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Editorial

Prison Writing / Writing Prison in Canada

Roxanne Rimstead and Deena Rymhs, Guest Editors

My prison window is not large
Five inches high, six inches wide,
Perhaps seven.
Yet it is large enough to show
The whole unfettered to and fro
Of heaven. How high, how wide is heaven?
Five inches high, six inches wide,
Perhaps seven.
—Joe Wallace,"How High, How Wide?"

One of the few traits of prison writing that critics consistently agree upon is that it both inscribes confinement and also writes beyond it, at times in a liberatory gesture. Yet as Joe Wallace, a political activist, shows in the poem above, which was written after twenty-eight days of solitary confinement in Canada's Petawawa Prison in 1941, prison has a way of foreclosing on concrete and imaginative space, even for the most transcendent of spirits.[1] The following collection unfolds several approaches to prison as both metaphor and experience: French discourse analysis of scripted confinement and subversion of the law of silence in writings by the Marquis de Sade and Hubert Aquin (Marion); a riveting interview with anthropologist Hugh Brody on his strategies of filming First Nations carceral subjects involved in self-harm and healing (Rymhs); a feminist reading of prison space and generic diversity in Margaret Atwood's postmodern novel *Alias Grace* (Toron); and a contextualization of "imaginative emancipation" and mythic structures in previously unpublished prison notes by the Inuit author known as "Thrasher, Skid Row Eskimo" (Martin and McKegney). Having neither style, nor context, nor implied audience, nor ideology in common,

these varied critical responses to an even more diverse corpus do meet, nonetheless, around the scripting of prison. They speak to and about confinement, expose the carceral state, trouble the prisoner's identity and voice, and invoke pertinent space and collectivities beyond as well as within prison walls.

Prisoners are not as isolated from literary cultures in this country as much as one might believe; it is literary criticism that has yet to catch up with these rich cross-pollinations. The critical neglect of writing by and about prisoners in Canada is all the more perplexing if one considers that internationally one of the most frequently cited sources on prison writing is *Writers in Prison* (1990) by Canadian sociologist Ioan Davies. Focusing on the significance of utterance among prisoners, although largely limiting his corpus to famous imprisoned writers, Davies provides a sustained and theoretically dense reflection on rhetorical and aesthetic strategies that has not yet been surpassed. Davies recognizes that the study of prison writing should entail the study of many minority languages outside dominant discourse and the translation of prison experience between the lines and through recurring tropes and discursive strategies. Besides using the theories of Mikhail Bakhtin and Pierre Bourdieu, Davies also draws on the pragmatic insight of the Canadian criminologist and editor of a prison journal, Robert Gaucher. Gaucher's approach to reading and writing confinement is a response to the problems of actually living in prison. Recent interdisciplinary work by Jason Haslam in Canada on "fitting sentences" and "captivating subjects" has successfully combined formal concerns to give a global overview of prison writing with a critique of nationhood and citizenship. A recent turn toward more sustained analyses of the narrative techniques of writing prison in Canadian literary studies has been influenced by a cross-fertilization from the fields of postcolonial, gender, and Indigenous studies. Deena Rymhs' *From the Iron House* (2008) pioneered the analysis of Indigenous subjects writing the carceral subject from a place of disproportionate representation in Canadian prisons and from residential schools as well, preceded in 2007 by Sam McKegney's reflections on incarceration in residential schools, cultural genocide, and community healing in *Magic Weapons*. Yet the critical responses to prison writing and writing prison in Canada are relatively few given the corpus.

Despite an insistent outpouring of writing by Canadian prisoners, few readers in Canada know about the voluminous body of writing published in prison serials and "joint magazines." Active since the 1950s, the penal

press continues to publish prisoners' work in the face of severe funding limitations and the constant shuffling of inmates.[2] In addition to magazines and newsletters published directly from prison, publications like *Words from Inside* (an annual anthology published by the Prison Arts Foundation), *Journal of Prisoners on Prisons* (a peer-reviewed journal published from the University of Ottawa), and *Prison Journal* (a periodical jointly published by the Institute for the Humanities and the Prison Education Program at Simon Fraser University)[3] have sought to bridge imprisoned and non-imprisoned readerships. While the prison and the outlaw have been a fascination for many of Canada's major authors, the writing of prisoners is almost entirely absent from the literary archives that we construct. This paucity of criticism is curious given the number of major Canadian authors who have corresponded or collaborated with men and women serving time in Canadian prisons. Roch Carrier, Lorna Crozier, Timothy Findley, Robert Kroetsch, Patrick Lane, Evelyn Lau, Margaret Laurence, Hugh MacLennan, Susan Musgrave, and Sharon Pollock are but a few of the authors who have worked with or published their writing alongside prisoners.

While our hope with this issue is to generate greater critical interest in prison literature in Canada, there exists a rich dialogue between Canadian prison writing and prison writing internationally—a dialogue that points to the transnational currents of prison literature. Letters from prisoners in well-known US prisons such as Attica, Marion, and Leavenworth, as well as from places as far away as Northern Ireland, appear in the newsletters published from Canadian prisons. August 10 marks Prison Justice Day, a now internationally observed memorial for Eddie Nalon, who bled to death in 1974 in his segregation cell in Millhaven, a maximum-security prison in Ontario. On this day, prisoners in Canada, United States, England, France, and Germany commemorate Nalon's death by fasting and refusing to work. This sense of an expanded political community emerges in writing by Indigenous prisoners as well. Since the 1960s, Indigenous prisoners in Canada have used the penal press to raise the intellectual and political consciousness of other prisoners, organizing letter-writing campaigns for the release of Leonard Peltier,[4] or supporting Indigenous land claims in Brazil. Their writings suggest a political imaginary that exceeds the boundaries of the nation-state. The 1969 occupation of Alcatraz—a structure that stood as a symbol of colonial oppression—represented a pan-indigenous struggle for sovereignty.[5] The prison is a place that seems to dissolve political geographies as they are conventionally conceived.

The prison has captured the imagination of Canadian writers, but perhaps the prison may too easily lend itself to metaphor at the expense of that literature written by individuals who have lived the experience of incarceration. Prisoners' writing performs a crucial role in exposing state mechanisms of control and in disentangling practices of punishment from values of justice and benevolent society by which they are often promoted. The value of this writing is more than symbolic, however. We need further discussion of the rhetorical and aesthetic strategies prison authors employ, the juridical and legal interventions they effect through their writing, and the material and social contexts of this literature's production and distribution. Despite, if not because of, the tenuous conditions of their production and dissemination, these texts also serve as important testimonies to life in prison—testimonies whose very publication is a wonder given the control of governments and prison administrations over what happens behind the prison's walls.

This writing also raises issues of literacy and the prison narrative as a site of an unfolding literate self. While existing scholarship on prison writing has been largely interested in prison authors who are intellectuals or members of revolutionary movements, most of Canada's prison authors are "common criminals" who become writers during their imprisonment. The class politics of this writing are an inextricable part of its discursive character and the radical consciousness often found within these texts. Approximately fifty-five percent of individuals entering Canadian federal prisons test below Grade Ten literacy levels. The rate of illiteracy in the prison creates further barriers to publishing, while it perhaps explains why a great deal of prison writing tends to be collaborative. In "Can the Penitentiary Teach the Academy How to Read?" H. Bruce Franklin makes the case that American prison writing forces us to view not just "incarceration, social justice, and literacy" but also "fundamental questions about literature itself . . . from the bottom up instead of from the top down" (648). In making this claim, Franklin interrogates ideas of "good literature" and argues the connection between "aesthetic standards" and "class, gender, and ethnic values" (648). Avery Gordon pushes this argument further by underlining the obvious (but downplayed) complicity of critical discourses with institutions of privilege—a complicity that makes it necessary to reflect on the ways in which critical discourse cedes to the legitimacy of imprisonment, "the rule of law," and the "morality of innocence" (653). Michael Feith makes these complicities even clearer when he observes: "The penal system as we know it is based on a spatial dichotomy, which in turn expresses a moral one" (665).

As Canada continues to incarcerate people at higher rates than ever before—particularly women,[6] racial minorities, and the poor—prison writing will have an even more vital role to play in our discourses of nation. The literature coming from prisons has much to tell us about the experience of incarceration and the changing identity of the prison author. These works testify to the privatization of prison labour, the "warehousing" of prisoners, the lack of drug treatment programs, inadequate medical care, and extended periods in solitary confinement. The prison today is different from the prison as Foucault theorized it in 1975. Prisoners' lives—as their writing extensively attests—are today characterized by idleness, unstructured time, and neglect. "Not only is prison no panopticon," observes C. Fred Alford, "but it is in many ways its opposite, a nonopticon" (131), a place where "hold[ing] the body" (133) has become the prison's reduced function. In an era of transnational capitalism, approaching prison writing from a transnational framework might also reveal the ways in which prison systems are being transformed by global capitalism. Moreover, recent amendments to the Canadian Criminal Code reflect a changing prison system that is beginning to resemble an American one. Reduced funding for prison educational programs and an attenuated focus on rehabilitation pose increasing challenges to prison writing—challenges that make prison literature all the more important for thinking about human rights and the nations that vouch to protect them, both within and beyond the wall.

NOTES

1 Joe Wallace was jailed in Canada as a communist under the Defence of Canada Regulations during WWII. His transcendent perspective of heaven in this poem derives, no doubt, from his faith in both communist and Catholic utopias.
2 See Robert Gaucher's "The Canadian Penal Press: A Documentation and Analysis" for further discussion of the history of the penal press in Canada.
3 *Prison Journal* ceased publication in 1997.
4 The occupation drew its strength from inter-tribal collaboration. The group claiming the island named themselves "Indians of All Tribes" and identified as their spokesperson Richard Oakes, a Mohawk man from St. Regis Reserve in New York. The occupation also formulated an Indigenous rights movement within the context of global colonialisms, drawing attention to the Vietnam War while this conflict was at its crest.
5 According to Lisa Neve and Kim Pate, "[w]omen are the fastest-growing prison population worldwide" (27). Neve and Pate attribute this growth to "[t]he neoliberal deconstruction of social safety nets—from social and health services to economic and education standards and availability" (27).

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As well as four articles on prison writing, this issue includes an essay by Stephanie Oliver on Larissa Lai's *Salt Fish Girl* and one by Douglas Ivison on Lynne Coady's *Saints of Big Harbour.* Oliver's article analyses *Salt Fish Girl* by focusing on the sense of smell, a sense that she demonstrates can provide an illuminating approach to the understanding of postcolonial subjectivities represented in fiction. Ivison argues that Coady's novel shows how globalization has disrupted traditional identifications for Atlantic Canadians and suggests that this disruption means that traditional concepts of regional writing should be rethought. —Margery Fee

Alison Toron

The Model Prisoner
Reading Confinement in *Alias Grace*

Based upon the actual 1843 murders of Thomas Kinnear and his housekeeper/mistress Nancy Montgomery on a farm outside Toronto, Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace* (1996) gives a detailed first-person voice to Grace Marks, the Irish serving maid accused, along with fellow servant James McDermott, of the murders. This sensational case continues to garner public fascination, particularly after the publication of Atwood's meticulously researched novel. Grace's role in the murders remains unclear to this day, but Atwood's multi-layered text opens up space for readings that consider the class, ethnic, and gender dynamics at play in the murder and its aftermath.[1] But what has yet to be explored by scholars is the complex physical and psychological space and place[2] of the prison in Atwood's psychodrama. After all, Grace narrates her story to the young psychiatrist Dr. Simon Jordan in the Governor's parlour at the Kingston Penitentiary, and sixteen years after she has been convicted of murder, the penal system continues to dominate her imagination and her daily reality. In *Alias Grace*, the prison, through a series of metonymical associations, takes on representational significance as the most literal and obvious site of confinement in a series of limiting enclosures that come to define Grace's identity and her narrative style. Although Grace's story may be fractured and incomplete, her telling represents, in the tradition of prison narratives, the power to transcend these various confinements through the act of storytelling. Thus *Alias Grace* may be read as a type of prison narrative, but one in which the conventions of this emerging genre—such as the trope of mental freedom, proclamations of unjust imprisonment, a complex

relationship to the outside world, generic multiplicity, creating sympathy with the reader, and a polemical edge—are undermined even as Grace deploys them for her own purposes. She strategically employs her narrative as a means of self-therapy (thus denying her psychologist the authority of performing therapy *on* her) and as a tool to secure her release. However, her challenges to the cathartic power of narrative can be read as a means of exploring the epistemological limits of prison narration. Traditionally prison literature foregrounds the ways in which knowledge is intertwined with power, and since the prisoner represents some of the most disempowered in society, she or he lacks access to much of the cultural authority associated with narration. Yet Grace confronts these presumptions through the telling of her story—and how she chooses to relay it is crucial.

It is difficult to discuss textual representations of the prison without considering the influential work of Michel Foucault. In his groundbreaking study *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975), Foucault traces the development of the modern prison system, detailing how, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the focus in prison theory shifted from corporeal punishment to mental refashioning—hence the *Penitent*iary. Although psychological manipulation is ostensibly more humane than physical discipline, Foucault argues that it too is part of a larger system of power and control. Foucault posits a theory of "the carceral" as part of an intertwined system of dominance that controls bodies in settings as varied as the hospital, the school, the monastery, and the factory. In them, docile subjects are produced who help maintain existing power structures. Foucault explains that "a body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed, and improved" (136). This transformation occurs in a variety of ways, through "a multiplicity of often minor processes, of different origins and scattered location, which overlap, repeat, or imitate one another, support one another, distinguish themselves from one another according to their domain of application, coverage, and gradually produce the blueprint of a general method" (Foucault 138). Sandra Kumamoto Stanley has rightly noted that in Atwood's novel "Grace is perceived as that recalcitrant body that must be defined, categorized, contained" (374), but her focus is on Grace's class and gender transgressions rather than her fraught identity as a prisoner. The methods by which Grace is shaped into a carceral subject are many and insidious. Grace is subject to routine inspections, arbitrary regulations, and constant surveillance, not to mention the power plays and petty rivalries of her fellow prisoners: "There is no place like prison for small jealousies,

and I've seen some come to blows, and even close to murder, over nothing more than a piece of cheese" (281). In a world in which all relationships are condensed and individuals are forced to operate in such close proximity, small details and minor intrigues take on unwarranted significance. Prison is the pinnacle of total discipline; it is "uninterrupted" (Foucault 236) because the subject is literally contained within the prison's walls. Yet this process of containment is not wholly complete because "[a]ny structure of ideas is vulnerable at its margins" (Douglas 121). In the Kingston Penitentiary, Grace makes clear that prisoners quietly contravene rules and carry out acts of revenge on one another:

> One ought to bear all patiently, as part of the correction we are subject to; unless a way can be found, of tripping up your enemy without detection. Hair pulling is not advisable, as the racket brings the keepers, and then both sides are punished for creating a disturbance. Dirt slipped into the food by means of the sleeve, as with magicians, may be accomplished without much fuss, and may bring some satisfaction. (282)

Rejecting their official position at the bottom of a top-down system, the prisoners harm one another in an attempt to alter the relations of power inside the prison. In this way, prisoners are able to refigure their identities as victims (even though they may be victimized by one another) and redistribute some of the power circulating in the prison system. Following Foucault, the prison in *Alias Grace* is articulated as a series of power struggles, in which the prisoner and others vie for any tiny degree of control, all within the context of state-controlled authority.

Foucault has had an immense influence on the emerging genre of prison literature. His notion of a subject who comes into being through incarceration has informed the ways in which writers have represented the prison in literary texts, and his conceptualization of discipline as a multifaceted process articulates the many restraints the prisoner finds him or herself subject to. Yet prison writing, both non-fictional and fictional, remains a relatively small and largely under-theorized area of inquiry. A major barrier for both the reader and the critic is that prison literature challenges accepted ideas about reading. It is difficult to grasp the full significance of writing produced under the conditions of confinement without having experienced imprisonment. Perhaps this is why critical examination of prison writing often analyzes it as a kind of resistance literature that has the potential to enact change at a broader societal level. Barbara Harlow, for instance, has traced the development of prison writing and examined its effectiveness outside the

prison walls, while Ioan Davies has raised theoretical and practical issues around the writing of incarcerated authors. Both Davies and Harlow attempt to understand the effect incarceration has on the imagination and on the physical state of the prisoner. Harlow rightly notes that prison literature is inescapably political, not only because it so forcefully makes visible mechanisms of power, but also because it frequently exists as a means of challenging various structures, which she identifies as both state-controlled and literary. Davies suggests that the metaphor and reality of incarceration have influenced the Western imagination and the way we understand such concepts as margin and centre; in an implicitly masculine-focused analysis, he puts violence at the centre of his ideas as he characterizes writing as a struggle. Other writers such as H. Bruce Franklin and Deena Rymhs have examined the role of the doubly marginalized (African Americans and Aboriginal people in Canada, respectively) in literary endeavours, noting the continuity between such oppressive institutions as slavery and the residential school and the modern prison system.

Atwood's novel adds to a body of prison literature developed in both Canada and around the world that aims to fictionalize and give voice to historical subjects for a variety of representational goals. Like George Elliot Clarke's *George and Rue* (2005), *Alias Grace* falls into the tradition of English-Canadian novels that examine the life of a subject (often based on a historical person) leading up to his or her incarceration. In the process, these textual representations reveal the social and economic impediments that cause the subject to become involved in the criminal justice system. *George and Rue*, for instance, details the systemic racism, violence, and crippling poverty that lead the two title characters—a pair of African Canadian brothers—to brutally murder a Fredericton taxi driver in 1949. Likewise, *Alias Grace* imaginatively reconstructs the entire life of Grace Marks, from her impoverished beginnings in Ireland with an abusive father and victimized mother, to their hellish journey across the Atlantic ocean to Canada, to the difficulties she faces as a young woman who becomes a domestic servant at the age of thirteen. Grace's personal history of oppression frames her supposed crime and inclines the reader to be sympathetic to her plight, a common effect of prison literature. Prison literature explores the relationship between the penal institution and the wider society through the individual's experience inside a prison. It confines itself to no one style; instead, its hybridized forms consider various subjects and serve different goals. Generally, however, prison literature has a mimetic

function in that it aims to provide a realistic portrayal of what prison is like, usually creating sympathy for the imprisoned. To be inside the prison, according to Mary Douglas, is to be permanently outside the social system, and the imprisoned subject remains perpetually marginalized (97). Yet prison literature reveals the links between the supposedly oppositional categories of inside and outside. As Foucault has shown, the prison acts as a synecdoche for other means of social control. But while Foucault skilfully describes how bodies are disciplined through such methods as surveillance, homogenization, and record-keeping, he does not consider how different social categories operate in institutional settings. Grace's gender, class, and Irishness taint her as guilty before she has been convicted of any crime. Grace is clearly aware of the deviancy associated with her ethnicity when she wryly notes, "I did indeed come from the North of Ireland; though I thought it was very unjust when they wrote down that *both of the accused were from Ireland by their own admission*. That made it sound like a crime, and I don't know that being from Ireland is a crime; although I have often seen it treated as such" (116). The potential of prejudice to create a carcereal subject before any crime is actually committed is also evident in the novel's references to phrenology, the dubious nineteenth-century "science" of measuring head size and shape in an attempt to predict deviant behaviour. Again, Grace subtly mocks such practices in a way that reveals their true motives: "And then they could lock those people up before they had a chance to commit any crimes, and think how that would improve the world" (29). By referring to such ideological prisons that interpellate subjects as criminals, Atwood is able to demonstrate that the prison is not actually a space apart from the larger social world from which subjects are put "away," but is instead a mirror reflection of the inequalities that already exist. In this way, Atwood removes Grace from her fixation in the temporal space of the day of the murders and contextualizes her responses to the limiting circumstances of her life.

