "Finally," grinned Al.

The estate museum safeguards the legends of Count Tolstoy's last years when he tried on the roles of a simple plowman, a stove builder, a carpenter, and a bootmaker as ways to escape the life of a wealthy count. Despite the murmur of the official guide, the hypocrisy did not escape Al's sharp eyes. In his poem "Visiting Tolstoy," a monologue for voices, he wrote: "*Master the plow is ready—Vladimir is holding the horses—and the old bent-backed tiny behemoth of letters pretends he's a character in his novels pretends he's a peasant . . . Who's he kidding?*"

International Incidents

Some episodes that Al called "international incidents" we remembered differently. But there was one that neither Al nor Ralph ever knew about. We landed in Tashkent late at night straight into the waiting arms of the Uzbekistan's Branch of the USSR Writers Union and the "la fourchette" windy speeches lavishly sprinkled with vodka.

Despite the warning that the hordes of participants to the Afro-Asian writers' conference which was scheduled for that week in the Soviet Uzbekistan would most likely flood the Samarkand hotels, Al and Ralph insisted on going, inspired by a quest to find the muse as great as the one that once possessed the fifteenth-century Uzbek poet Alisher Navoi. In fact, it was I who badly needed lots of artistic inspiration in order to secure space in what I heard was the only decent Samarkand hotel (Al called it

"crummy"). I asked the Writers' Union head office for help, but the "hand of Moscow" failed us.

"Think of something" was all the advice I had. The Intourist office was in a small room on the second floor of the two-story building of the Samarkand Airport. It was September, but the nights were still hot and the sweat was trickling down the soiled collar of the only rep on duty. "Nyet" was the verdict. Poets, he said, were not on his priority list. In the hall a group of American tourists were sharing the wind from the only fan with the Purdys and the Gustafsons, all unaware of the ongoing clash. Suddenly, it dawned on me—Sharof Rashidov, a poet too, his portrait on the wall behind the rep's back, was at the time the Communist Party leader in the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic and a candidate member of the Politburo.

"These Canadians," I lowered my voice, "are here on his personal invitation." On my mention of Rashidov's name, the rep rose from his chair, bent over the desk and narrowed his eyes at me. For a minute his hand rested in hesitation on the telephone. I did not blink. "The tall one," I pointed to Al, "may be translating Rashidov's poetry into English." The rep hesitated for another minute, then asked for our passports and scribbled our names onto the hotel voucher. I knew there was neither way, nor will for him to verify my words. Al and Ralph never found out what true lies got us rooms in overcrowded Samarkand, but they were happy; especially Al for getting ahead of the bunch of American tourists. Once at the hotel Al went to bed and I took Eurithe, Betty and Ralph to look at the turquoise domes of Samarkand mausoleums by moonlight.

Early next morning, after the muezzins called the remaining faithful to prayer, Al wanted to see the local marketplace. It was Sunday and we walked the narrow time-battered streets passing donkey carts filled with local produce to what was then Kolhozniy Rynok, the collective farmers' market. The day was getting hot. Al treated himself to a tongue-burning shish kebab and wanted to cool it down with a piece of freshly cut watermelon. Nearby, a farmer in black sateen *tubeteika*, an Uzbek skull-cap, and pale blue cotton gown tightly tied with a colourful waistband was slicing watermelons with a knife. Al took a piece, but then he saw the farmer's little girl sitting in the shadow of a tree behind the cart, licking ice cream. Al put the watermelon back on the cart, quickly walked to the girl, his camera hanging from his neck, his finger pointing to her face. Communism or no communism, in some lost-in-time Central Asia villages, photographing women's faces was taboo. Of course, all Al wanted was to know where he could buy an ice cream. Before I could interpret Al's silent question, the farmer rushed towards him, bull's anger in his red eyes, a whip in his hand. I grabbed the whip and for a minute or two we stood there looking into each other eyes; me trying to explain something about ice cream, him still suspicious of Al's intentions. A few locals gathered around us and helped me to dispel the man's fears and though reluctant, he let go of the whip.

Back in the hotel we joined the rest of the team for a quick tour of Samarkand that ended on a laughing note, erasing from memory the sour taste of the morning's "international incident." Valentina, our Intourist guide, was walking us through the ancient capital of Tamurlane's empire to the remains of what was once the biggest mosque in Central Asia—Bibi Khanum Mosque. Amir Timur (Tamurlane) started erecting the mosque around 1399, after his successful campaign to India, but it was not finished before a new campaign required him to leave. His wife, Bibi Khanum finished the construction in his absence. "When Tamerlane returned," summarized Valentina, "he went to see the mosque.