Not only do these circumstances serve to humanize Grace, but they also reflect a pattern of confinement that culminates in Grace's imprisonment. The prison is not an aberration in Grace's life, but just one of a series of oppressive spaces that includes her unhappy childhood home, the houses in which she works, and finally, the Kingston Penitentiary, where she narrates her life story to the young and eager psychiatrist Dr. Simon Jordan. The premise of the novel requires that Grace be a prisoner. Several commentators have noted the "Scheherazade" trope of the imprisoned Grace weaving tales to interest and detain her audience (specifically Dr. Jordan and more

generally the reader).[3] But Grace's imprisonment is more than a narrative convention. The novel is defined by its portrayal of small, confining spaces: tiny attic bedrooms, suffocating ships' holds, stuffy and sexually charged parlours, and cramped stairways, not to mention the small prison cell where Grace spends her days. And she has plenty of days to spend: she has received a life sentence for her role in the murders. The novel's prison setting reflects Foucault's insights, elucidated in "Of Other Spaces," that certain spaces can be characterized as "heterotopias of deviation," where "individuals whose behaviour is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm are placed" (25). These spaces help collapse such binaries as private/public and leisure/work (23) because their spatial qualities are not clearly defined. In Grace's case, she is as much an unpaid domestic servant for the Governor, performing the familiar tasks of sewing, washing, and cooking, as she is a conventional prisoner. These spaces of deviation also contest standard conceptions of temporality. Deprived of nearly everything else, prisoners have plenty of time. At one point, Dr. Jordan wonders how Grace is supposed to fill the rest of her time now that "the main story . . . the thing that has defined her" (104) is over. *Alias Grace* partially answers this question by depicting Grace's life as a prisoner.

Alias Grace's prison setting serves to emphasize the significance of literal spaces in creating and maintaining discursive spaces, and vice versa.[4] While speaking to Dr. Jordan as he attempts to make a name for himself in the newly developed field of psychotherapy, all meaning for Grace is shaped by the ideological and physical space of the prison. As Atwood has noted, Dr. Jordan already has an "edge" over Grace not only because he is educated, but also because he is a man ("In Search" 1515). Moreover, he is free and Grace is not. These inequalities lead to misunderstandings and frustration on both sides. During Dr. Jordan's word association games, Grace does not make his expected and neatly connotative connection of "Beet—Root Cellar—Corpses . . . or even Turnip—Underground—Grave" (103). Instead, Grace produces "a series of cookery methods" (103). The distance between these two discourses creates a humorous effect. Moreover, Grace's materially-grounded responses reflect her status as a working-class woman who has been taught practical skills rather than the type of abstract thinking that Dr. Jordan values. Fresh produce signifies to the incarcerated Grace freedom outside the prison walls.[5] At the first touch of an apple, Grace thinks "It has such an odour of outdoors on it I want to cry" (43). Later, when Dr. Jordan brings Grace the radish she requests, she muses on the ways in which imprisonment severs

connection with the natural world: "I ask him how he came by it; and he says it is from the market; though he has it in mind to make a small kitchen garden himself at the house where he lodges, as there is the place for it, and he has already begun the digging. Now that is a thing I envy" (291). Although Dr. Jordan has the power to bring highly meaningful objects from the outside world, giving him considerable authority in her eyes, the power dynamics existing between them are fundamentally unstable. By the time Dr. Jordan presents Grace with the radish, their relationship is quite different from their first encounter in which Grace will not engage in Dr. Jordan's guessing game and thus refuses to submit to his rules. Instead, Grace imposes her own rules upon him. When he pleases her, such as when he brings the requested radish, she tailors her narrative in such a way to entertain him: "Because he was so thoughtful as to bring me a radish, I set to work willingly to tell my story, and to make it as interesting as I can, and rich in incident, as a sort of return gift to him; for I have always believed that one good turn deserves another" (291). Conversely, Grace consciously punishes Dr. Jordan when his simplistic interpretations insult her intelligence, such as when he fails to understand her nuanced analysis of quilts as warning flags for women: "I should not speak to him so freely, and decide I will not, if that is the tone he is going to take" (187). Grace has clearly internalized the prison's rigid system of rewards and punishments, and she inflicts a similar framework on Dr. Jordan. In so doing, she shifts the prison's dynamics of power in her favour.

Just as Grace is confined within the penitentiary, we as readers are confined within the novel's intensely interior world. *Alias Grace* may not be as claustrophobic as Anne Hebert's *Kamouraska* (1970), another Canadian psychodrama that gives first-person voice to a woman accused of murder, but its obsessive foregrounding of Grace's perspective makes it a deeply intimate and psychological text. Most of the novel is narrated by Grace in the first person, though Dr. Jordan narrates chapters from his perspective and Atwood includes many textual scraps, such as newspaper articles, literary extracts, and letters. Even when the point of view shifts, the narrative remains confined to Grace's unsettled mind because the plot is filtered through her incomplete account of her life. Grace can only tell her story at specified intervals—her scheduled interviews with Dr. Jordan in the parlour—and she can only tell what she remembers (or claims to remember). The prison setting provides Grace with a great deal of time to think, and her narrative style reflects her stream of thoughts. The novel's powerfully interior

narrative voice is shaped by the prison setting of strict confinement; the two types of confinement mirror one another.

Grace's imprisonment is the most obvious and visible mode of containment, but it is not the only repression the novel illustrates. Discipline, for Foucault, is not simply the function of a single institution or the authority wielded by those at the top of the social hierarchy, but is "a type of power, a modality for its exercise, comprising a whole set of instruments, techniques, procedures, levels of application, targets" (*Discipline* 215). Implied in these disciplinary techniques are gender codes. The prison in *Alias Grace* is metonymically connected to gender regulation through Grace's heavily connotative diction. The prison is immediately established as both a physical and psychological space, and although Grace does not explicitly read her performance of femininity as a means of coping with incarceration, her choice of language reveals such connections:

> I am a model prisoner, and give no trouble. That's what the Governor's wife says, I have overheard her saying it. I'm skilled at overhearing. If I am good enough and quiet enough, perhaps after all they will let me go; but it's not easy being quiet and good, it's like hanging on to the edge of a bridge when you've already fallen over; you don't seem to be moving, just dangling there, and yet it is taking all your strength. (5-6)

Grace's syntactical construction is notable because it begins a pattern in which she makes what seem like straightforward statements about herself ("I am a model prisoner"), and then undermines them by ascribing them to someone else ("That's what the Governor's wife says"). This discursive play gestures toward the complexities of negotiating a subject position for the incarcerated writer, particularly when she is a woman. It is noteworthy that performing femininity has taught Grace how to be the best possible prisoner. As Gillian Siddall has argued, Grace's incarceration can be read as a metaphor for "repressive aspects of nineteenth-century ideologies" (85) such as those relating to gender and sexuality. Contrary to the essentialist notion that femininity is something that women do naturally, Grace's analysis reveals the struggle inherent in acting the socially prescribed role of the "model" woman, which is as strenuous and imprisoning as being a "model" prisoner. Moreover, although this passage demonstrates how Grace has been constructed by other people, we also see that she uses this construction strategically as a survival mechanism. Rather than identifying with fellow prisoners and forming some kind of collective unit, Grace categorizes herself as different and somewhat superior to her fellow inmates

("a model prisoner"), capitulating, in Foucault's model, to the "individual and individualizing" (*Discipline* 236) effects of the prison.

The prison in *Alias Grace* metaphorically represents gender regulation, but it also has multiple and sometimes conflicting meanings. The prison punishes its inmates, but it also provides a spectacle for visitors like Susanna Moodie who visit for entertainment. For the most part, the novel explores issues familiar to Atwood's readers: power (*The Handmaid's Tale*), imprisonment (*Bodily Harm*), multiple identities (*Lady Oracle*, *Surfacing*), relationship dynamics (*Life Before Man*), and deception (*The Robber Bride*). All of these motifs converge in *Alias Grace* in the prison as a space of competing desires. Grace astutely sums up this theme when she comments, "[n]o one comes to see me here unless they want something" (41). Grace's own desires are ambiguous, yet everyone else wants something from or for her. The Governor's wife wants Grace exonerated and released; she also wants Dr. Jordan to marry her daughter Lydia. Reverend Verringer, the man who heads the committee working to secure Grace's release, wants Grace's freedom, but he wants Lydia (and eventually gets her when she becomes pregnant out of wedlock by a soldier) even as he yearns for Grace. All of the men associated with the prison desire Grace in one way or another. Dr. Jordan notes that Grace is the only woman he wishes to marry, and after losing his memory during the Civil War, he refers to his wife Faith as Grace. Dr. Jordan also has the most at stake during his prison interactions with Grace. He is a "collector" (45); he wants Grace's story for both personal and professional reasons. His official justification for his curiosity is the interest of science; by solving the mystery behind Grace's memory loss, he hopes to build enough of a reputation to eventually open a private asylum in the United States. On a broader level, there is also power in knowing what no one else (perhaps not even Grace) knows. Adding to these relations of power, Dr. Jordan wants Grace's body, most obviously when he dreams about having sex with her while actually having sex with his landlady. Grace is as imprisoned by these desires, fantasies, and clichéd scripts as she is by the prison's walls.

Because it is impossible for Grace to escape the stories various people tell about her, she begins to tell her own stories. It is fitting that Grace uses narrative to reconstruct her identity given that her existence has been shaped by narrative. As Jennifer Murray rightly points out, we already know "what happened" by the time we finish reading the popular ballad in the novel's first few pages. Therefore the remainder of the novel is concerned with "the question of how things get told, to whom, to what end or effect" (Murray

315). Endless stories are told about Grace, for as Paul Gready has observed, "to be a prisoner is to be variously written" (quoted in Rymhs 14). Her incarceration is based on one story of illicit desire and murderous jealousy; her release is based on another of unjust imprisonment and penitent reformation. Grace wryly observes, "it calls for a different arrangement of the face; but I suppose it will become easier in time" (529). By presenting her newfound freedom in this way, Grace not only foregrounds how contradictory different narratives about the same subject can be, but she also demonstrates that they are ideologically malleable. The stories that define and confine Grace may have material effects, most obviously her physical containment, but they are not necessarily permanent.

During the course of the novel, Grace only leaves the grounds of the Penitentiary twice: first in 1852 when she is transferred to the Provincial Lunatic Asylum, and then again in 1872 when she is pardoned. Clearly the prison is a space of stasis and confinement that physically restricts her movement. Yet Atwood paradoxically represents the prison as a fluid, porous space in which prisoners sometimes achieve some kind of release. Grace is able to leave the prison area to do fine sewing work in the Governor's parlour and to work in the kitchen; her value as a domestic worker is deemed higher than any potential threat she might pose as a convict. Ironically, the escorted journey from prison to parlour is the most perilous part of her day; she faces continuous harassment from her guards as she physically leaves the prison's walls. In addition to being physically permeable, the prison is also imaginatively permeable. Roxanne Rimstead has astutely noted that "in several instances Grace's inner imaginings collapse the confined space of her prison cell or her lonely life in service into wild, red peonies or colourful quilt patterns to suggest that she is somewhat empowered through these imaginings (along with hauntings, fainting, lying, alternate identities, and so on)" (61). The prison fails in its goal of total psychological and imaginative containment; instead, it often blends with other settings, particularly in Grace's dreams. The very first scene in the novel illustrates this process when Grace describes the red peonies growing out of the gravel in the prison yard. First they are "like the peonies in the front garden at Mr. Kinnear's" (5), and then suddenly Grace is taken back to the day of the murders and the horrible vision of Nancy on her knees, covered in blood. The vision scatters into red "patches of colour" (6), and Grace despairingly says "I know I will never get out" (6). Her statement perfectly encapsulates the multiple levels of imprisonment she is subject to: imaginative, literal, and figurative.

She believes she will never physically leave prison, and she is continually incarcerated by the memories that haunt her. Yet paradoxically, her visions and memories do offer her a kind of escape through recollection. Although being transported back to the day of the murders at the Kinnear farm is not the kind of escape she yearns for, it still is a way to breach the prison's walls.

Grace's imagination and hallucinations allow her some form of freedom, but her most effective means of escape is her use of narrative. Grace is the most literally confined character in all of Atwood's novels, yet Grace is Atwood's most resourceful storyteller—and a highly skilled editor. Using narrative as a means of escape from incarceration allows Grace a great deal more agency than her uninvited memories, yet like her imaginative escapes, the outcome of this process is not always predictable. In her stories about Mary Whitney, for instance, Grace is temporarily transported back to "a happier part of [her] story" (169) and "the happiest Christmas that [she] ever spent" (197), but her potential for catharsis is reduced as her narrative approaches the climactic murder scene. At this point, her mental incarceration is foregrounded: her memory becomes less sharp, her telling more chaotic, and her memories dream-like. At the end of the first chapter, it becomes clear that Grace intentionally orders her fractured narrative about the day of the murders in a way that will appeal to her audience: "This is what I told Dr. Jordan, when we came to that part of the story" (6). The "we" implies a collaborative effort between narrator and listener, yet the "I" who chooses what, how, and how much she will tell suggests that the telling is not a simple recounting of events, but instead is one involving a complex negotiation of power and a reclamation of Grace's own story. This power negotiation includes struggles that occur within Grace as an individual, a process poetically expressed in Grace's duplicitous description of a sunrise:

> Today when I woke up there was a beautiful pink sunrise, with the mist lying over the fields like a white soft cloud of muslin, and the sun shining through the layers of it all blurred and rosy like a peach gently on fire.
> . . .
> In fact I have no idea what kind of sunrise there was. In prison they make the windows high up, so you cannot climb out of them I suppose, but also so you cannot see out of them either, or a least not onto the outside world . . . And so this morning I saw only the usual form of light, a light without shape, coming in through the high-up and dirty grey windows, as if cast by no sun and no moon and no lamp or candle. Just a swathe of daylight the same all the way though, like lard. (279)

Interestingly, the captivity of prison seems to inspire Grace to creatively reinvent her world. Prison forces her to take "a light without shape" and

mould it into an evocative description because the alternative is to submit to a drab and hopeless existence that offers no possibility of agency.

Although Grace benefits from her rhetorical skills, storytelling is not necessarily a form of renewal or a way for her to foster her creativity. Monika Fludernik has convincingly argued that the trope of mental freedom in prison—that is, prison as a place of meditation, peace, and refuge so popular in the nineteenth century—is actually deeply rooted in class privilege. Similarly, Mark E. Kann suggests that "[p]enitence was for the privileged" (31) in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century America, and Angela Y. Davis argues that the idea of repentance has historically been targeted at white middle-class men. In other words, going to prison in the nineteenth century was only a welcome escape from the harsh world for those who had the means and education to use it as an opportunity for writing and quiet reflection. Although working-class and female, Grace shrewdly appropriates this self-improving role by using her incarceration as an opportunity to improve her education. She criticizes Mary Whitney's poor grammar and ironically notes "I used to speak that way as well, but I have learned better manners in prison" (35). Her proclamation points to class-based values that underlie the prison structure, but it also suggests that prisoners like Grace are able to appropriate some of the cultural capital associated with proper speech and use it for their own ends.

Grace strategically performs her class transformation much as she deliberately employs various tropes frequently associated with prison literature. At various points, she performs the part of the innocent criminal, defending herself against unjust imprisonment. While she never explicitly claims innocence, she never admits guilt either. Instead she utilizes the generic trope of the falsely accused, unjustly imprisoned because of a patronizing lawyer and a rejected young admirer seeking revenge for being hurt in love. When Jamie Walsh divulges to the courtroom that Grace is wearing the dead Nancy's clothes, she knows she is "doomed" (434), not because of what she may or may not have done, but because of the narrative the jury will construct from this revelation. She positions herself as powerless against such discursive inevitability, conveniently eliding the possibility that she is "doomed" because she participated in Nancy and Thomas' murders.

Given that Grace so astutely comprehends the flexible and potentially empowering nature of narrative, it is not surprising that although it is Dr. Jordan who attempts to transform Grace through his therapy, it is Grace who enlists narrative as a tool of self-help. The novel gestures towards and then

refuses the classic Freudian narrative in which a patient reveals repressed memories after an extensive period of psychoanalysis. For Dr. Jordan, an early practitioner of the "talking cure," therapy is based upon a clearly defined power relationship: Dr. Jordan asks questions; Grace responds; Dr. Jordan records information and draws conclusions from it. This practice depends upon a certain degree of objectification: Grace becomes a "case" for Dr. Jordan to study using his medical knowledge, and his gaze fixes her in place as he attempts to transform her from an enigma to a knowable patient.[6] The analyst is supposed to move the patient from a state of amnesia to traumatic revelation.[7] However, Grace is an unruly subject. Rather than giving Dr. Jordan the "true crime" narrative he wishes to hear, Grace instead produces a socially conscious autobiography that focuses on the ill treatment of the working class. Atwood humorously subverts the therapy paradigm through this reversed power play, diminishing the privileged doctor-patient relationship and producing a nuanced social critique.

What Grace provides is not a simple counter-narrative to the many stories circulated about her, but something rather more complex. Because of the restrictions of both the actual prison and of prison writing, her story becomes a meditation on the nature and forms that narrative can take under conditions of confinement. Grace cannot offer unadulterated truth not only because her amnesia prevents access to it, but also because her position as a prisoner affects her perceived reliability. More than once in the novel, physical evidence is valorized as the ultimate yardstick of truth. When Grace considers revealing to Dr. Jordan that she fainted and fell on a railing of pointed spikes when her guilty verdict was read to the courtroom, she offers, "I could show him the scar" (434). Physical proof is offered as a badge of authenticity to counter the prisoner's dubious credibility. Atwood suggests that Grace's literal confinement—even after her release, given that her marriage to Jamie Walsh does not leave her unambiguously free—is inextricably linked to the discursive confinement that dictates what is sayable or plausible in the prison atmosphere. Her narrative is not simply one story replacing another, but is instead a complex conglomeration of narrative styles and conventions that at times accepts and at other times challenges her assorted representations. The kind of narrative Grace produces represents the fraught position of the incarcerated author who frequently borrows from multiple narrative modes in order to most accurately represent the various discourses that have constructed her or him. Much prison literature, such as Leonard Peltier's hybridized *Prison Writings*, is defined by its generic

diversity, and *Alias Grace* is notable because it reflects the heterogeneity that characterizes many prisoners' non-fiction productions. More specifically, what *Alias Grace* makes explicit is that the prisoner's epistemological position is unstable because it is determined by social relations that extend beyond the prison's walls. In other words, the prisoner finds him or herself in a catch-22: although he or she is only able to create a position as a knowing subject by writing out of prison (a setting that denies his or her subjectivity), his or her knowledge will always be considered suspect by those outside. In this way, Atwood is drawing on the philosophic tradition of standpoint epistemology. "A standpoint in the everyday world," explains Dorothy Smith, "is the fundamental grounding of modes of knowing developed in a ruling apparatus" (230). Because it exists outside of the everyday world, the prison is subject to its own epistemological limits, compounded by the fact that many of its inhabitants are already labelled as "other." Moreover, feminist scholars have argued that women have a standpoint "as one situated outside textually mediated discourses in the actualities of our everyday lives" (Smith 34). As both a woman and a prisoner, Grace is doubly excluded from the creation of cultural and intellectual discourse. Like Grace's truth claims, prison knowledge in general is always suspect because it exists on the margins. By showing Grace as unwilling and even unable to reveal all her secrets, Atwood is making visible the epistemological limits placed on her as a knowing subject and broadening the range of lines of inquiry in an ever-expanding genre.

Alias Grace is critical for the rethinking of prison literature in Canada because it not only foregrounds the roles of gender, class, and ethnicity in such literature, but it also redeploys several conventions of the genre in order to present the possibility of using narrative as a tool of self-therapy, thereby reclaiming a small degree of power. Atwood demonstrates that agency in prison is created and maintained through small acts, such as telling one's own story, as fragmented and chaotic as it may be. As Jason Haslam has argued, "prison serves to reconstruct and reconstitute the identities of those under its control" (12), and therefore to consciously take part in one's own identity construction is a means of asserting oneself in a homogenizing environment. For Grace Marks, prison represents the pinnacle of a series of confining spaces and ideologies. Although prison is clearly a form of discipline in Foucault's understanding, it is also revealed to be a space of competing desires and negotiated power dynamics, where top-down authority is sometimes disturbed. One way Grace does this is through

narrative, in which she reclaims the power of telling previously given to others and instead utilizes the authority granted to the teller. Narrative may allow Grace to resist imprisonment, but it also creates its own problems, particularly when she is expected to reveal certain parts of her story. Despite the limits placed on Grace as a knowing subject and the limits that prison narration places on her ability to tell her story, the novel can be read as a challenge to the prison's authority over Grace's identity.

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NOTES

1 For a thorough examination of the complex class dynamics at play in *Alias Grace*, see Roxanne Rimstead and Sandra Kumamoto Stanley. For more on the ways in which Grace's Irish ethnicity impacts how she is interpreted, see Stephanie Lovelady. Grace's gender identity has been explored in several excellent articles, including those by Coral Ann Howells, Stephanie Lovelady, and Gillian Siddall.

2 Both of these terms have a rich history and are the subject of much theoretical debate. Politicized by Michel Foucault and Marxist geographers like Henri Lefebvre in the 1970s, "space" and "place" have come to be associated with a variety of academic disciplines, most notably cultural studies and human geography. Doreen Massey understands "space" as a dynamic area of intersecting social relations and "place" as a point "where localities can in a sense be present in one another" (7). I am using "space" and "place" to refer to a dimensional way of thinking or positionality and a physical particularity, respectively.

3 Scheherazade is the narrator in *Arabian Nights* who keeps herself alive by reciting stories to the murderous King Shahryar. Stephanie Lovelady characterizes Grace as a "trickster figure" (50), noting that she is compared to Eve, Pandora, and Scheherazade as a way to underscore her status as a transgressor of norms. Coral Ann Howells argues that Grace "is a Scheherazade figure, a woman who is telling stories to save her life" ("Margaret Atwood: *Alias Grace*" 32), while Heidi Darroch suggests that the novel "presents an image of Grace as Scheherazade, offering up seductive stories to forestall [Dr. Jordan's] departure and his loss of interest in her 'case'" (117).

4 Although Atwood devotes a great deal of attention to describing the material conditions of the prison based on extensive archival research, a thorough examination of the material space of the prison is beyond the scope of this article. See Stanley for information about Atwood's research and its impact on the novel's representation of class politics (373). Material objects such as quilts, food, and clothes are also important in the novel. For insightful analysis of the quilt motif in *Alias Grace*, see articles by Sharon Rose Wilson, Margaret Rogerson, and Gillian Siddall.

5 For a detailed discussion of the rich significance of objects in *Alias Grace*, see Cristie March.

6 See Laura Mulvey's work on the objectifying power of the male gaze in the context of cinematic representations and John Berger's analysis of the gendered power relations inherent in seeing and being seen.

7 Cathy Caruth and Anne Whitehead, among others, have examined how trauma affects fictional narratives. The word "trauma," derived from Greek, literally means "wound," and it is generally understood as a wound inflicted upon the mind—a "breach in the mind's experience of time, self, and the world" (Caruth, *Unclaimed* 4). According to Whitehead, trauma fiction relies on literary techniques such as intertextuality, repetition, and fragmented narrative voice because they formally mirror the effects of trauma (84). The rich possibilities for reading *Alias Grace* as a trauma narrative are beyond the scope of this paper, but see Heidi Darroch for one examination of Grace's traumatic testimony.

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Jon Donlan

Out All Day

Finger-combing deerfly carcasses
out of what's left of my hair
I puzzle over my most minute machinery,
the "cascade of chemical reactions,"

proteins, electric snakes bunched,
their branched and folded chains
like overtwisted flex cord, flickering
with life, without thought, without intention.

The path from there to here
has too many connections, overwhelms,
as when a widower, hearing his wife's name,
weeps.

Dragonflies hover and dart like gunships
and I scratch my head, and the pond's
lacy scrim of lilypads might map the molecule
of happiness, thirty thousand atoms long.

Deena Rymhs

On Making *The Meaning of Life*
An Interview with Hugh Brody

Hugh Brody is an anthropologist who has worked for over thirty years with Indigenous peoples in Canada and abroad. His books and films have explored the lived consequences of paternalist federal policies in Inuit, Dunne-za, Innu, and Northwest Coast communities. As early as the mid-1970s, Brody used his writing and his role as policy advisor to dispel notions of northern Indigenous people in Canada as cultureless, vanishing, and consigned to irrelevance in an industrialized society. His most recent book, *The Other Side of Eden* (2001), continues to unmoor familiar dichotomies by depicting agriculture-based societies as nomadic and—in contrast—by presenting Inuit and other northern Indigenous peoples as intimately connected to the land. Rich in local description, oral history, testimony, and life narrative, and inflected by philosophical, linguistic, and political theory, Brody's work defies disciplinary classification while offering some of the most important reflections to date on Indigenous peoples' conceptions of their lands and their struggle to gain sovereignty over those lands.

In 2006, Hugh Brody began filming *The Meaning of Life*, a documentary that examines Kwìkwèxwelhp Prison in the Fraser Valley of British Columbia. Operated in collaboration with the neighbouring Chehalis First Nation, Kwìkwèxwelhp (Kwi) is a minimum-security prison that offers programs to Indigenous and non-Indigenous prisoners based on Indigenous spiritual and cultural philosophies. *The Meaning of Life* follows seven men at Kwìkwèxwelhp who offer their perspectives on this facility's unique operation while also sharing their histories of abuse, violence, and racism. A key figure in the men's lives is "Grandma" Rita Leon, an elder-mentor whose approach is to

separate the crime from the man. By the film's end, some of the men have been successfully discharged from the prison; some have not. *The Meaning of Life* explores the challenging issues accompanying the journey to recovery while also reflecting on the meaning of a life lived in prison.

The Meaning of Life is more than a prison ethnography: its exploration of the prison's troubling presence in the colonial histories and current realities of Indigenous people makes the film an important companion to literary criticism of Indigenous prison writing.[1] The stories told by the men resonate with more widely published accounts by Indigenous prisoners, including Rudy Wiebe and Yvonne Johnson's *Stolen Life: The Journey of a Cree Woman* (1998), James Tyman's *Inside Out: An Autobiography by a Native Canadian* (1989), and Anthony Apakark Thrasher's *Thrasher . . . Skid Row Eskimo* (1976). Published works of this kind are few, however, and many stories from prison never reach a reading public. In this light, Brody's film plays a vital role in recording and disseminating the oral narratives of individuals whose lives rarely make it to the written page. *The Meaning of Life*, as its very title suggests, inspires reflection on a wide range of philosophical and literary issues alongside its investigation of Kwìkwèxwelhp's symbolic power.

RYMHS: At a screening of your documentary last fall at Musqueam First Nation, you explained that the film emerged from a study of Indigenous youth "harming themselves." Can you explain the connection between "self-harm" and the prison system that you took as the focus of *The Meaning of Life*? In what ways does Canada's prison system create an environment of self-harm?

BRODY: I was doing interviews with Sto:lo youth in the Fraser Valley, centred on how people found meaning in their lives and looking at the causes and nature of self-harm in Aboriginal communities. A young man with whom I spoke about this work was Gabriel George. He told me that one of the most important sources of meaning in his life was his wife's work. She was Angela George of the Chehalis First Nation. At the time, Angela was working as Aboriginal Liaison Officer at the Kwìkwèxwelhp minimum-security prison, high in the mountains that are part of Chehalis territory. Gabriel arranged for me to meet Angela, and Angela told me about the prison where she worked. "The place we gather medicines" was the meaning of its name, she said. She also explained that it was a facility at which long-term offenders, often near the end of their sentences, experienced Indigenous culture and ritual as part of a rehabilitation program. She invited me to make a visit.

There are two ways in which self-harm is at issue in the life stories of the men in the film. First, there is the damage people do to themselves when in

prison—often attempted suicide, and often early in their sentence. In telling me about these attempts, inmates took me to the ferocious despair and rage they felt at the start of long sentences. Some of the accounts were filled with extreme levels of self-violence. Some men saw their surviving this violence as a kind of sign from outside themselves: they took meaning from their survival. As one inmate said to me: "If you can't die, there must be a reason for living."

The other way self-harm is at issue for these men is in their lives before they came into prison. Especially for the inmates from Aboriginal backgrounds, this self-harm was often linked to abuse they had suffered both at home and in residential schools. Attempted and successful suicide are horribly familiar in these life stories—and given voice in the film by [a prisoner named] Art when he talks with such clear, contained, and terrible feeling about what has happened to his brothers, sisters, and friends. For him, part of the challenge of life is to cope with this accumulation of self-harm and loss. Of course this kind of accumulation is to be found in the stories to be heard in all prisons.

RYMHS: While *The Meaning of Life* may have emerged from a study of Indigenous people harming themselves, your documentary is very much about a process of healing. Was this an unexpected shift in the teleology of your project?

BRODY: Many of the men who told me their life stories took me to painful and self-destructive experiences. Forces of history—the colonial experience, residential school, violent parents—converged with personal events to create sequences of damage. This damage included self-destruction as well as harm to others. Most of the men had been caught in many forms of violence and had—which as I learned was a distinct pattern—turned this violence onto themselves. So the work involved, and in some sense began with, issues of harm. But the institution was committed to offering healing through the elders who were there and the ceremonies that the neighbouring Chehalis community brought to Kwi. So my focus was both the harm and the healing: they occupied different levels of the story, as it were, and presented different dimensions of the filming. Also, the work I had been doing before filming in Kwi had led me to think about Indigenous culture and heritage as protective and healing in the cases of young people whose lives had been far less destructive. So this was not an unexpected shift in teleology so much as the inherent character of the stories and the direction in which the work was sure to move.

RYMHS: A discourse of healing has become part of the repertoire for discussing Indigenous issues in Canada. Some argue that this focus on healing is a depoliticising gesture that directs attention away from more challenging issues like land, governance, and material redress. (In Craig Womack's words, "America loves Indian culture; America is much less enthusiastic about Indian land title.") Can you identify any problems with how this notion of healing has been used by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities? Perhaps you might also want to address the ways in which prisoners are assailed by therapeutic discourses.

BRODY: This is a vast set of issues: I won't be able to do justice to your question, but I can offer some thoughts in general and some that arise from working in the prison.

The politics of land claims and Aboriginal title have a long and difficult history in Canada. In earlier protests about colonial invasion and settler occupation, the focus is very much on land, not on culture. The Royal Proclamation in the eighteenth century expresses recognition of territory and sovereignty, not "culture." The Nisg'a Petition, in the nineteenth century, focuses on land title, not heritage. Similarly the discourse around the McKenna-McBride Commission in the early 1900s is about land and nothing else. This focus changes with the "new" land claims from the 1960s onwards. The research to support these early claims was centred on mapping the use and occupation of lands, but there begins to be a strong concern with oral culture, Indigenous knowledge, Indigenous law and, of course, language. In part, this shift of emphasis results all too obviously from the kind of destruction of heritage, knowledge, and language that had been caused by direct assault on Indigenous culture. This assault was embodied in the residential school program and more indirectly in the form of Eurocentric/Canadian educational, religious, political, and geographical assimilation. Yet there was another force at work: many people—articulate elders, a new generation of Aboriginal leaders, a new generation of anthropologists—began to give voice to the importance of Indigenous ways of knowing the world. The land base mattered but so did their way of relating to and understanding that base. Hence the new interest, at that time, in ethnosciences and, in particular, ethnobotany to understand and capture (the term is not insignificant, not without at least unconscious irony) what is now referred to as "Indigenous knowledge." In this way, a link was affirmed between land and culture.

The idea of "healing" within the Canadian prison system emerged within a discourse that grew from and expressed this link. The idea of the "Red

Road"[2] that arose in Canadian prisons in the 1970s was radical in its call for recognition for Aboriginal knowledge but also in its endorsement of land claims. In the minds of those who advocated the Red Road healing path, the rights and the culture of First Nations were inseparable; and rights were to lands that had been alienated, resources that were at risk, and the ways of life that these lands and resources had supported.

So is this a shift that allows "America," in Craig Womack's observation, to feel less threatened? I am not sure about this. My impression has been that the double preoccupation of modern land and heritage claims has been more challenging to the Canadian body politic and more disturbing to the Canadian public conscience than the land only claims of earlier decades. This said, it was in the 1920s that laws were introduced in Canada to suppress organization of the land movement—though there were laws in the 1880s, of course, to suppress culture. "Red Power" and AIM drew strength and support in the 1960s from outrage and despair about loss of heritage (especially language and knowledge of ritual) as well as loss of land. *Black Elk Speaks* was as much a seminal and mobilizing book as *Bury My Heart At Wounded Knee*. But this is a fascinating and important question, deserving a much longer answer.

This said, there is a complication to the process that is very much to do with both Aboriginal history and the nature of prisons. Red Power and AIM had important links to prisons—where leaders were incarcerated. And their apparent or actual willingness to use violence led to confrontations with the police and meant that jails became part of their story. Perhaps there was a way in which the prison became metaphor as well as reality for the radical politics of the Indian Movement at that time—from the early 1960s in the United States, later 1960s in Canada, and still at work today. The Aboriginal inmates at Kwi had their own meetings, set against the background of a nation-wide recognition of the Red Road as a feature of prison politics. But inmates from First Nations families again and again spoke of their *lives* having been in prison, first and foremost because of the residential schools, but more widely than that: as if to be born into a First Nations family, on a reserve, meant that life was somehow begun in a prison and would lead, in a grim and overdetermined way, to prisons of various kinds. The idea of healing is thus tied to images of some kind of profound escape from the prison that, in the minds of many inmates and in the language that is used by many to describe them, is somehow a condition of their lives.

It is not hard to see that there are many problems here. The fatalistic

language is entrapping and establishes a sort of victimhood *ab initio.* There are prisoners who have experienced extremes of abuse and "imprisonment" prior to finding themselves in a real prison; and there can be a real sense of inevitability about this. In the film, Richard is the Aboriginal inmate to whom this could be said to apply; among the non-Aboriginal inmates, both Ralph and Rod led lives where very harsh home lives seemed to flow into life in correctional institutions. And for all three of these, I think there is a huge benefit in thinking for them and with them about "healing"—though both Ralph and Rod would themselves resist the term. For others, and as unquestioned notions about all prisoners, the portrayal of imprisonment as an inevitability and healing as the way forward—if we are limited to that kind of discourse, and the whole set of circumstances is understood on a therapeutic model—loses a lot of reality, the difference and texturing of life that are individual stories. Meanwhile, there is more to be said in favour of therapeutic discourse, with its commitment to understanding causes and linking these to rehabilitation, than there is to be said in support of a rugged, sort-yourself-out-repent-and-get-on-with-it notion. The incoherence of this latter approach and its close ties to extreme enthusiasm about retributive justice became more evident to me with every week I spent listening to the lives of the men in Kwi.

So are prisoners themselves "overdetermined" by therapeutic discourse? Not the ones I knew. Perhaps two of them slipped into therapeutic concepts when talking about their lives or the process they were experiencing at Kwi. All the others wanted to tell their stories and talk about Kwi very much in their own ways. A couple of them did tell me, though, that when it came to parole hearings, it was a good idea to use the language that the parole people liked. Maybe this is a clue to how specific kinds of discourse within the system reach the men.

RYMHS: Do you see any problems with the confessional tenor of the film? One can only imagine how frequently these same men have been forced to make similar statements in the course of their lives—to police, to the courts, and to parole workers. Is there a discursive violence, inescapable as it might be, in the way that these men come to explain and understand their crimes—and view their potential for re-entry to society as citizen-subjects? Your film is also a public document. Could the men's statements influence future parole hearings and Correctional Service Canada (CSC) transfers? In short, how possible is it to separate the discursive framework of the prison from the types of narratives that these men tell?

BRODY: This set of questions raises a challenge to the voices of the men in the film and, perhaps, a challenge to the validity of the process itself. My conversations with the men were outside the norms of prison life and perhaps outside the experiences they would have had in their lives away from prison. This is to say that the men were given the chance to speak knowing they were being heard and that what they said had no place in any form of assessment. Therefore, they were able to be "confessional," though I rather dislike the word: it seems to imply a kind of intimacy that is not quite truth. This open and non-institutional form of interview is very different from—perhaps an opposite to—the statements they have been urged to make within the prison system, and it would seem to me to have very little overlap with the ways men have been forced to tell their stories and explain their crimes. No doubt there are moments of what could be called self-exculpating cliché—observations that men have made over and over again to deal with either their own guilt or the requirement of the system that they show due remorse. But think of Rod, the baker in the film, when he refers to the requirement that he show remorse; or of Les, when he says on camera that his crimes are sexual assault; or of Len who insists on complete frankness that comes across as comedic, yet is so because of the startling directness of his words. I do not claim that the interviews are a sustained truth or have no overlap with the ways men in these kinds of institutions feel obliged to speak. Yet, the men said that the time speaking with me, on camera, for this film was not like any other times they had had while they were incarcerated. I would argue that this difference is an important element in the integrity of the film.

You raise a different kind of concern when you identify the possibility that the men's statements could influence their futures. Yes, the film is a public document and one that was likely to be seen and perhaps have a role in CSC. All the men in the film are looking at possible day paroles or release of some form. Does this mean that what they say puts them at risk? I think the men may well avoid saying things that could put them at risk of losing parole possibilities. But just about all of them have been inside for a long time, have qualified for minimum security, and are confident that if the truth about them is heard and understood, this should increase their chances of progressing through the system. In short, as Rod says and others imply, they have nothing to lose from speaking openly to me. On the contrary, their sense of the space in which the filming took place was full of confidence. They spoke at great length, with great apparent freedom of thought and

expression, without seeming to be managing their words to fit with any fears of retribution. It may be that there were men in Kwi who chose not to be in the film because they did fear what this kind of exposure might mean—though this was never given to me as a reason.