In front of his look raised in their magnificence were the domes and minarets. Amazed that he possessed such a wonderful erection, he hurried to his wife."

"I'd drink to that," laughed Al and on this encouraging note we hurried to the airport to return to Tashkent and later take a five-hour flight to yet another ancient city, this time in Eastern Europe.

The scenery changed from the turquoise domes of mausoleums and mosques to the golden domes of Ukrainian churches. For three days in Kiev, the Purdys and the Gustafsons were imbibing culture and beer while touring the ancient monasteries, the Shevchenko Museum and the Conservatory. Craving for fruit in the fruitless Soviet Kiev we passed others with the same craving: "people cluster in queues to buy them" ("Make Watermelons Not Love," Al Purdy). One hot afternoon Eurithe wanted to stop for a watermelon right under a "no stopping" sign. Guests' wishes, especially those of foreign delegations, always came first in the USSR and the driver stopped. We joined about twenty locals queuing for the melons. Soon a traffic cop appeared and ordered our driver to move. Eurithe and the Gustafsons obediently headed back to the car ready to give up on the watermelons, but not Al. Looking down on the short figure of the cop he showed him his Canadian passport, and then pointed to the watermelons, declaiming something about freedom, Canada and human rights, and the meaning of true democracy.

Meanwhile, the vendor reached from behind the counter and put a watermelon in my arms ending another international incident. Watching Al challenging a traffic cop in Kiev made me believe that somewhere across the ocean there was a land of harmony between motorists and traffic cops. I parted with this illusion many years later when at 2 a.m. I was pulled over for driving fifteen kilometres over the limit on Bayview Avenue: reasoning with traffic cops turned out to be a bum show on either side of the ocean or political system.

On our last day in Kiev, before the official meeting and lunch at the Ukrainian Club of the USSR Writers' Union, the local guide took us to Babi Yar, a ravine in Kiev, the site of the massacre of Jews by the German Nazis in 1941. About twenty per cent of the almost one million people who lived in Kiev before the war were Jews and those who failed to escape the besieged city were shot in Babi Yar. Later, Soviet prisoners of war, Jewish and non-Jewish, and Roma, were also killed there. For political reasons, no official memorial was built at the site until 1976 and even then it did not even mention that most victims were Jews. Only a few poets and musicians dared to challenge the Soviet propaganda machine. In 1961, during "Khrushchev's Thaw," Yevgeny Yevtushenko's powerful poem "Babi Yar" was published and echoed in 1962 by Dmitri Shostakovich's 13th Symphony.

Al and Ralph were crushed by what Al called "enormous not murder only, but a black cloud in the human brain. . . ." The story of a Russian sergeant whose soldiers found babies' shoes even years later when training near the site made us feel hollow and sick inside—"all of us are their descendents" Al wrote in his poem "At Babiiy Yar."

At the hotel, Mark Pinchevsky, the editor of *Vsesvit*, the Ukrainian journal of world literature, was waiting for the group to take us to the formal summing up meeting of the Ukrainian leg of our tour. The Writers' Club was close and Mark offered to walk with Al and show him some interesting spots on the way. Worried about the "interesting" spots, I tried to talk Al out of it, but his settled policy at the time was "never refuse a drink." Mark assured me that it'd be "just a snifter for an appetite," so we agreed to meet later at the meeting. Little did I know that a snifter would be a water glass of brandy on an empty stomach on a hot Kiev afternoon. When Mark and Al, both wearing dark

glasses, showed up at the meeting, it had already descended into the usual "here is to peace" speech-toast smoothed down the irksome guests' throats with black caviar and vodka. The pretentiousness of the situation did not go well with Al. "Peace . . . damn your eyes!" he cursed through gritted teeth: "They'd better leave their dissident writers alone and admit the truth about Babi Yar."

A few days in Riga and Leningrad were very much the same, with the exception of one episode in a small, but lavish, Baltic Writers' Union brunch in an elite resort hidden from public eyes behind the pine trees and sandy dunes of Jurmala. After a dozen of "here is to . . ." the carefully selected group of Latvian writers turned to singing. Suddenly, the communist consciousness cracked and a popular local stage director Peteris Petersons, broke out off-key with "*Deutschland, Deutschland über alles*" ("Germany, Germany above all"), once a Nazi anthem. Al, who during the war was with the RAF's Military Police, bent over the table and stared down his throat. "I can see his tonsils, but not what he means," he said turning to me. "Who is he aiming at?" Many years later, having read about the ex-Nazis parading in Latvia, I no longer wonder.

Back in Moscow, on the eve of the return flight home, Eurithe and Betty were shopping in the hard currency stores reserved for foreigners and the diplomatic community. Al and Ralph were drafting notes for the politically correct speeches required at the summing up meeting with the Soviet officials, were eager to hear appreciation of the Soviet way of life in the "Communist paradise." It was decided that Ralph would do the talking.

At the end of the meeting Al added that Soviet tradition impressed him—the way the Soviets honoured their writers and academics. The cities we visited had squares and streets named after the most prominent ones. "I cannot think of a Canadian parallel," he said.

Al and I corresponded for a few years. We met again only seventeen years later, after me, my wife Natasha, and our thirteen-year-old son relocated to Canada. One day, we read in a newspaper about Al Purdy's readings in Toronto's High Park. Eurithe was with him.

We waited behind the improvised park stage. That evening in the coffee shop at the York Hotel we laughed and talked about his USSR adventure and our future in Canada.

"How about a snifter to that," said Al, "Only now," he added looking at Eurithe, "I toast with herb tea, damn it."

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Contributors

Articles

Richard **Brock** currently teaches classes in English and Communications at the University of Calgary and at Red Deer College. He has published articles on a range of topics within postcolonial literature, critical theory, and image-text relations. He gained his PhD in English from the University of Calgary in 2011. His doctoral dissertation, "Reading Canada and the Postcolonial: An Ekphrastic Methodology," explored postcolonial uses of the visual in Canadian literature.

Mary **Chapman** is an Associate Professor of English at UBC. She is currently editing an anthology of uncollected works by Edith Eaton (Sui Sin Far) for McGill-Queen's University Press.

Manina **Jones** is a Professor in the Department of English at the University of Western Ontario. She is the author of *That Art of Difference: Documentary-Collage and English-Canadian Writing*, co-author of *Detective Agency: Women Rewriting the Hard-Boiled Tradition*, and co-editor of *Carol Shields and the Extra-Ordinary*, as well as articles on Canadian poetry, fiction, and drama.

Laurie **Kruk** is the author of two collections of poetry, *Theories of the World* (Netherlandic, 1992) and *Loving the Alien* (YSP, 2006). She teaches at Nipissing University in North Bay, Ontario.

Geoff **Martin** holds an MA in English Literature from McMaster University. Aside from his interest in twentieth-century Canadian literature and culture, he writes on nineteenth century migration narratives in North America. He is currently teaching at the City Colleges of Chicago.

Victor **Pogostin**, PhD, was born in Moscow, Russia. After his return from military service, he defended his dissertation on "Ernest Hemingway's Non-fiction" and for many years worked in the Academy of Sciences and continued his career as a freelance author/translator for the national newspapers and literary magazines in the former Soviet Union. He has translated works into Russian and has compiled, edited, and written introductions and commentaries for over 12 books of North American authors, including the fiction and non-fiction works of Ernest Hemingway and John Steinbeck. Pogostin first visited Canada as a translator for the USSR hockey team at the 1987 Canada Cup. In 1993 he relocated to Canada with his wife and son.

Medrie **Purdham** is an Assistant Professor at the University of Regina, where she teaches Canadian literature and creative writing. Her doctoral thesis was entitled, "The Encyclopedic Imagination and the Canadian Artist-Figure," and she

is currently at work on a poetry manuscript. Her poetry has been published in *The New Quarterly*, *The Malahat Review*, *The Fiddlehead*, *The Antigonish Review* and in other Canadian literary journals. Her research is focused on Canadian literature at the intersection of modernism and postmodernism, and her particular interests are in prosody, modernist epistemology, the poetics and politics of collecting, and in the aesthetics of the miniature.

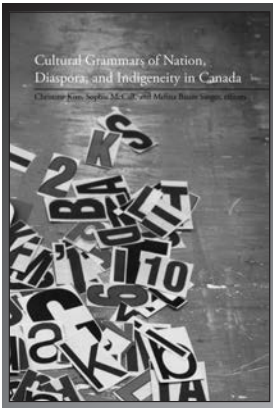
Cynthia **Sugars** is an Associate Professor in the Department of English at the University of Ottawa where she teaches Canadian literature. She is the author of numerous essays on Canadian literature, and is the editor of *Unhomely States: Theorizing English-Canadian Postcolonialism* (2004); *Home-Work: Postcolonialism, Pedagogy, and Canadian Literature* (2004); and, with Gerry Turcotte, *Unsettled Remains: Canadian Literature and the Postcolonial Gothic* (2009). She has recently co-edited a new anthology of Canadian literature with Laura Moss, *Canadian Literature in English: Texts and Contexts*, published by Pearson/Penguin in 2009.