The men in the film, and many who are long-term prisoners, can easily be underestimated. They are people who have been at the receiving end of many kinds of institutional violence and manipulation. I was struck by the clarity of their thinking and their capacity to have found spaces for themselves in which to be both thoughtful and creative—hence so much remarkable art as well as such engaging interviews. There is a kind of freedom that the men find—that human beings perhaps have to find—whatever their circumstances. I think I was lucky enough to be able to join them in some of those spaces of freedom, and they were able to take advantage of my being there with them. Of course there were many limitations—personal and institutional—but I think that there was a flow of thoughts and memories that had remarkable clarity and honesty. You can sense this as you watch the men talking.

RYMHS: One of the criticisms of the Okimaw Ohci Healing Lodge, a federal women's minimum-security facility in Saskatchewan, is that it eventually morphed into a prison, unable to sustain itself as an alternative space. Has the same happened with Kwìkwèxwelhp Prison and, if so, how?

BRODY: Kwi began as a prison that has attempted to include some Healing Lodge elements. The balance, or tension, between incarceration and healing is integral to the venture. There is no morphing into one or the other: the basic structure is in place, with it being a prison first and the healing being added on as an idea for or experiment in rehabilitation.

RYMHS: What do you see as the limitations, if any, of a facility like Kwìkwèxwelhp Prison? (Who can forget Len's statement, "There's always assholes wherever you go"?)

BRODY: The limitation grows out of the reality to which my last answer refers. To say a bit more about this, though:

The limitations are invoked and evoked by Len's remark—there are "assholes" in his view because it is a prison, an institution with a tough hierarchy. It is a prison, and must be a prison. These are damaged men, many of whom have committed horrific crimes. There is a rationale for keeping them in a secure facility. At the same time, prison is caught in an idea of—and a political requirement for—retribution. The notion of punishment implies discomfort and some degree of pain, if only psychological. This

is obvious and universal because it is about the meaning of the words: without the pain, there is a sense in which there cannot be justice. So any rehabilitation—albeit with Aboriginal culture as its rehabilitation tool—is set into an environment that has been designed to punish, confine, and limit the basic freedoms of people. If we think of Aboriginal culture's most important feature as respect (the word that elders always use when talking about their view of the world and cultural values), it is easy to see the difficulty: the prison system is at its heart a refusal to give respect. This is the limitation on a healing approach within a prison.

During the time I was working with the men in Kwi and spending time talking to elders and administrators there, I learned about the periodic swing between more and less preoccupation with security versus less or more commitment to Indigenous culture as healing. This back and forth expresses the inherent tension and contributed to a certain instability in the institution. Whatever the swings might do, however, the fundamental concern, the over-riding priority of CSC was for security. Everyone at Kwi would tell me that, in the end, it was a minimum-security prison. This means a degree of freedom consistent with its status as "a minimum," and the Chehalis First Nation partnership is built on top of this, not into it. When it came to the breaking of minimum rules, responses were those of all other minimums—as we see in the case of Rod and Darcy toward the end of the film.

RYMHS: Prisoners who are eligible for transfer to Kwìkwèxwelhp Prison do not have to be Indigenous. In what ways do you see institutions like Kwìkwèxwelhp Prison influencing the operation of other correctional institutions in Canada? Is there a potential for cross-pollination, and do you think that potential will be recognized and used?

BRODY: There is indeed potential cross-pollination: I am very much hoping that our film will play a part in this. There could be a very strong argument for replicating Kwi across Canada (and indeed in other countries) with a partnership between a prison and a neighbouring Indigenous community. This is not to escape or even seek to upend the element of retribution within justice systems, but it is to offer a model that may give some hope through an Aboriginal notion and practice of respect, and hence potential for re-entry into community.

RYMHS: Can you identify any problems with how tradition becomes revived, or redefined, in the prison? How do these models of Indigenous masculinity translate for the men outside the prison?

BRODY: "Tradition" is a term that makes me uncomfortable. There are purists

on the subject of First Nations traditions (including two Kwi inmates) who have pointed out to me that the culture in the prisons that is called "Native" or "Indian" is generalized and not authentic as any actual culture. They point out that much that is offered in Canadian prisons as "culture" is taken from the Prairies, especially Cree heritage, and then pieces are added that come from whatever heritage may be of interest to individuals of particular institutions and particular times—with New Age notions built on. Thus the welcome ceremony at Kwi is overseen by Chehalis elders, drawing on Coast Salish traditions, with music that comes in part from the Prairies, with special prayers spoken in Cree, while the background ritual is a sweat lodge ceremonial that is an amalgam of traditions, and many of the inmates talk about healing and spirituality without any real knowledge or experience of their or any other Aboriginal heritage. From these observations comes a dismissal of, or serious doubts about, the specific healing project in Kwi and the notion of the Red Road. This dismissal is to propose that there is a failure of "tradition," or a diluting, or even a polluting of something that could have been real but is not.

It is true to say that the "tradition" that has been revived or constructed in the prison systems, as part of the healing lodge concept and the idea of the Red Road, is a revival or in part a construction. There is indeed an anthropological critique that can be made of this, an unpacking of what is taking place. But this critique—coming from either inmates or anthropologists (bearing in mind that some inmates are rather good anthropologists)—may be irrelevant to the internal and heuristic validity of this "tradition." The important questions for the justice system are to the side of, or beyond, the concerns of the purists. What is the force of Aboriginal culture when at work for inmates? How can inmates from Aboriginal backgrounds find a link to and strength from this culture? How can the tradition, as it is defined and given life within an institution, be given respect despite prison regulations? What rituals work? And in the case of Kwi: how can Chehalis heritage be given optimum life inside the prison?

Meanwhile, ideas about heritage, spirituality and ritual are both set inside the Canadian prison system with, as I noted, strong roots in the Cree of the Prairies (they have been the largest and most influential group of Aboriginal inmates in Canada). These ideas are, moreover, dynamic: there are elders coming from each region into the prisons of that region, and they bring with them their ideas of culture. There are also inmates who have especially strong ideas about their particular heritage.

I don't think CSC packages "Indian tradition" so much as follows the lead taken by Aboriginal rights, Red Power, and Red Road thinking. I have long given thought to what "tradition" has come to mean in different Aboriginal contexts. When I first began working on these issues, while living on Edmonton Skid Row in the late 1960s, I became aware of the way part of a widely accepted Indigenous identity was loosely based on the Plains with anything else people wanted to add to make a composite shape. I think this amalgam is a result of the crushing and scattering of Indigenous communities and the way the urban diaspora became the political cultural centre. It is an identity that can give real support to people who need this support—as well as be troublesome to purists and anthropologists who are looking for more precise cultural definitions.

So where does the idea of masculinity fit into this? The difficulty here is that the cult of the male is so strong within the prison system. To be tough, to conceal or control pain, to be without softer emotions—these are ideals that have deep roots in the families and life experiences of a very large proportion of inmates, and which are reinforced by the culture of prison. Not having feelings is the best way to protect oneself from the intense difficulties of life in the prison—as it may well have been long before these men got into prison at all.

Against this kind of social and psychological backdrop, the suggestion that First Nations culture and tradition reinforce or, on the other hand, have any chance of subverting particular notions of masculinity may be far-fetched. Yet there is a kind of respect that men from First Nations backgrounds often are able to show to one another that is very striking. It is a form of ease in dealing with others and often accompanied by a certain openness. And this can mean an antidote to, if not an actual subverting of, the cult of the tough, mean, untouchable male. There is an ease and comfort that many of the Aboriginal inmates seem to feel with one another and, in some striking cases, with other inmates. At least one very tough, non-Aboriginal man said to me several times that he had been affected by this. "They kind of made me vulnerable" was how he put it. And he also spoke of how much difficulty he had with this vulnerability—it brought him back to feelings that he had spent years making sure he did not have. He also said that he was glad to have been made vulnerable; it reminded him of what was possible, what was inside him.

Does this mean that there is a real challenge to the cult of maleness within the prisons? I doubt it, though it may be possible over another decade of

healing and with greater presence of First Nations culture within the system. Does it have implications for men outside the prison? I doubt it, unless they are returning to live in a First Nations community where recovery of heritage has been of great importance.

RYMHS: Can you situate the issues that *The Meaning of Life* examines in relation to some of your work around the globe?

BRODY: I think that the film speaks to, and from, the heartland of my work. The men take us into their life stories, where we find them struggling with the consequences of violence, abuse, and a kind of cumulative loss. There is a recurrent theme in what they say about what has happened to them. For the Aboriginal men, it can be seen as the fall-out from colonial history. For the non-Aboriginal men, the consequences of social or individual breakdown and the culture of poverty. So there is loss of love, safety, family, home, heritage, language and, in due course in these stories, loss of freedom. And the awful disarray that comes with accumulation of loss, including the fallback on violence and thus, in many cases, the committing of terrible crimes.

Just about all my work has dealt with these issues of loss and the way colonial history generates such losses. This is the first time I have entered the story at its darkest edges and heard it from those who have lost the most and caused the worst harm to others. But the story as a whole, the global story as it were, is the same. I came closest to it, I would think, when living on Skid Row in Edmonton in the 1960s, but I was also in a dimension of the story when travelling in remote parts of the Canadian high Arctic. I never found myself outside the realities of colonial or frontier encounters or the inequitable aftermath of "development." In villages in western India, I for the first time found myself walking in places where there was almost no sign at all of these realities—none of the detritus of some outside and dominant economy and no apparent loss of heritage or land base. Yet I was there because these villages were threatened by a vast development project that was almost certain to displace and perhaps dispossess them.

It may be trite to say that the story is always the same. It isn't. Every people and every person has their own story—the real and crucial work consists in listening to that particular story and understanding what it means.

RYMHS: Can you imagine how your film would have been different if you had focused on a women's prison? In women's prisons that offer similar programs centring on traditional knowledge, how do women participate in and practice this recovery of Indigenous teachings?

BRODY: I don't have the experience or knowledge to answer the second part of this question. But there are institutions in the Prairies, especially in Saskatchewan I believe, where there are healing programs within institutions for women.

I cannot imagine being able to work in a women's prison as I was able to work in Kwi. The one insight I got into how difficult and different it would have been came from an evening I spent in a women's prison, screening *The Meaning of Life* and doing a long Q&A after it. I found a radically different environment.

In Kwi, as in the other prisons where I filmed or have held screenings and discussions, I have again and again been struck by the way the men are restrained and composed. They may have problems keeping focused, and they suffer from obvious attention deficit difficulties, but by and large they keep their thoughts and feelings to themselves. They have strong friendships, with the same two or three always eating their meals together and hanging out in the yards together, but there is a strong, silent quality to these friendships. I did not get any sense of explicit or open sexual attachments, and the one gay man who spoke to me about being gay in prison had much to say about the crude and non-attaching way men would suggest having sex.

Through that one evening in the women's prison, I got a strong impression of a very different way of being. The showing and sharing of emotions were right out in the open, with pairs of women in intense conversations, obvious states of upset and a great deal of physical contact—holding hands, hugging, sitting more or less on one another's laps. Far from holding in feelings, many of the women made a point of showing them—at least in front of and to me. When I spoke to staff and NGO support people who work in women's prisons, they confirmed my impression. Far from sustaining the cool, unfeeling exterior that was a norm in men's prisons, the women inmates to some extent idealized the opposite. To show and share emotions, they said, was how the women made sense of and coped with being incarcerated.

This is something of a mirror-image stereotype, and I am sure it needs much more consideration and analysis. The fascination of filming life stories with women in prison would be to excavate what is at issue here. But a man filming in a women's prison as I filmed in Kwi—being allowed the time to build strong relationships with some of the men and to develop ease around just about all of them: I very much suspect that any such project would encounter significant, and different, challenges.

RYMHS: Can you talk more about Darcy—specifically, the conditions working

against his cultural and spiritual reintegration in prison? He identifies himself as both Métis and gay in the documentary. After the making of the film, he was transferred from Kwìkwèxwelhp to a higher-security prison. How do you see Darcy's identification as Métis and gay as contributing to his struggle both inside and outside of the prison? Qwo-Li Driskill argues that "the healing [of] our sexualities as First Nations people is braided with the legacy of historical trauma." Driskill's discussion of the ways in which the erotic is burdened by a history of sexual violence seems illuminating here. Would you agree that Kwìkwèxwelhp has implicit barriers to all men finding a place? In what ways might cultural recovery programs be heteronormative in their philosophies and practices?

BRODY: To answer this set of questions would be to write a long essay of its own. The puzzle of colonial history and sexuality and related sexual trauma are issues with which I found myself confronted early in my work in Canada. It arose when I was living on Skid Row in Edmonton. Some of the Aboriginal women I knew well there lived as what can be termed part-time sex-workers, with related alcohol and violence problems. I learned from them about compulsive self-abasement and apparent acceptance of abuse that, even then, I began to see as an overlapping of historical and personal forces. Much later in my work, I spoke at length with Aboriginal women about their experiences of sexual violence and again found myself looking at colonial history through very private, individual experience. And this is at the core of any answer I could make to your questions here: the struggle for Indigenous people whose sexuality is not able to find a home, or make itself at home, in the conventional, straight world raises this braiding of personal and historical trauma. But there is a further dimension that your question implies: all sexuality is to some degree shaped by its moment in history. Many people, straight and otherwise, know about complications that seem to come from beyond oneself.

I do not want to go into Darcy's particular story; his right to privacy has to be respected, and his case has again and again been confused by public concerns about his crime and what, in the public mind, constitutes reasonable punishment. But his account of himself in the film, as a man who realizes in prison that he is gay and Métis, is very compelling—not least because I think the viewer of the film gets a strong sense that his readiness to talk about his life in relation to identity and spirituality happens thanks to all that Kwi offers him. (Though there is far more of this in his interviews than found its way into the film.) We also see in the film something of the strength

of his relationship with Grandma Rita Leon: she is giving love and support to him at many levels, which we can see as an immense benefit to him that comes from Kwi. This benefit also centres on his identity as gay and Métis being respected by Grandma. So his healing is helped, we can say, by the way that here, in this particular prison, his identity is not a barrier for him.

Yet this is to leave out the question about how others in the prison saw and related to him, and the way his transfer to higher-security may have been linked to his sexual identity. Overall, my impression at Kwi was that the other men accepted Darcy's sexuality, and of course they had all known other gay men during their many years in prisons. Some were open in a rugged kind of day-to-day expression of disdain for homosexuality, but just about all managed, at the same time, reasonable day-to-day respect for others. I remember one of the older men describing his discomfort at finding himself in a discussion program with sex offenders and thinking how he disliked being among them for long hours each day. Then he added: "Well, they are probably unhappy to be sitting here all day with a murderer." So my view is that sexual identity was not a very major barrier to men finding a place at Kwi. Yet there were allegations at the time of Darcy's transfer, from one or two inmates and at least one prison official, that he had become a target of homophobia within the system. So maybe the nature of the barrier changes along with the swing between Aboriginal healing and implementation of CSC security to which I have referred already.

Darcy, like everyone else in Canadian prisons, encounters colonial history. There are underlying problems of class, race, gender, and sexuality that this history speaks to, and that in profound ways give shape to the history. Male homosexuality causes a particular kind of unease in a place preoccupied with a frontier version of male toughness and so busy celebrating the perfect nuclear family. Then there are the values of individualism and egalitarianism that are so much part of colonial history and that develop against a background of British ideas of class difference and metropolitan control of hinterland. Add to this the different forms of indigeneity at the frontier, with such complex preoccupations with purity, authenticity, degradation, and miscegenation—that troubled potpourri of racial stereotypes and phobias. All of these get exaggerated or brought into sharp relief at colonial frontiers—and thanks to this exaggeration, we can see with special clarity at the edges of our system some of the most important features of the centre.

Thus it is in the prison system: ideas, preoccupations, and distortions that are integral to colonial history are to be found there in high relief. Efforts

are made to address these residues of colonialism by the kind of culturally informed healing project I saw at Kwi. There is an explicit wish on the part of some of those working on these projects to provide a new and intelligent recognition of sexual identity as well as Indigenous identity. Thus there are workshops and programs that focus on what it means to be gay or two-spirited, and much concern to give respect to Aboriginal identities. These efforts resist and perhaps reshape the colonial heritage as it plays out in the prison system. Of course, they cannot uproot the origins and deeper sources of the problems surrounding identity.

However one might see or interpret Darcy's account of his life, many would recognize that kind of collision between the self and the self that society seems to require one to be. There is a particular kind of marginalization that comes from living with that collision. In small town or suburban, parochial, and conservative communities that are so much a part of the social landscape of North America, this kind of marginalized self is all too common. It is often associated with outbursts of anger, alcohol and drug abuse, and various forms and degrees of breakdown. It is therefore often linked to self-destructive behaviour, thus featuring in many inmates' internal lives.

When such men or women get to prison, however, they may well find, perhaps for the first time in their lives, that they are in a community of the marginal. They may also find that their sexual or racial identity is something that they can at last own up to, or even, if they are lucky with the institutions in which they find themselves, be proud of. I think this happened to several of the men in the film, and it may be an important part of what Kwi offers. So there might be a significant way in which a place like Kwi takes down the barriers to men finding out who they are and, through who they are, finding a non-marginalized place within at least this society.

As you suggest in your question, there are "heteronormative" aspects to Indigenous philosophies, and these may mitigate against some of the demarginalizing potential for a healing program in Kwi or in prisons in general. But my experience of Indigenous culture is that it gives less privilege to the macho male than does the white, colonial culture. Yet, there is terrible violence against women in all societies where men feel redundant and have good reasons for thinking that they have nothing much to offer—as is the case, of course, in many Aboriginal communities, especially with hunter-gatherer heritage. So there are links between the erotic and violence in both the minds of the oppressor and the oppressed.

NOTES

1 The writing of Indigenous prisoners remains a neglected area of focus in Canadian literary discussions. Responding to this scant amount of criticism, in *From the Iron House: Imprisonment in First Nations Writing* (2008) I examine the prison's role in Indigenous history with an analysis of prison autobiographies, residential school narratives, prison serials, and collections of prisoners' writing. Similarly, Sam McKegney's *Magic Weapons: Aboriginal Writers Remaking Community after Residential School* (2007) is a book-length study of residential schools narratives that theorizes how Indigenous authors use writing to resist their containment by this institution. McKegney notes the continuities between the residential school and prison (a connection also made by many of the men interviewed in *The Meaning of Life*). Essay-length discussions of *Stolen Life* by Julia Emberley, Manina Jones, and Susanna Egan further contribute to this body of criticism on Indigenous prison narratives. Other salutary examples include Jason Haslam's and Warren Cariou's separate articles on Tyman's prison autobiography, *Inside Out.*

2 Invoked in various Indigenous cultural and tribal contexts, the "Red Road" is generally described as a philosophy of living inspired by spiritual teachings and traditions. Joseph Gone observes that the Red Road involves "an ongoing process of self-transformation" (qtd. in Waldram 6). Janice Alison Makokis builds on this formulation by describing the Red Road as a "decolonized transformative process" (47). By returning to ceremony and "the ways of the old people," writes Makokis, "we learn what our role and responsibility is to our people and it is this role that keeps us relationally accountable and on the path of living the "good life," *miyo pimatisiwin*" (47).