Poems

Michael **Aird** lives in Coquitlam. derek **beaulieu** lives in Calgary. Gregory **Betts** teaches at Brock University. Clay **McCann** is conducting ethnographic fieldwork in the southern Thompson region of BC. Shane **Rhodes** lives in Ottawa.

Reviews

Gisèle M. **Baxter**, Mélanie **Bennett**, and Kevin **McNeilly** teach, and June **Scudeler** studies at the University of British Columbia. Michael **Roberson** lives in Calgary. Nicholas **Bradley** teaches at the University of Victoria. Daniel **Burgoyne** and Lynn (J.R.) **Wytenbroek** teach at Vancouver Island University. Clint **Burnham** teaches at Simon Fraser University. Alison **Calder** teaches at the University of Manitoba. Mélanie **Collado** teaches at the University of Lethbridge. T.L. **Cowan** lives in New York. Susie **DeCoste** lives in Halifax. Emir **Delic** teaches at the Université d'Ottawa. Joel **Deshaye** teaches at McGill University. Alexis **Foo** lives in Port Moody. Kaya **Fraser** lives in Victoria. Brenna Clarke **Gray** teaches at Douglas College. Tasha **Hubbard** lives in Ogema. Crystal **Hurdle** lives in North Vancouver. Paul **Kennett** teaches at the University of Calgary. Zoë **Landale** lives on Pender Island. Atef **Laouyene** teaches at the California State University. Lindy **Ledohowski** lives in Ottawa. Élise **Lepage** lives in Winnipeg. Joanna **Mansbridge** teaches at St. Francis Xavier University. Sylvain **Marois** teaches at l'Université Laval. Robert **McGill** and Kailin **Wright** teach at the University of Toronto. Katherine **McLeod** and Robert **Zacharias** teach at the University of Guelph. Catherine **Owen** lives in Burnaby. Swann **Paradis** teaches at Glendon College. Laurent **Poliquin** lives in Winnipeg. Brooke **Pratt** lives in Dundas. Robert David **Stacey** teaches at the University of Ottawa. Helene **Staveley** teaches at Memorial University. Laure **Tollard** lives in Seuil d'argonne. Ariane **Tremblay** lives in St-Apollinaire. Hilary **Turner** teaches at the University of the Fraser Valley. Carolyne **Van Der Meer** lives in Kirkland. Jeffrey **Weingarten** lives in LaSalle.



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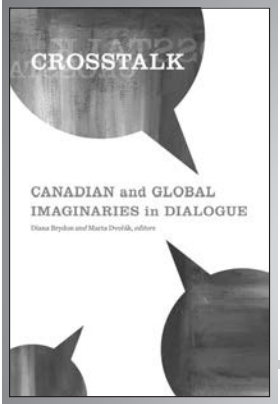

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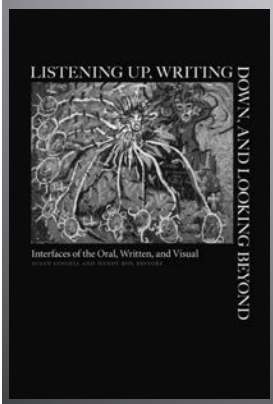

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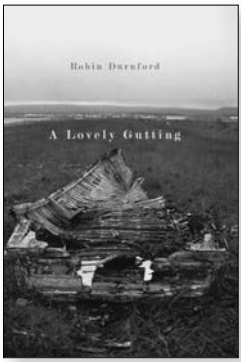

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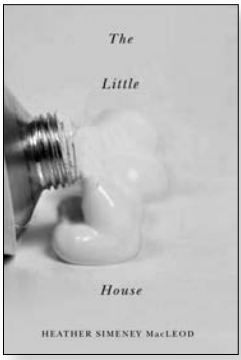

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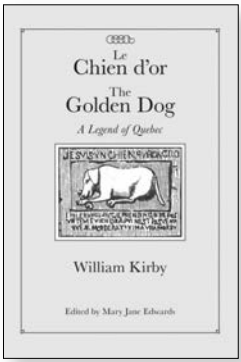

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