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Chris Ewart

for yukon

stained glass red
hints gold
in a button hole

rip a four a.m. sunrise
flash like a water pillow
we swim

your scoops of healthy orange
shine like juice
in a pan

my arms lift
to the squeeze
of wet fingers

in a cradle of sugar
a paint of sweat
spills morning smiles

Dominic Marion

D.A.F. de Sade et Hubert Aquin
le récit au pied du mur

Il en est du récit comme d'une voix qui s'adresse à un mur : avec le temps, la surface se fissure pour qu'une oreille vienne y suturer le corps de l'Histoire; mais longtemps la barrière résiste, et la voix y réverbère ses blessures sans que la cautérisation n'advienne. À près de deux siècles d'intervalle et séparées par un océan, deux mains emmurées écrivent, aux prises avec une ébullition révolutionnaire; mais il est vrai que face à la Terreur, le terrorisme felquiste paraît bien tranquille.

Si le thème de l'incarcération marque l'œuvre de Sade dans toute son étendue, sa portée explicite se limite chez Aquin au premier roman publié : le corps biographique du premier est mis à l'écart pendant près de trente ans, alors que celui du deuxième ne l'est que pour quelques mois. Mais dans les deux cas, la claustration confine à l'écriture. Embastillé, Sade produit à l'automne 1785 le manuscrit des *Cent vingt journées de Sodome*; interné à l'Institut psychiatrique Albert-Prévost, Aquin rédige le premier jet de *Prochain épisode* lors de l'été 1964. L'emprisonnement de la main qui écrit autorise l'assimilation des différences de ces textes à la prégnance d'une économie du désir réprimé, d'un état organique où le corps atteint le degré zéro d'une pression interne qui exige l'exutoire de la lettre. Une réflexivité du politique dans le fictionnel étaye les récits considérés : l'écriture y jaillit en fonction de la répression orchestrée par un pouvoir dans un contexte historique donné. La main claustrée saisit sa relation à l'autorité pour la distiller dans l'architecture du texte.

L'exigence qui se pose ici revient à circonscrire dans la fiction les rouages du procès de sublimation de l'isolement que la dynamique du récit met en

scène. Il faut d'abord distinguer deux logiques désirantes : la voix énonciative du texte ne digère pas le pouvoir sous le même mode de Sade à Aquin. Une constante relie néanmoins les deux corps de fiction par-delà l'abîme historico-géographique qui les sépare : la permanence d'une imposture du pouvoir motive dans les deux cas la main à la mise en récit d'une « ironie généralisée » (Richard 23) qui s'attaque à la légitimité symbolique de « l'image d'une société figée autour d'un *consensus* . . . qui donne l'apparence d'être tout ce qu'il y a de plus normal, de plus naturel, mais qui, en réalité, a quelque chose d'implacable et de bêtement mensonger » (Richard 28). « Québécois, encore un effort . . . » : la substitution qu'opère Robert Richard à partir du titre du célèbre pamphlet de Sade relance la virulence de l'humour noir sadien à même la problématique de l'assomption de l'histoire littéraire québécoise. Ce n'est qu'au XX^{e} siècle que la critique française a ouvertement dégagé l'insigne portée de l'offrande illisible du texte de Sade; peut-on dire que le Québec se soit libéré de l'énigme du texte d'Aquin? La voix emmurée traverse tant bien que mal le mur de l'incompréhension, thésaurisant son bouillonnement dans le pavillon de certaines oreilles, à l'abri de sa dévaluation à la bourse de la culture. Car de fait, *non*; « Québécois, encore un effort, vos héritages ne sont pas encore conquis » (Lefebvre/Richard 5).

Raison et claustration : les Lumières incarcérées

> Le centre tragique de la vie de Sade, c'est la prison. Sans cet enfermement, il se serait peut-être dissipé aux quatre vents d'une existence mondaine; sa révolte n'aurait pu exploser avec une telle violence : il fallait ce mur, ces quatre murs, plutôt, du cachot pour que se cristallise sa puissance révolutionnaire. (Didier 186)

Avec Sade, le siècle qui achève en France la conception de la suprématie de la Raison comprise comme Progrès dévoile du même élan les ténèbres que refoule la Lumière du discours dominant. Sade parle alors avec la raison qui domine l'espace intellectuel, mais il la détourne de la finalité qu'on lui croyait propre : sa raison nie la prééminence de la vertu et du Bien pour perpétuer le Mal. *Satan se met à parler la langue de Dieu*. Une immense contradiction structure en ce sens l'écriture sadienne : la clarté de la langue se maintient malgré la violence du contenu; la transparence de la raison fait progresser le discours jusqu'au cœur de l'horreur sans nom.

L'altérité de la raison exploitée par le texte de Sade étoile le miroir où se reflète le discours des Lumières : une béance irrationnelle sourd d'une écriture témoignant par ailleurs de tous les signes distinctifs de la rationalité. Comprise comme « le Tiers garant de la division pour le sujet institué, le

Tiers mainteneur du Miroir » (Legendre 12), l'image de la Raison vacille à même le discours raisonnable; *la raison rend la Raison suspicieuse à elle-même*. L'écriture de Sade fomente avec cynisme une anomalie raisonnée qui vient diffracter la prétention de la Raison à dominer l'expérience humaine. Le dispositif du texte sadien met en échec l'*universalité* de la loi morale kantienne. Réduite à l'état d'un moyen sollicité par une volonté contingente, la raison devient pure instrumentalité : elle se voit dépossédée de la nécessité téléologique que Kant *voulait* lui octroyer. La volonté des libertins que Sade fait parler figure en quelque sorte la *hantise* du monde rationnel : l'immonde renaît dans une débâcle qui foudroie les interdits fondamentaux à l'ordre de la civilisation. La crue des passions explose à l'image d'un resurgissement : l'affect que le système de la raison kantienne précipite hors de la sphère du savoir revient rôder entre les mailles du discours fondateur tel le spectre d'une violence irréductible. Au fond de sa cellule, Sade couche sur d'improbables parchemins un débordement que l'autorité ne tolère qu'entre quatre murs.

Devant l'idéal de transparence d'un discours pouvant épuiser la résonance de la Parole dans le mouvement du Progrès, Sade systématise une utopie du mal où le langage devient un outil de négation : les libertins sadiens nient Dieu, nient la Morale, nient parfois la Nature, bien qu'ils se targuent généralement de suivre seuls ses principes; la fureur de la négation s'attarde en fait à tout ce qui n'est pas *moi*. « Sade eut pour fin d'atteindre la conscience claire de ce que le "déchaînement" atteint seul (mais le "déchaînement" mène à la perte de la conscience), à savoir la suppression de la différence entre le sujet et l'objet » (Bataille, *La Littérature* 249). Si la langue des *Cent vingt journées de Sodome* se nourrit d'une exigence de raison, la forme de l'écriture y évolue en fonction d'une détérioration : le texte se déroule selon un processus d'effritement qui mène le récit d'une rédaction détaillée à une énumération de supplices qui triture le dispositif narratif. « C'est maintenant, ami lecteur, qu'il faut disposer ton cœur et ton esprit au récit le plus impur qui ait jamais été fait depuis que le monde existe » (Pasolini 69) : bien que Sade débute son récit en s'adressant au lecteur, il le termine dans l'impersonnalité de la troisième personne. On soulèvera évidemment l'inachèvement du texte, les dernières parties étant demeurées à l'état de plan; mais on peut considérer avec Michel Delon son caractère *inachevable* (cf. tome I, 63), et ce précisément dans la mesure où le langage de Sade « désavoue la relation de celui qui parle avec ceux auxquels ils s'adressent » (Bataille, *L'Érotisme* 211). La négation d'Autrui s'y dessine sans équivoque; Sade n'admet pas la

réciprocité linguistique de la première et de la deuxième personne[1]. Les murs de la cellule n'ont pas d'oreilles.

Le texte se présente d'abord comme une fiction s'appuyant sur les inégalités de l'Ancien Régime :

> Les guerres considérables que Louis XIV eut à soutenir pendant le cours de son règne, en épuisant les finances de l'Etat et les facultés du peuple, trouvèrent pourtant le secret d'enrichir une énorme quantité de ces sangsues toujours à l'affût des calamités publiques qu'ils font naître au lieu d'apaiser, et cela pour être à même d'en profiter avec plus d'avantages. La fin de ce règne, si sublime d'ailleurs, est peut-être une des époques de l'empire français où l'on vit le plus de ces fortunes obscures qui n'éclatent que par un luxe et des débauches aussi sourdes qu'elles. C'était vers la fin de ce règne . . . que quatre d'entre eux imaginèrent la singulière partie de débauche dont nous allons rendre compte (Pasolini 15).

Sade précise que les capitaux nécessaires à l'organisation de la débauche sont issus de « fortunes *obscures* » : la lumière officielle du discours financier du Roi-Soleil recouvre les ramifications d'un pouvoir souterrain qui implose dans les ténèbres du château de Silling. Si la Raison des Lumières actualise la nécessité d'enfermer le libertin en Sade, l'écrivain y répond par la représentation. « Sade lui-même endurant cette vie ne l'endura qu'imaginant l'intolérable » (Bataille, *Larmes* 105) : l'homme nié par le monde de la Raison s'engage dans un processus de surenchère, relançant son ego dans la négation de ce qui le nie. Une identité renversée s'installe entre la situation biographique du prisonnier et l'espace fictionnel où les quatre libertins enferment leur sérail : le corps emmuré se transvase dans une fiction qui renverse l'ordre de domination auquel il est soumis, traçant les contours du fantasme à l'encre d'une souveraineté dominatrice.

> Vous voilà hors de France, au fond d'une forêt inhabitable, au-delà de montagnes escarpées dont les passages ont été rompus aussitôt après que vous les avez eu franchis. Vous êtes enfermés dans une citadelle impénétrable; qui que ce soit ne vous y sait; vous êtes soustraites à vous amis, à vos parents, vous êtes déjà mortes au monde, et ce n'est plus que pour nos plaisirs que vous respirez (Pasolini 66).

Les quatre libertins des *Cent vingt journées* ne sont *maîtres* des cérémonies sacrificielles qu'en fonction du pouvoir imaginatif d'un cerveau séquestré. Exemple insigne du transvasement des tensions du registre libidinal dans le corps du savoir, l'écriture présente une certaine oscillation entre critique révolutionnaire et achèvement du totalitarisme de l'Ancien Régime. Si le langage du dévoilement sadien participe à la montée de la représentation de la sexualité dont témoigne l'activité pamphlétaire de la période révolutionnaire (Hunt, Thomas), la possession du corps victimaire réaffirme les privilèges

aristocratiques. La subversion sadienne mime non sans ironie la conjoncture d'un pouvoir qui perdure en retirant de la circulation culturelle les discours qui confrontent son autorité. L'écriture donne forme à la critique d'un pouvoir dont elle achève la logique dans le même geste : elle préfigure l'impasse politique d'une liberté affirmée à coups de couperet.

Le discours sadien conteste la légitimité conférée au bourreau, lui qui « n'emploie pas le langage d'une violence qu'il exerce au nom du pouvoir établi, mais celui du pouvoir, qui l'excuse apparemment, le justifie et lui donne raison d'être élevé » (Bataille, *L'Érotisme* 209). Le bourreau parle le langage de la violence déjà sublimée du pouvoir; la victime seule est contrainte à opérer sa propre sublimation pour tisser un lien entre l'image de la violence et la parole[2]. C'est pourquoi Bataille soutient que « le langage de Sade est celui d'une victime » (Bataille, *L'Érotisme* 211) : la révolte demeure la motivation la plus intime du corps prisonnier. Si « le langage de Sade nous éloigne de la violence » (Bataille, *L'Érotisme* 213), c'est que le délire délégitimateur reproduit ouvertement le processus par lequel le discours du pouvoir justifie la violence qui maintient son œuvre. L'autorité discursive institue l'utilité du sang versé en le recueillant dans l'encrier où puise la plume qui trace la lettre de la loi.

La révulsion de la contestation détermine l'insistance de la surenchère : thématisée jusque dans l'organisation du squelette formel des *Cent vingt journées*, la logique de l'excès se relance dans la transgression d'interdits toujours plus grands. Le système de gradation qui va des passions simples aux passions meurtrières met en scène l'état d'insatisfaction d'un désir qui ne se représente son objet que pour l'échapper. Le dispositif romanesque anticipe l'alliage freudien de la compulsion de répétition et de la pulsion de mort : « le temps du roman est, comme son espace, très spécifiquement carcéral; il est une répétition sans fin . . . Dans son échec à parvenir à cet absolu qu'il recherche, le libertin n'a plus d'autre ressource que la redite et la réitération » (Didier 190-191). La conclusion sous forme de « supplices en supplément » (Pasolini 383) cerne l'horizon de la décharge du scripteur : la représentation de la mort de l'autre renverse l'incarcération du corps biographique dans l'image d'une claustrophilie fictionnelle; la main emmurée trace la promesse de jouissance à travers la maîtrise d'un *espace mental* qui lui est propre, « affirmant la dépendance souterraine des constructions libertines et des constructions répressives » (Le Brun, 233). La castration du prisonnier devient le motif du désir textuel. « My constant erection! » proclame le Sade du film *Quills*, désignant ainsi le caractère prothétique de l'écriture (Wright 193). L'épreuve du dérobement perpétuel de la jouissance dans la sublimation

d'une érection infinie récupère la Parole en tant que moteur du système claustrophilique sadien.

« La dissertation et l'orgie » (Thomas) : l'écriture de Sade articule la débauche à partir d'une posture de langage; l'épanchement de la violence érotique dépend du support de la parole. « Les débauchés tortionnaires de Sade . . . manquent . . . à ce profond silence qui est le propre de la violence, qui jamais ne dit qu'elle existe, et jamais n'affirme un droit d'exister, qui toujours existe sans le dire » (Bataille, *L'Érotisme* 209) : ils tiennent à justifier leurs actions par les dissertations philosophiques qui accaparent cycliquement la narration. C'est-à-dire que les libertins sadiens jouissent de ce manquement au silence de la violence : leur désir ne s'investit pas moins dans la décharge du discours que dans celle de leur sexe. La jouissance se lit dans l'imagination textuelle :

> Il est reçu, parmi les véritables libertins, que les sensations communiquées par l'organe de l'ouïe sont celles qui flattent davantage et dont les impressions sont les plus vives . . . Il s'agissait, après s'être entouré de tout ce qui pouvait le mieux satisfaire les autres sens par la lubricité, de se faire en cette situation raconter avec les plus grands détails, et par ordre, tous les différents écarts de cette débauche, toutes ses branches, toutes ses attenances, ce qu'on appelle en un mot, en langue de libertinage, toutes les passions (Pasolini 39).

Dans les notes situées à la fin de son texte, Sade se vouvoie lui-même : « Ne faites jamais rien faire aux quatre amis qui n'ait été raconté » (Pasolini 383). La mise en garde atteste l'importance structurelle d'une gradation rigoureusement définie selon l'exigence de la maîtrise de la raison sur la violence des passions. La précaution s'inscrit dans la structure du récit par la remise de l'autorité diégétique aux quatre historiennes : celles-ci traitent la débauche dans un discours en abyme qui vient délimiter l'ordre des orgies concrètes. Le dispositif assure la primauté rationnelle de la planification sur la contingence des impulsions. *Formellement*, Sade reste en cela bien près de l'ordonnancement propre à la pensée kantienne :

> La raison est l'organe du calcul, de la planification; elle est neutre à l'égard des buts, son élément est la coordination . . . Elle est devenue une finalité sans fin qui, de ce fait, peut s'attacher toutes les fins . . . La raison est pour l'*Aufklärung* l'agent chimique qui absorbe la substance spécifique des choses et la dissout dans la pure autonomie de la raison même. (Adorno/Horkheimer 98-100)

L'autonomie de la raison n'implique pas qu'elle reçoive une fin en elle-même. « La raison est excessive », car elle prend la parole au nom de ce qui ne se dit pas (Blanchot, *L'Entretien* 326). Le langage devient le point de pivot d'une désensibilisation où la stabilité de la raison amortit l'imprévisibilité de

l'affect. Kant travaille à fonder la loi morale dans un désintéressement qui sache contenir les inclinations pulsionnelles; Sade entrave l'imagination de ses protagonistes d'un dispositif qui freine l'urgence de la satisfaction pour en relancer l'objet dans un procès de surenchère : à ce point de l'articulation du discours à l'affect, l'inclination pulsionnelle s'engage dans les deux cas sur la voie du refoulement. Le libertin sadien ne reconnaît la grandeur du crime que lorsque celui-ci est accompli avec sang-froid, faisant ainsi porter à la Raison l'horreur de l'anomalie criminelle.

> L'apathie est l'esprit de négation appliqué à l'homme qui a choisi d'être souverain . . . Il faut bien entendre, en effet, que l'apathie ne consiste pas seulement à ruiner les affections « parasitaires », mais aussi bien à s'opposer à la spontanéité de n'importe quelle passion. Le vicieux qui s'abandonne immédiatement à son vice, n'est qu'un avorton qui se perdra. Même des débauchés de génie, parfaitement doués pour devenir des monstres, s'ils se contentent de suivre leur penchant, sont destinés à la catastrophe. Sade l'exige : pour que la passion devienne énergie, il faut qu'elle soit comprimée, qu'elle se médiatise en passant par un moment d'insensibilité; alors, elle sera la plus grande possible . . . Tous ces grands libertins qui ne vivent que pour le plaisir, ne sont grands que parce qu'ils ont annihilé en eux toute capacité de plaisir (Blanchot, *Lautréamont* 44-45).

L'image de la jouissance élit domicile dans l'instrumentalité du « penser calculateur » (Adorno/Horkheimer 97) : elle se donne comme la fin arbitraire que la raison doit conquérir par le libre exercice de son autonomie. La raison survit sous le masque de l'aberration : elle décrit froidement une horreur dont la part d'excitation sexuelle devient une énigme.

> Pendant la nuit, le duc et Curval, escortés de Desgranges et de Duclos, descendent Augustine au caveau. Elle avait le cul très conservé, on la fouette, puis chacun l'encule sans décharger; ensuite le duc lui fait cinquante-huit blessures sur les fesses, dans chacune desquelles il coule de l'huile bouillante. Il lui enfonce un fer chaud dans le con et dans le cul, et la fout sur les blessures avec un condom de peau de chien de mer qui redéchirait les brûlures. Cela fait, on lui découvre les os et on les lui scie en différents endroits. Puis l'on découvre ses nerfs en quatre endroits formant la croix, on attache à un tourniquet chaque bout de ces nerfs, et on tourne, ce qui lui allonge ces parties délicates et la fait souffrir des douleurs inouïes. On lui donne du relâche pour la mieux faire souffrir, puis on reprend l'opération, et, à cette fois, on lui égratigne les nerfs avec un canif, à mesure qu'on les allonge. Cela fait, on lui fait un trou au gosier, par lequel on ramène et fait passer sa langue; on lui brûle à petit feu le téton qui lui reste, puis on lui enfonce dans le con une main armée d'un scalpel avec lequel on brise la cloison qui sépare l'anus du vagin; on quitte le scalpel, on renfonce la main, on va chercher dans ses entrailles et la force à chier par le con; ensuite, par la même ouverture, on va lui fendre le sac de l'estomac. Puis l'on revient au visage: on lui coupe les oreilles, on lui brûle l'intérieur du nez, on lui éteint les yeux en laissant distiller de la cire d'Espagne brûlante dedans, on lui cerne le crâne, on la pend par

> les cheveux en lui attachant des pierres aux pieds, pour qu'elle tombe et que le crâne s'arrache. Quand elle tomba de cette chute, elle respirait encore, et le duc la foutit en con dans cet état; il déchargea et n'en sortit que plus furieux. On l'ouvrit, on lui brûla les entrailles dans le ventre même, et on passa une main armée d'un scalpel qui fut lui piquer le cœur en dedans, à différentes places. Ce fut là qu'elle rendit l'âme (Pasolini 371).

Une fois traité par les historiennes, le meurtre s'accomplit dans un espace privilégié : le caveau se donne comme le renversement diégétique du cachot biographique. Il devient le lieu où l'impasse du sujet sadien se formule : l'image d'une jouissance totale se nourrit de l'élimination totalitaire de l'objet du désir. Le corps de l'autre devient un objet qui n'a de sens qu'en tant que chair à faire souffrir à travers la négation de son organisation naturelle : langue pendante, expulsée par le gosier; indifférence des orifices où se découpe l'indistinction de la défécation et du coït; procès de *défiguration* à l'état pur, « jouissance dans la destruction de l'objet de la jouissance » (Klossowski, « Justine » 249). L'horreur élève la parole jusqu'au non-sens, mais la Raison elle-même détient la clé de ce discours de viol.

Maître de son univers fictionnel, le narrateur des *Cent vingt journées* l'est bel et bien. Le souffle de son fantasme de domination s'assujettit le métarécit des Lumières. Le discours de Sade digérant le capital symbolique de son siècle, « la perspective d'une unanimité possible des esprits raisonnables » se dérobe (Lyotard 7). L'opération s'affermit hors des repères de la négation déterminée hégélienne : le contre-discours sadien procède d'un jeu d'interférences qui détourne le discours dominant de sa finalité afin de donner corps à ses contradictions (Brix). La violence du texte présage ainsi l'éclatement de la Terreur et cristallise l'impasse révolutionnaire dans le geste de la représentation. L'autonomie du pouvoir identitaire de la raison affirmée en tant que moyen nourrit l'effectivité du procès de délégitimation : le discours subversif prolifère en fonction d'une *maîtrise* du discours dominant. Le capital sadien fructifie plus avant dans l'éclatement de la violence révolutionnaire : « c'est en quelque sorte pour avoir la conscience nette d'avoir infligé un démenti aux vérités proclamées par la Révolution qu'il donna alors la version la plus virulente de sa Justine; il fallait que l'impulsion secrète de la masse révolutionnaire fût quelque part mise à nue » (Klossowski, *Sade* 18).

Un enjeu commun relie en ce sens le monolithe sadien à l'écriture schizophrène de *Prochain épisode* : une même révolte délégitimatrice y trace le corps d'un contre-discours. Si Sade reconfigure les tensions de son

époque pour remettre en cause leur prétention à la légitimité, la volonté révolutionnaire du roman d'Aquin se débat quant à elle contre sa propre illégitimité : le discours de l'autre cerne la voix subversive dans l'enceinte de sa domination. L'échec que *Prochain épisode* met en scène énonce la structure problématique d'un désir enchaîné dans la toute-puissance fantasmée du regard de l'autre : un narrateur interné écrit un roman d'espionnage qui dresse l'ampleur de son emmurement par-delà les murs de sa prison.

L'échec de la suture narrative : la Nation contresignée

> J'écris sur une table à jeu, près d'une fenêtre qui me découvre un parc cintré par une grille coupante qui marque la frontière entre l'imprévisible et l'enfermé. Je ne sortirai pas d'ici avant échéance. Cela est écrit en plusieurs copies conformes et décrété selon des lois valides et par un magistrat royal irréfutable. Nulle distraction ne peut donc se substituer à l'horlogerie de mon obsession, ni me faire dévier de mon parcours écrit (Aquin, *Prochaine* 5).

D'emblée, le dispositif narratif de *Prochain épisode* articule le geste de l'écriture à la claustration : la main du narrateur incarcéré s'agite sur le papier, tâchant de recréer un espace de liberté à partir d'une situation où la captivité sévit. Une ambiguïté narrative se cultive par l'omniprésence de la première personne du singulier : un narrateur autodiégétique aborde avec le même « je » sa situation de prisonnier et le roman d'espionnage qu'il écrit; la narration enjambe à répétition la frontière de la mise en abyme où elle évolue. La métalepse finale—où l'arrestation du narrateur-espion fournit non sans incohérence diégétique l'origine de la situation de détention où évolue le narrateur-rédacteur—condense l'impasse du désir révolutionnaire dans un mouvement circulaire qui assaille la temporalité du roman. Cette transgression de la logique narrative burine le récit d'un revirement irrationnel : dépossédée de son avenir, la narration « exécute une danse de possession à l'intérieur d'un cercle prédit » (Aquin, *Prochaine* 44), comme si une puissance omnisciente l'entraînait vers l'infini ressassement d'un scénario écrit d'avance.

> Rien n'est libre ici : ni mon coup d'âme, ni la traction adipeuse de l'encre sur l'imaginaire, ni les mouvements pressentis de H. de Heutz, ni la liberté qui m'est dévolue de le tuer au bon moment. Rien n'est libre ici, rien : même pas cette évasion fougueuse que je téléguide du bout des doigts et que je crois conduire quand elle m'efface. Rien! Pas même l'intrigue . . . Quelque chose me dit qu'un modèle antérieur plonge mon improvisation dans une forme atavique et qu'une alluvion ancienne étreint le fleuve instantané qui m'échappe. Je n'écris pas, je suis écrit. Le geste futur me connaît depuis longtemps (Aquin, *Prochaine* 85-86).

À même ce cloître diégétique, l'enjeu de la narration se cristallise dans l'exigence d'un meurtre : la révolution exige la mort de H. de Heutz,

représentant des forces contre-révolutionnaires qui nient l'autonomie du corps de la narration autodiégétique. Cependant, la maîtrise du déroulement de l'action lui échappe justement : devant son ennemi,

> le narrateur est soudainement « frappé de stupeur cataleptique » et ne parvient donc pas à commettre le geste homicide capable de le libérer de cette emprise. Cette catalepsie, en effet, le laisse interdit devant cet ennemi qui, tout à la fois, le fascine, le ravit, et l'inquiète étrangement. S'il en est ainsi, c'est sans doute que le narrateur suppose son ennemi omniscient. En cela, et malgré toutes les ruses qu'il met en œuvre, il ne peut le déjouer car l'autre sait toujours déjà ce qu'il pense et jette ainsi le doute dans la conscience du narrateur quant à la maîtrise de ses gestes. Cette confrontation est donc, en définitive, condamnée à l'échec puisque le narrateur est, d'entrée de jeu, arraisonné au jeu du maître qui est le maître du jeu. Cette impasse, on pourrait dire qu'elle est celle d'une captation imaginaire au champ de l'Autre (Cardinal, *L'Oblitération* 13-14).

Le sujet s'enlise dans le regard de cet autre qu'il voudrait rayer de son univers. En soulignant que « l'histoire ne se fait qu'en se racontant » (Faye 9), Anthony Purdy a bien montré que la performance historiographique de *Prochain épisode* se creuse dans une problématique de la *compétence narrative*. La fiction aquinienne exploite le nœud de l'« échec narratif » (Purdy 114) que le romancier théorise par ailleurs dans sa lecture des événements de 1837-1838 : aux prises avec la narration d'un texte dont il n'est pas l'auteur, « le dominé vit un roman écrit d'avance » (Aquin, « Profession » 51). *Prochain épisode* formule l'échec d'un peuple qui ne parvient pas à « *se* raconter, [à] s'emparer de la narration de *son* histoire » (Purdy 114). Contestant « une histoire déréalisante et déterminée à l'avance », forcé « à habiter l'antichambre d'une révolution ratée », le discours littéraire trace les contours de la logique symbolique qui le séquestre dans l'ascendant imaginaire de l'autre devenu Autre (Purdy 123). Du fond d'un « cachot national » (Aquin, *Prochaine* 31), écrasé par « deux siècles de mélancolie et trente-quatre ans d'impuissance » (Aquin, *Prochaine* 65), le narrateur se scarifie de la signature d'une autonomie politique qui ne vient pas. « J'agonise sans style comme mes frères anciens de Saint-Eustache » (Aquin, *Prochaine* 132) : le récit fictionnel se décalque sur l'impasse historique qui sourd de la représentation comme un insigne retour du refoulé.

> Cet amas de feuilles est un produit de l'histoire, fragment inachevé de ce que je suis moi-même et témoignage impur, par conséquent, de la révolution chancelante que je continue d'exprimer, à ma façon, par mon délire institutionnel . . . Ce livre est le geste inlassablement recommencé d'un patriote qui attend, dans le vide intemporel, l'occasion de reprendre les armes (Aquin, *Prochaine* 88-89).

Réfractée dans le traumatisme collectif des rébellions patriotes (Collin), l'image de la Conquête hante l'imaginaire du narrateur comme le poids d'une

scène irrésolue que seule la violence pourrait dénouer. Assujetti au miroir du regard de l'autre comme à la caution de sa propre existence, le narrateur retourne contre lui-même le désir de mort qu'il continue d'élever en tant que critère fondamental de l'autonomie narrative : « Me suicider partout et sans relâche, c'est là ma mission » (Aquin, *Prochaine* 21). La mort est à l'œuvre; et si l'œuvre de la mort enserre le discours, c'est que le travail d'un deuil tarde à se faire. Figure condensée du sacrifice muet des plaines d'Abraham et du désespoir d'un patriote assiégé, « le corps du père jonche ainsi le sol de la représentation historique, excluant le sujet du procès symbolique par lequel se noue, dans la coupure, la fondation originaire et l'élaboration de la filiation historique » (Cardinal, *L'Oblitération* 17).

Oscillant entre l'excitation meurtrière et l'arraisonnement fasciné à un ennemi qui se dérobe, le narrateur manque à l'appel de son propre procès. Le procureur élève la voix et impose l'influence de son Mythos en tant que grand Autre—« Autre chose que sa mission contre-révolutionnaire définit cet homme . . . Je suis aux prises avec un homme qui me dépasse » (Aquin, *Prochaine* 123). À récupérer Derrida pour soutenir que « la lisibilité de la lettre à l'œuvre dans notre culture s'inscrit dans un procès selon lequel le nom (l'écrit, le *graphein*) est toujours déjà oblitéré par la voix (la *phonè*) en laquelle se recueille, pour le sujet, l'expérience de la présence du présent et de la vérité » (Cardinal, *L'Oblitération* 5), Jacques Cardinal conclut que l'écriture du narrateur manque à reconnaître le dynamisme de cette logique de l'identité comprise comme « différence originaire » (Cardinal, *L'Oblitération* 5). Par le refus de renoncer au fantasme de la présence pleine « du texte national comme fondation originaire » (Cardinal, *L'Oblitération* 22), l'imaginaire du sujet se laisse déterminer par l'oblitération du nom de l'autre, lui-même oblitéré suivant la structure différentielle de l'identité[3]. Le narrateur cherche à éliminer le maître dans le récit en abyme, mais son échec grillage l'espace de la narration autodiégétique de la stature symbolique du nom de la loi. « Je me suis enfermé dans un système constellaire qui m'emprisonne sur un plan strictement littéraire » (Aquin, *Prochaine* 18) : l'internement de la voix révolutionnaire se noue dans une problématique de la trace où « le ratage symbolique de l'imposture du nom (doublement) oblitéré » (Cardinal, *L'Oblitération* 22) projette la narration dans les limbes d'une liberté qui, à défaut de reconnaître la différence de la loi de la fondation, couche l'écriture sur un linceul où le sujet découpe le signe indiscernable de son nom mortifère.

> On ne m'avait pas dit qu'en devenant patriote, je serais jeté ainsi dans la détresse et qu'à force de vouloir la liberté, je me retrouverais enfermé . . . Condamné à la

> noirceur, je me frappe aux parois d'un cachot qu'enfin, après trente-quatre ans de mensonges, j'habite pleinement et en toute humiliation. Je suis emprisonné dans ma folie, emmuré dans mon impuissance surveillée, accroupi sans élan sur un papier blanc comme le drap avec lequel on se pend (Aquin, *Prochaine* 22-23).

Le ressassement de la narration dans l'espace indéfini d'une temporalité cloîtrée fomente l'incapacité du narrateur à se défaire de l'emprise du regard de l'Autre. Le sujet narratif se trouve suspendu entre l'exigence symbolique de l'inscription de son nom dans l'histoire et le fantasme d'une filiation où la mémoire collective se nourrit du sang de ses martyrs.

> Événement nu, mon livre m'écrit et n'est accessible qu'à la condition de n'être pas détaché de la trame historique dans laquelle il s'insère tant bien que mal. Voilà soudain que je rêve que mon épopée déréalisante s'inscrive au calendrier national d'un peuple sans histoire! Quelle dérision, quelle pitié! C'est vrai que nous n'avons pas d'histoire. Nous n'aurons d'histoire qu'à partir du moment incertain où commencera la guerre révolutionnaire. Notre histoire s'inaugurera dans le sang d'une révolution qui me brise et que j'ai mal servi : ce jour-là, veines ouvertes, nous ferons nos débuts dans le monde (Aquin, *Prochaine* 90).

La voix du narrateur s'écoule comme un désir qui ne saurait coaguler. « L'histoire aspire à la clôture de l'œuvre, à la cicatrice littéraire et anhistorique; le discours y oppose l'ouverture de la blessure quotidienne » (Purdy 121). De l'indiscernabilité de l'oblitération du nom du narrateur à l'échec narratif de son histoire, le récit agonise dans la plaie qui laisse la déliquescence du discours s'épancher des veines de la narration à la terre des plaines d'Abraham; le sol maculé donnant corps au Mythos de la défaite, le sang réinvestit l'imaginaire de l'échec de la suture narrative. Cardinal condense bien la pensée de Lacan en disant que « l'Imaginaire lie alors que le Symbolique distingue » (Cardinal, *Roman* 19) : la suture cicatrise la blessure à même la production d'un récit qui puisse tenir lieu d'Histoire. « L'imaginaire est une cicatrice » (Aquin, *Prochaine* 86) : si l'opération suturale de *Prochain épisode* tient, c'est que l'aiguille du discours parvient malgré tout à coudre l'héritage de l'échec dans le linceul qui appelle le deuil sans pourtant en achever le travail. Le fil qui suture manque à affranchir le Sujet-Nation de l'imposture illégitime que la stature de la loi de l'autre lui impose. Le « chiasme narratif » (Cardinal 1993b, 21) qui scinde et unifie à la fois la voix narrative de *Prochain épisode* se donne à lire comme l'énonciation d'un désir problématique où l'écriture cherche à fonder l'autonomie discursive qui lui échappe.

Si la contresignature du discours de l'autre enchaîne la narration de *Prochain épisode*, la signature sadienne reste muette. Sade n'a jamais signé ses œuvres les plus subversives; il en a même maintes fois nié la

paternité. Le discours dominant a traqué le nom de Sade pour en stigmatiser l'autorité par-delà l'anonymat du texte. « Ces notes sont de la main de l'infâme Marquis de Sade » (Delon tome II, 116-117) : ainsi une main geôlière oblitère-t-elle la couverture d'un des cahiers rédigés à la Bastille. L'écriture de Sade arraisonne la signature des Lumières à son pouvoir subversif.

> Le discours, en apparence, a beau être bien peu de chose, les interdits qui le frappent révèlent très tôt, très vite, son lien avec le désir et avec le pouvoir. Et à cela quoi d'étonnant : puisque le discours—la psychanalyse nous l'a montré—ce n'est pas simplement ce qui manifeste (ou cache) le désir; c'est aussi ce qui est l'objet du désir; et puisque—cela, l'histoire ne cesse de nous l'enseigner—le discours n'est pas simplement ce qui traduit les luttes ou les systèmes de domination, mais ce pour quoi, ce par quoi on lutte, le pouvoir dont on cherche à s'emparer. (Foucault 12)

Prochain épisode appréhende ce « pouvoir dont on cherche à s'emparer » selon un désir de nomination autonome qui sillonne le roman sous le signe de la dépossession. Tout se joue du narrateur. Si la nécessité de la mort de H. de Heutz s'impose à travers le désir de K—elle qui transmet la mission au narrateur (Aquin, *Prochaine* 37)—ce dernier retrouve aussi la chevelure aimée aux côtés de cet homme qu'il n'arrive pas à tuer (Aquin, *Prochaine* 101). Objet évanescent du désir, objet du désir évanescent, K échappe à la voix énonciative du roman : autour d'elle orbite le désir de la narration.

Le sujet libertin des *Cent vingt journées de Sodome* assujettit à l'inverse l'objet de son désir dans l'enclave de la mort : le désir sadien s'abîme dans la destruction de l'objet qui pourrait structurer la relation à autrui. Le meurtre rappelle alors le sacrifice objectal d'un esclave : le pouvoir maîtrise un ordre de discours à travers la manipulation des individus jugés superflus, renversant ainsi la maxime kantienne qui ordonne d'agir « de façon telle que tu traites l'humanité, aussi bien dans ta personne que dans tout autre, toujours en même temps comme fin, et jamais simplement comme moyen » (Kant 108).

Or, l'annihilation répétée des victimes atteste justement le caractère irréductiblement fuyant de l'objet du désir : si la jouissance se conjugue sous le mode du meurtre, le sujet ne possède jamais l'objet que dans l'instantanéité d'une perte. Chez Sade comme chez Aquin, la claustration biographique vient se sublimer dans l'écriture en fonction de la mainmise de la loi de l'Autre sur la loi indiscernable de l'impulsion qui sourd du texte. La subversion ne subvertit qu'en fonction du cadre d'un discours qui n'est pas le sien et qui l'enserre. Il a fallu un certain recul historique pour qu'une voix critique (notamment Le Brun) se risque à libérer Sade de l'emprise de la loi

du « désir de l'Autre » (Lacan 259). Lorsqu'il parle de « *loi hors-la-loi* » (20), Richard entend dégager un travail de la pulsion qui « n'a absolument rien de policé » (22). Il devient question d'une « loi qui n'a strictement rien à cirer de la loi des hommes » (25), « d'une loi *autre*, qui n'est plus la loi du coagulum, mais qui est celle de l'abîme » (30), et à même laquelle les écritures de Sade et Aquin puisent leur force. Cette *loi hors-la-loi* effraie; par elle, l'inceste et le viol collectif marquent la chair humaine. En elle se ramifie une logique du désir réprimée par le droit occidental, précisément dans la mesure où la loi de l'Autre séquestre la loi *autre* dans les limites d'un certain registre juridique et sociopolitique.

Derrière le mur, l'ébullition du récit continue de jaillir sur l'imposture du pouvoir dominant. Si j'ai essayé de mettre en évidence l'étau de la loi de l'Autre sur cette *loi hors-la-loi* par où s'articule la promesse d'autonomie de « l'abîme de l'ironie généralisée », c'est que le thème de la *prison* me semblait l'imposer (Richard 28). Du désir entendu comme « désir de l'Autre », le sujet ne peut que chercher sa propre marque dans la suture qui le relie à autrui en y distinguant la duplicité des regards. Mais que l'analyse révèle un impensé de la liberté, et la voie s'ouvre à une absence qu'il importe d'affronter dans un *effort* qui ne s'achève jamais.

NOTES

1 Sade désavoue la possibilité que « celui que "je" définis par "tu" se pense et peut s'inverser en "je", et "je" (moi) devient un "tu" » (Benveniste 230).

2 Le discours du pouvoir s'autorise d'une légitimité qu'il tâche de faire paraître naturelle. Le narrateur de *Prochain épisode* notera à sa manière : « Je suis soumis à une expertise psychiatrique avant d'être envoyé à mon procès. Mais je sais que cette expertise même contient un postulat informulé qui confère sa légitimité au régime que je combats et une connotation pathologique à mon entreprise. La psychiatrie est la science du déséquilibre individuel encadré dans une société impeccable. Elle valorise le conformiste, celui qui s'intègre et non celui qui refuse; elle glorifie tous les comportements d'obéissance civile et d'acceptation. Ce n'est pas seulement la solitude que je combats ici, mais cet emprisonnement clinique qui conteste ma validité révolutionnaire » (Aquin, *Prochaine* 13).

3 L'écriture du narrateur se bute au mur du nom de Canada tel qu'il séquestre la voix révolutionnaire dans la contresignature qui oblitère le nom de Québec : « La valeur de la signature du Québec sur la scène constitutionnelle canadienne, et de l'histoire comme mise en œuvre du droit des peuples à disposer d'eux-mêmes, semble prise dans le nœud d'une certaine ambiguïté. Cette signature est en effet ambiguë parce qu'elle est à la fois reconnue (en tant que le nom d'un sujet mis en position de Sujet-Nation sur la scène de l'histoire se donne à lire sur un texte légal, c'est-à-dire reconnu par la communauté du droit international), et cependant méconnue dans la mesure où cette signature est arraisonnée par la contresignature du maître colonial » (Cardinal, *L'Obliteration* 11).

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Changming Yuan

Class 761, Shanghai

So you are the second one
From the middle in the first standing row
In a world of black and white

Is this the girl squatting in the front
Who you might have pursued hard
But your pride and prejudice prevented you

The tall and handsome guy from a high-class family
Who suspected your poverty had made you a thief
Before he lost and found his fancy watch in the dorm

And your make-do friend is the third one
From the left in the second standing row, the nice guy
Who had a really hard time passing every single test

Wait, there is more to it—
Who is the guy that has become the vice president of Citigroup
And who is the girl that died a miser-multimillionaire in Seattle last year

What's happened to the character library building behind all of you
Did they really convert it into a brilliantly decorated hotel
To accommodate your travelling alumni, rich or famous?

Keavy Martin and Sam McKegney

Inuvialuit Critical Autobiography and the Carceral Writing of Anthony Apakark Thrasher

I am an alcoholic far from my home,
Far from my loved ones, my heart suffers.
My body is weak but my Eskimo spirit is strong
So I go to sleep happy. My dreams are of you.
My people. My Home. My land. God bless you all.
(TS 433-434)

Anthony Apakark Thrasher, an Inuvialuk[1] from the Western Arctic, wrote these lines during his incarceration in an Alberta prison. Thrasher's exile had been voluntary at first; he initially came to the South as part of a training program aimed at preparing Indigenous men of the Mackenzie Delta region to support industrial development in the North. "[L]ured by the books and picture[s] of beautiful city lights" but "not adequately equipped to compete with what [he] met in city life" (TS 291),[2] Thrasher became mired in alcoholism and street life, part of a network of marginalized people attempting to navigate the addictions, poverty, and violence engendered, in part, by other government initiatives designed to assimilate Indigenous peoples into mainstream society.[3] In November of 1969, while en route from Edmonton to Lethbridge, Thrasher was arrested in Calgary on the charge of non-capital murder. With no recollection of having ever seen the victim, an elderly man named Charles Ratkovitch, Thrasher awaited trial at Spy Hill Penitentiary, Calgary, and began recording his story on "literally thousands of scraps of paper" (Deagle and Mettrick viii). He was encouraged in this activity by his lawyer, William Stilwell, who had Thrasher's handwritten narrative typed up to form part of his legal defence. Six

months after his arrest, however, Thrasher was convicted of manslaughter and sentenced to fifteen years in prison. Over the next five years, Thrasher's writing grew to provide material for a typescript of more than five-hundred pages; it was eventually edited, pared down, reordered, and supplemented by two Calgary journalists, Gerard Deagle and Alan Mettrick, who oversaw its publication in 1976 as a 164-page "collaborative autobiography" entitled *Thrasher . . . Skid Row Eskimo*. This book has been out of print for thirty-five years.

In 2003, Sam McKegney acquired a typewritten version of Thrasher's original typescript from Stilwell; thus began a lengthy and ongoing process—in collaboration with Keavy Martin and with Thrasher's relations in the Inuvialuit Settlement Region—of preparing a new publication which will differ significantly from *Skid Row Eskimo*.[4] Restricted by market demands and by dominant representations of Indigenous peoples in the 1970s, Deagle and Mettrick narrowed the scope of their published version to focus predominantly on Thrasher's chronicling of his more harrowing experiences, while omitting most of the author's extensive critical and artistic commentary on the socio-cultural circumstances that accounted for these events. As a result, *Skid Row Eskimo* generates an image of Indigenous alienation and victimization in urban settings, and thus firmly locates itself within the marketable colonial metanarrative of the "Vanishing Indian." Deagle and Mettrick were constrained in their editing choices during a period when there was scarcely a market for Inuit autobiography at all. Their edited version of *Skid Row Eskimo* remains an important literary and cultural resource that would likely never have reached Inuvialuit or any other audiences without their intervention. Also, it would be misleading to posit that the editors imposed the Vanishing Indian/Inuk trope on Thrasher's prisons writings, since it is at play in the typescript as well.[5] For example, the epigraph selected to introduce *Skid Row Eskimo,* written by Thrasher, reads: "*Listen to the North Wind. It has come to take us away. The name, Inuvialuit, will only be heard in the wind. The land will still be there, the moon will still shine, the Northern Lights will still be bright, and the Midnight Sun will still be seen. But we will be gone forever . . .* " (iii, ellipses and italics in original). This passage—excerpted from the latter half of the typescript, but the first thing that readers encounter in the published text—not only announces the seemingly inevitable demise of the Inuvialuit, but also naturalizes this disappearance as somehow connected to the "North Wind," eliding how colonial interventions created the social conditions that threaten Inuvialuit individuals, families, and communities.

Although Thrasher's writing at times gestures toward the trope of the

Vanishing Inuk,[6] it also works to complicate notions of *inevitable* demise by emphasizing the economic, political, and religious motivations behind colonial incursions that continue to plague the Inuvialuit. For example, Thrasher notes perceptively that "if the Arctic coast was made of solid mineral of economical value, the Eskimo people would be pushed right into the ocean to get what is under his feet" (TS 480). The destruction of traditional Inuvialuit lifeways and the fragmentation of Inuvialuit kinship structures are consequences not of fate, but of decisions made by European settlers in positions of political, legal, economic, and spiritual authority.

In fact, the typescript's documentation of Thrasher's early childhood, years in residential school, and experiences in southern urban centres is punctuated throughout by broader reflections about the changes that alcohol, disease, Christianization, and southern systems of law and education have brought to his people—*critical* reflections that are largely omitted from the published version, but which complicate and alter the decolonizing interventions that Thrasher, as a carceral Inuvialuit writer, can perform in radical ways. What Thrasher produced, we contend, was not the standard autobiography to which *Skid Row Eskimo* ultimately conforms, but a much more generically complex document we are provisionally calling an Inuvialuk "critical autobiography."

Our editing of Thrasher's prison writings provides an occasion here for considering the intellectual and ethical complexities involved in engaging with Inuvialuit critical autobiography and with carceral composition. Thrasher's prison writings provide an instructive case study for both bodies of literature due to the author's vacillation between what might appear to be mutually exclusive claims of inevitable victimhood and of emancipatory authorial power. Though victimized by the colonial institutions of residential school, church, and prison, Thrasher performs a kind of agency in his repeated assertion that his writing can effect change in the extra-textual world. "This world is strange," he writes. "I hope the younger generation of my people could read of what I know so they could keep out of trouble. They will be easy targets like me if they are not warned before time" (TS 162). As we have worked on the typescript, it has been this transcendent and self-sacrificing Thrasher whom we have found most compelling: the writer who, despite his incarceration, yearns to serve his people and who offers a kind of hope that something useful will be born out of his struggles.

Yet although it is tempting to applaud the author's invocation of Inuvialuit kinship ties and his claims to power in defiance of the limitations placed

upon him by the state, we remain suspicious of the emancipatory potential of prison writing; we worry that such reification might divert attention from the state's ongoing tyranny toward prisoner populations and toward Indigenous populations more broadly. Here we will consider the ethical challenges and possibilities with which Thrasher confronts his readers through his complex authorial self-positioning in his prison writings. After examining some of the material omitted from *Skid Row Eskimo*, we will consider how the model of Inuk elder Ivaluardjuk might act as cultural forebear for Thrasher in his assertions of pedagogical agency within the prison setting. We then focus our attention on a dream narrative from Thrasher's prison writings that operates according to the conflicting logic of both inevitable demise and empowered emancipation. Although invoking nostalgia for an apparently unattainable 'traditional' past[7]—according to the mythos of tragically but inevitably fading Indigenous cultures—Thrasher's dream narrative simultaneously affords its author an imaginative vehicle for transcending the punitive logic of the carceral space by which his body is confined. We then consider how Thrasher's imaginative identification with a mythic Inuvialuk hunter who bears witness to the colonial containment of his people might offer a means of accounting for authorial agency without allowing that agency to become unmoored from unjust power relations that restrict both prison inmates and the Inuvialuit community. We argue that by tempering his narrative escapes with the realities of colonial oppression, Thrasher reminds readers of carceral literature that, as Dylan Rodriguez puts it, "[t]he writer in prison is never simply *free to write*" (409). Furthermore, the author's actual imprisonment militates against the Vanishing Inuk trope invoked in the typescript by forcing readers to acknowledge not the *inevitability* of Inuvialuit demise, but rather the implicatedness of cultural erasure and economic dispossession in ongoing colonial incursions that continue to make Inuvialuit cultural persistence difficult, incursions which readers are therefore encouraged to recognize, to name, and to resist.

Toward an Inuvialuk Critical Autobiography

In their foreword to the 1976 publication, Deagle and Mettrick explain their position vis-à-vis the text as follows: "Our role was to collate what was essentially a loose-leaf diary into narrative form, authenticate that narrative as thoroughly as possible and expand it" (x). The editorial interventions implied by terms like "collate" and "authenticate" are not specified within the text; the audience is thus left not knowing which

parts of the narrative represent Thrasher's own words and which have been emplotted or "expand[ed]" by the editors. The "narrative form" that was created, furthermore, is likely to trouble readers today with its preference for decidedly "un-modern" Indigenous characters: the story depicts the Inuvialuk in the city as comically and tragically helpless, "slick[ing] his hair down with Noxzema, brush[ing] his teeth with shaving lather, and wash[ing] his face with mouthwash" ("Editors' Foreword," *Skid Row Eskimo* ix). Thrasher's tale unfolds predictably, then, as its narrator sinks further into the vortex of the city: accompanied by addicts and prostitutes, he clashes with police, drifts from place to place, suffers from beatings and blackouts, and eventually finds himself in jail—robbed even of the agency of remembering his crime. The editors' foreword to *Skid Row Eskimo* begins with the admission that "to wait for a happy ending [for Thrasher] is to wait for the musk-ox and the white fox to return to a white and simple north" (viii). Here, extinction provides the metaphor for Thrasher's seemingly inevitable failure to "rehabilitate"—the author's demise in the city apparently mirroring the decimation of animals that form traditional sources of Inuvialuit sustenance. "He has written an honest and true book," the editors continue, "and to hold out hope is to cheat on him" (viii).

On one hand, the published text bears unflinching witness to the brutality experienced by Thrasher during his time in the South; on the other, we worry about its reliance on constructions of Thrasher as doomed victim without the capacity to create change. As editors, we are concerned about the tendency within *Skid Row Eskimo* toward nostalgia and victimization, as well as the wide divide it seems to posit between the "traditional" and the "modern." What kind of story does this tell? What kind of message does this send to contemporary readers, whether in southern universities or northern communities? Recent scholarship in the field of Indigenous literary studies, after all, emphasizes resistance and continuance over victimization and despair; in 2004, Choctaw scholar Devon Mihesuah asked of Indigenous writers, "[D]o we want to use our personal experiences, combined with our imagination, to create empowering, dynamic stories that lift us up and inspire us to better ourselves, or do we want to write the same stories about alcoholism, depression, alienation, and tribal destruction that bog us down in sadness? Do we only want to study the same and wallow in helplessness and hopelessness?" (101). In *Magic Weapons*, McKegney argues along these lines that

> Although they depict historical disparities in power and often traumatic personal events, [Indigenous survival narratives] render these imaginatively, affording the

> Indigenous author interpretive autonomy and discursive agency while transcending the structural imperatives of proof and evidence embedded in historical paradigms. They invoke . . . history as a creative element in provocative visions of growth, healing, and change. The [colonial] experience does not generate the survival narrative beyond the creative agency of the Indigenous author, which immediately locates the survivor outside standard fallback positions of victimhood implied by much historical and psychoanalytic discourse. (6)

Certainly, Thrasher's unpublished prison writings offer a different set of interpretive possibilities than does *Skid Row Eskimo*. Granted the luxury of envisioning this typescript as a publication that will be read by those in a field that did not even exist when *Skid Row Eskimo* appeared, we still realize that our textual interventions will—like Deagle and Mettrick's—inevitably involve a re-emplotting of Thrasher's story that will require impositions on (and perhaps figurative violence toward) the text. However, given the greater consultative voice of members of the Thrasher family throughout the editing process, the greater resources we can bring to bear on the project due to our positions within universities and changes in the market for Indigenous writing, and the capacity to track editorial interventions made possible by internet-based archival data, we hope that our limitations and failures in the editing process will be acknowledged rather than obscured. Most importantly, we hope that the addition of more of Thrasher's critical and contextual commentary will provide readers with more frequent interpretive cues to catalyze the text's decolonizing force. In the typescript, Thrasher spends pages upon pages critiquing the institutions—the residential schools, the churches, the courtrooms, and the prisons—that have sought to recreate him as a subservient yet palatably exotic Canadian subject of lesser status. Yet rather than being a mere victim of "progress," Thrasher speaks out strongly against the forces that work so relentlessly to make the Vanishing Inuk myth a reality. He speaks candidly about the impact of alcohol on his life and his community; he attests to the racism and brutality of the police and the justice system; and he voices his concern for the environmental degradation caused by northern "development." Above all, he maintains a commitment to sharing his experiences in an unsentimental and frank fashion, both for the sake of his people in the North and for southerners whose ignorance continually exhausts him. Writing from within the prison cell, he finds a new purpose for his existence: "I will humble my self for my people who might come south," he says, "at least they will know what kind of society to keep away from to be safe" (TS 218).

Again, this community-oriented Thrasher aligns with contemporary trends in Indigenous literary criticism, embodying what Cherokee scholar

Jace Weaver would call a "communitist" vision through a "proactive commitment to Native community" (43). The challenge for us as editors, however, is respecting Thrasher's decolonizing vision while resisting the urge to evade or ignore those elements of his writing that refuse to conform to contemporary critical values. Faced with the terrible reality of his life and of what colonization has done to his people, Thrasher at times gives way to nostalgia and despair and succumbs to the dominant discourse: "Now they are dying," he writes, "[t]he inuit are dying" (333):

> Some body anybody bring us the answer to our problems. Some body anybody bring back our dreams. Some body anybody bring back our happy live. Some body anybody listen to our plea. Before we became a memory of the past. Before the north wind blizzard buries us all. Before the name Eskimo is gone. (336)

Given his enforced segregation from Inuvialuit community and the physical and psychological burdens he bears in the wake of alcoholism, street life, and horrific violence, the idea of the "dying" Inuk undoubtedly bore particular resonance for Thrasher. Furthermore, viewed in the context of Inuvialuit history of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries involving rampant disease, enforced settlement, and extension of colonial control, Thrasher's despair is understandable. The social changes and epidemics brought by the fur trade and American whaling industry caused the Inuvialuit population to fall, by 1905, "to about 250 people, or about ten percent of its level two or three generations earlier. By 1910 the number was further reduced to 150" (Alunik et al. 89). A few decades later, the Canadian government began to take a more hands-on approach to managing the Inuvialuit population, providing monetary support so long as children were attending school. As Eddie D. Kolausok writes, this policy "pushed many Inuvialuit off the land and into villages like Aklavik, Tuktoyaktuk and Holman" (as told to Alunik et al. 163).

With the disruption of Inuvialuit culture and lifeways and the relocation of the majority of Inuvialuit to towns by the 1960s, the RCMP—who had long maintained a presence in the Arctic to control the activities of fur traders and whalers—turned their attention toward the management of Indigenous locals. Although Inuit communities across the North already possessed systems of justice, these were not recognized by the Canadian government, and the Inuvialuit were soon subject to a foreign law (see Eber; Grant). Like the church and school, the courtroom, and ultimately the prison, became forums in which Inuvialuit were conditioned to consent to their own confinement. As Thrasher recalls:

> Some of my people get drunk just to see what it's like in a jail because the white men do it too. I remember 17 of us Eskimo boys picked up to put up our jail cells at Inuvik the first time I ever seen one. We were only too happy to help. I and many boys used to get drunk and every body was always guilty. We used to plead guilty because every one else did. (TS 216-217)

In view of this history, the fact that Thrasher should find himself incarcerated in a southern prison is unsurprising. The series of institutions erected by the state to ostensibly "assist" the Inuvialuit in adapting to radically altered social and environmental conditions functioned to enforce and normalize the restriction of Inuvialuit movement, a process that finds its most heightened expression in the confined space of the prison cell. Yet, containment, dispossession, and deterioration are not the whole story, as Thrasher's eloquent defiance and startling claims to power throughout the typescript make clear.

Freedom in Captivity

Before he was arrested, Thrasher had been travelling to Lethbridge to collect a paycheque; from there, he says, he planned to return home to the North. Once in custody, Thrasher often seeks to complete this homeward journey symbolically, through his writing. He recalls his childhood, his family, the people that he knew; he tells hunting stories, accounts of being lost out on the land, and the older tales—the *unipkat*—that were passed down to him. He describes the features of the landscape and the rhythms of the seasons; he speaks the names of the Arctic animals with a reverence bordering on incantation. Exiled from this homeland and isolated from his family and community, Thrasher journeys into an imagined past—a time before the arrival of the fur traders, the whalers, and the priests—dreaming of a life as a hunter of seal and polar bear, and as a provider for a wife and children, whom he supplies not only with meat but also with songs and stories. Thrasher explicitly refers to this mythic setting as the "legendary dream" of the "Eskimo past" (TS 324). This should not suggest, however, that pre-contact life offered the only true expression of Inuvialuit traditionalism, but rather that Thrasher's brutal experiences with the colonial apparatus engendered an understandable nostalgia for a time prior to the imposition of southern rule.

In singing the stories of the times "when the Eskimo were happy" (TS 329), Thrasher could be echoing his grandfather, a gifted singer and storyteller, who also used to "tell of the days when the days were good" and was reportedly "a very good singer for an old man" (TS 340-341). Although Thrasher is only thirty-two years old at the time of his sentencing, he is

already beginning to emulate his elders as he seeks to nurture his connection with a community from which he is physically exiled. Unable to fulfill his traditional masculine role as hunter and provider, Thrasher seeks alternative ways to be of use to his people, even at this remote distance. Like his grandfather, then, Thrasher attempts to become a hunter of stories and a keeper of knowledge for the next generation. Yet because Thrasher has not been rendered impotent by age but rather by the shackles of the colonial justice system, his offering of intellectual or spiritual sustenance departs significantly from traditional models provided for him by his elders. Not only does he replicate and recast his ancestors' tales of survival on the land, but he also pledges the secrets of survival in the urban landscape:

> I am just hoping by what I am writing some day some where some Eskimo will be helped by my writing. My people should be told not only of the good side of city civilized living. They should be also warned of the other part. The part that was hidden from me. To protect society the innocent have to be forewarned of many things that is why I am putting every thing of my experiences in the south country. (TS 218)

Here, Thrasher casts himself as a kind of urban elder—one who has learned the contours of the city and who can warn the next generation of its dangers. As such, he seeks to salvage something useful from his life and to transform his humbled state into a purposeful act. Through this transformation, Thrasher joins generations of Inuit men who have likewise stepped into the role of lore-keepers once they were too old or too ill to hunt any longer.

In December of 1921, for example, in a region far to the east of Thrasher's home territory, an Inuk elder named Ivaluardjuk recalled for ethnographer Knud Rasmussen the old days "when all meat was juicy and tender, and no game too swift for a hunter" (qtd. in Rasmussen 17). "Now," Ivaluardjuk claimed, "I have only the old stories and songs to fall back upon" (17). With the encouragement of the people, he sang:

> Cold and mosquitoes,
> These two pests
> Come never together.
> I lay me down on the ice,
> Lay me down on the snow and ice,
> Till my teeth fall chattering.
> It is I,
> Aja—aja—ja.[8]

Displaying a theme common to the Inuit poetic tradition, Ivaluardjuk's singer is lying prone on the ice because he is hunting. The singer's quest for

game is paired cleverly with the other central feature of the traditional songs: a reflection on the process—and the difficulties—of song-making. Both are occupations that "call for strength," and both are heavy with the possibility of failure (Rasmussen 18). The two come together later in the performance: "Ai! I seek and spy / Something to sing of / The caribou with the spreading antlers!" As the hunter acquires his target, the singer acquires the subject of the song. In 1921, the elderly Ivaluardjuk is too weak to pursue caribou, having become instead a hunter of songs. "Memories are they / from those days," he sings. "The cold is bitter, / The mind grows dizzy / As I stretch my limbs / Out on the ice." Even in this recollection, the hunter's body is becoming still, supine, perhaps stiffening with the cold—almost anticipating, or reflecting, the coming limitations of age. With his body in this weakened state, however, his mind "grows dizzy"—swarms even, mosquito-like, as he seeks after the memory, and for the song to convey it. Now, when his limbs seem permanently stiff and he can no longer leap up to hurl his spear, the songs are his prize—the sustenance that he brings to the community.

As in the case of elders like Ivaluardjuk, the restraining of the body seems to work in opposition to—or even, perhaps, to enable—the expansion of the mind. Indeed, the ability of some shamans to fly (either physically or in spirit) is enabled by a ritual binding of the body. As Rose Iqallijuq of Igloolik explains,

> The *angakkuq* [shaman] was stripped of all his clothing, except for his pants. His thighs were bound with an *aliq*, a rope made from bearded seal hide. Then his head was tied to his thighs, and his arms were tied behind his back at the wrists and above his elbows. He was not able to move an inch of his body. He was carried to the rear of the dwelling on a sealskin mat. The man was now ready to *ilimmaqtuqtuq* [fly; rise] behind the blind, invisible to us. (qtd. in Aupilaarjuk et al. 158)

Though Thrasher does not align himself directly with this tradition—he does not seem to conceive of himself as a shaman, even an urban one—he reflects often, understandably, on the state of being restrained. The limitations of his body, however, are almost always contrasted with the vigour of his spirit. "My broken bones may heal up crooked," he says, "but my spirit is always healed up straight" (TS 445).

While Thrasher may find temporary relief in the idea that his experience in the city, thus recorded, will be of service to his people, his hunger for his homeland cannot be satisfied by stories of the South. Thus, Thrasher uses his self-defined role as holder of experiential knowledge not only to warn youth of southern dangers but also to affect a mode of imaginative return to social

conditions and landscapes from which he is temporally and geographically separated in his Calgary jail cell. Thrasher sporadically invokes tales of what he calls "the legendary . . . Eskimo past" (TS 323) as forms of imaginative release that resonate with Ivaluardjuk's song. In their use of reminiscence about traditional lifeways in which they can no longer participate, both Thrasher and Ivaluardjuk transform the speaker's social role from hunter to teacher. One such section commences with a poetic tribute to the time in which "the Inuvialuit first came with the wind" and "[t]he game was plenty and the land was great" (TS 323); the thirty-three line poem—one of only a handful in Thrasher's 500-page prison writings—catalogues the various forms of animal life "brought" to the Inuvialuit hunter by the "land," the "sea," the "ice," and the "rivers," while explaining how each animal is used for the community's survival. Watched over by the "midnight sun," the "northern lights," and the "full moon," the speaker acknowledges how all the elements of the northern environment come together in a delicate and dynamic balance that sustains the Inuvialuit family, who can slumber in comfort, confident that their knowledge of the land- and seascapes will keep them safe. "Look at my family," Thrasher's speaker entreats his reader, "sleeping and not afraid" (TS 324).

Like the song of Ivaluardjuk, Thrasher's ensuing tale focuses on the vaunted memories of the virile hunter-hero who demonstrates patience, skill, and courage in fulfilling his social role of providing for the family. Told in the first person, Thrasher's tale follows the hunter's pursuit of *nanook* (polar bear), a difficult and dangerous process that begins with moving the family to an appropriate location on the sea-ice, building an igloo for shelter, and killing a seal to act as bait. With the repetition of both the Inuvialuktun word "*nikpuk*" and its English equivalent "wait," Thrasher draws attention to the artful stillness required of the hunter as he anticipates the seal's arrival at the "good . . . breathing hole"—an anticipatory and mentally active stillness that resonates with Thrasher's creative activity while figuratively contained in prison and with Ivaluardjuk's "dizzy" mind as he recalls "stretch[ing] [his] limbs / Out on the ice." "In the moon light," Thrasher writes, "I will get nanook by this bait. . . . My fathers tell me the nanook is strong and dangerous. But inuit are more dangerous with a weapon" (TS 326). The identity of the hunter-narrator in this tale is thus affirmed by his ability to ensure his sleeping family's survival through the mutually dependent acts of patient waiting and aggressive pursuit that conspire to conquer the bear, thereby binding Thrasher's narrator to an Inuvialuit masculine tradition.

Thrasher delineates the importance of this inheritance through reference to the "fathers" who provide the hunter-narrator with knowledge of the great bear, the invocation of "my atatak grandfather" about whom the hunter-narrator recites a story after the bear has been killed (TS 326), and the acknowledgement of the succeeding generation embodied by "my son [who] will be a great hunter some day soon" (TS 324).

Like Ivaluardjuk, Thrasher's narrator is not only a hunter of beasts but also of words. After documenting the defeat of the bear, Thrasher depicts his hunter-protagonist telling three stories about which his sleeping children dream. The persistence of these tales in their dreaming minds gestures toward the political potential of the mythic narrative and Thrasher's typescript as a whole. In a section of the typescript preoccupied with continuance of the Inuvialuit as a people,[9] the children seem to refer not only to the mythic hunter's imagined offspring but also to the younger generation of Inuvialuit whom Thrasher seeks consistently to reach with his writing. The "songs" and "stories" with which Thrasher addresses these two imagined audiences are therefore not simply entertainment, but also function as cultural teachings designed to keep those youth strong as kin and as Inuvialuit. In the face of assimilationist policies, which ensure that Inuvialuit children who "go to some thing called a school" return home and "can't hunt" (TS 331), Thrasher provides cultural knowledge to restore some of what Eurocentric education seeks to take away. Thrasher explains the various tools, implements, and strategies involved in the hunting process, while translating key terms into the Inuvialuktun language; he also demonstrates the hunt's cultural significance by integrating the harvesting of the bear into kinship systems of social organization and building it into ceremony through song and story. Thus, Thrasher's narrative adoption of the role of a mythic Inuvialuk hunter appears neither individualist nor escapist, but rather communal, pedagogical, and what Weaver might call "communitist." It seeks to "participate in the healing of the grief and sense of exile felt by Native communities"—here the Inuvialuit community—"and the pained individuals in them" (Weaver xiii).

The Limits of Imaginative Emancipation

The dynamic interaction between physical contraction and imaginative expansion throughout Thrasher's prison writings is undoubtedly seductive. In fact, Thrasher insists on transforming physical containment into conditions of possibility for intergenerational empowerment. Yet although recognition of enduring agency remains important to ethically engaged

critical methodologies for dealing with carceral composition, it comes at a cost if not tempered by an awareness of ongoing transgressions against the minds and bodies of prison writers by instruments of state captivity.

Although Thrasher, in adopting the role of elder, mobilizes elements of tradition in the service of a kind of intellectual emancipation from his carceral surroundings, we worry about possible dangers attendant on the critical reification of prison writing's emancipatory potential. As Rodriguez suggests, the assumption that prison writing is, by its very nature, resistant, risks obscuring the complex ways in which prison writing "is both *enabled* and *coerced* by state captivity, a dynamic condition that preempts and punishes some forms of writing, while encouraging and even forcing others" (410).[10] In other words, the celebration of the carceral writer's intellectual resistance and/or liberation—for example, the framing of Thrasher's adoption of the mythic hunter persona in an unqualified manner *as emancipatory*—has the potential to obscure the ways in which the act of writing in prison is qualified and circumscribed by the power of the state. A critical focus on individual resistance and transcendence, furthermore, risks reinscribing the individualizing logic of the Canadian justice system itself, which seeks to decontextualize the experiences of accused individuals in order to treat particular actions as discrete, punishable transgressions rather than as forms of social suffering interwoven with colonial histories of cultural and material dispossession.

Inuvialuit elder Ishmael Alunik tells a story about the time when the great shaman Kublualuk was arrested by the North West Mounted Police for shooting a cross fox when not permitted by the newly imposed hunting laws (recounted, as told to Eddie D. Kolausok, in Alunik et al. 101-102). Kublualuk was jailed at Herschel Island, but he was no ordinary prisoner: after waiting until the fireplace had cooled, the shaman transformed into a feather, floated up the chimney, and went home. Three times he was arrested, and three times he escaped. Eventually, the police gave up, opting instead to respect Kublualuk's governance of the land and its animals. Though metaphorically resonant with Thrasher's apparent tendency toward imaginative escape, this story is not Thrasher's; he is not a shaman, and the story of his relationship with the law has no happy ending. Yet it is this failure to transcend and to triumph, we argue, that transforms Thrasher's prison writings from memoir to critical intervention. The pertinent critical consideration here seems to be the need to weigh recognition (and perhaps even celebration) of the prison writer's ongoing authorial agency against the need to account for,

and indeed to react against, the systemic violence of the state. What we seek through analysis of Thrasher's work is a critical stance nuanced enough to treat Thrasher as more than simply the product of the coercive powers of the Canadian state, yet not so radically autonomous as to obscure the state violence that continues to work unevenly in racialized and economically stratified populations and to be exerted upon the bodies and minds of prisoners like Thrasher. We find critical direction toward such a balanced critical approach in the latter half of Thrasher's imaginative embodiment of the role of mythic hunter.

Although Thrasher often experiments with a nostalgic narrative mode in his dream-visits to the remote Arctic, his imaginative wanderings are consistently tethered to the reality of judicial iniquity and police brutality. Throughout his prison writings, Thrasher documents incidents of violence endured at the hands of "young constables" dispatched to Aklavik and Inuvik by the RCMP and of policemen on the beat of skid rows in Edmonton, Calgary, and Lethbridge. These catalogues of wounds often descend into vivid depictions of sadistic abuse:

> I met 2 police men on the street. I was drunk yes. . . . They were young cops. They put the hand cuffs on me and threw me hard head first into a paddy wagon. One got in with me. My arms were behind my back with irons hand cuffs on. He put his foot on my hands and forced my arms up to my neck. I howled with pain but the police men were laughing. Some thing snapped in my right arm also in my head. I blacked out. I lost track of time and feeling. . . . I came to my mind my leg and right arm well my right arm was real big. I was not really in my mind my whole right arm was blood poisoned. The pain was too bad when Doctor Mulvanno took me in I tore my elbow open with my left hand. I was half out of my mind white puss filled a basin mixed with pink blood. It was rotten green yellow. The puss had reached my shoulder and my wrist. I could remember the police man with his foot on my handcuffed wrist. I heard some thing snap my arm. I don't know I am sure I lost my mind. (TS 155-56)

Such graphic depictions of dehumanization, intimidation, and violence require the reader to remain aware of how the prisoner's body is acted upon by individuals armed by the state. At the same time, Thrasher's portrayals trouble the transparency, neutrality, and supposed benevolence of the law by betraying the arbitrariness of its application, while exposing its excesses and abuses.

Bound to the political reality of extra-textual injustice by accounts of police brutality and abuses of judicial and legislative authority, Thrasher's autobiographical narrative is difficult to read as transcendent in a manner uncontaminated by the residue of systemic violence. This perhaps purposeful failure to escape from the realities of incarceration is also reflected symbolically

in Thrasher's dream-visions of the Inuvialuit past. In one incarnation, the vision turns nightmarish; the family is hungry, and "[i]n the wind," the narrator says, "I listen I can hear (torko) death" (TS 339). The wind makes good on this promise; when it shifts unfavourably, the family loses its dogs and then their lives to the folding ice (TS 340). Even in the somewhat happier vision discussed earlier in this article, the mythic narrative is invaded by various elements of colonial policy. Shortly after killing the polar bear, the hunter-narrator explains,

> Some white men with red clothes came. They say they are the men of the queen. . . . [and] bring a book called law. . . . The minister carrys [sic] his book the good book. The man with the red clothes carries a gun and a stick. The people called the government . . . put some thing up on a pole called a flag the Union Jack. They claim our land in the name of the queen. We don't know what it means but the queen mother . . . must be great. We learned also of King George. We saw his picture on a piece of paper called money. (TS 330-31)

For Thrasher, these colonial impositions function not as benign supplements to Inuvialuit culture but rather as instruments of cultural erasure and individual alienation. The balanced relationships among the Inuvialuit and the land, sea, wind, and wildlife depicted earlier are *dis*integrated in both form and content as the "legendary dream" of the "Eskimo past" gives way to the "Eskimo nightmare of the 1970s" (TS 332): the finely crafted poetic celebration of natural harmony with which Thrasher began this section is perverted by colonial forces to become, by that section's end, disjointed prose statements about absence and loss: "The land that was great has little game. The land that had caribou can't feed my family. The musk ox our pride is almost gone. . . . The great nanook is nearly gone from the ice" (TS 331). Now the hunter-narrator's "family is awake and cannot sleep. The lonesome wolf still calls to the full moon," but the hunter-narrator's "dogs . . . don't answer the wolf call" (TS 332). With this poignant final image of a failure of communication between animals presented formerly in dialogue—"From outside my igloo the dogs answer the lonesome wolf" (TS 324)—Thrasher signals the extent of the damage: the intimate relationships that sustained and brought peace to the Inuvialuit have been destroyed by colonial interventions. "The Eskimo society before the white man established theirs in the Arctic," Thrasher writes, was one in which "[k]inship and relationship systems" bore "a lot of meaning . . . We used to keep them unbroken . . . like a law" (TS 238-39). Given the reader's awareness of Thrasher's conditions of composition behind prison walls, the coercive instruments that engaged in this destruction don't appear to have gone anywhere.

In this way, Thrasher's donning of the mythic hunter persona resists being read as an act of imaginative emancipation for the individual carceral subject because Thrasher refuses to disentangle his personal claims to power from the colonial circumstances that inform his incarceration. Although the Euro-Canadian justice system functions under the (mis)apprehension that individual actions can be radically separated from the trajectory of an unjust history of colonial dispossession and treated as discrete, punishable crimes, Thrasher steadfastly refuses the pull of individualization, choosing even here in this "legendary" tale of "the Eskimo past" to shed light on the role of colonialism in rendering "the old life . . . *only* a dream" (TS 324)—a dream accessible to the Inuvialuk prisoner solely through story and no longer through lived experience. By attending to the role of colonialism in decimating the lifeways celebrated in the hunter-narrator's story, Thrasher ensures that his own conditional imaginative escape will not be perceived as sufficient; the autonomy, power, and freedom of the mythic hunter is, in Thrasher's telling, ultimately circumscribed by the four intertwined colonial systems of containment symbolized by the "red clothes," the "good book," "the flag," and the "paper called money." According to Thrasher, law, religion, government, and economics conspire to undermine traditional Inuvialuit lifeways and physically contain the Inuvialuit people in a manner that resonates with Thrasher's own captivity. Furthermore, through his attentiveness to the role of colonial decision-making in Inuvialuit dispossession, Thrasher exposes the fallacy of notions of inevitability embedded within the Vanishing Inuk myth, even as he acknowledges the very real crises the Inuvialuit face. The product not of "fate" but of human choices being made within oppressive systems of economic and political power, these crises—exposed and named—can be faced, reacted against, and potentially overturned in the service of the continuance of the People.

What we mean to suggest is that Thrasher's use of the mythic narrative is far from empty nostalgia; it isn't imaginative escapism, and it isn't diversionary. Rather, Thrasher invokes the cultural trope of the elder hunter of words in order to critique the ways in which colonial interventions in the lives of the Inuvialuit inform not only the historical context of Thrasher's exile to southern cities, his alcoholism, and his eventual incarceration, but also the contemporary context for his writing and its potential reception. Indeed, such interventions inform the ongoing economic, legal, and political oppression of the Inuvialuit, all of which have persisted long after Thrasher's writing and even after his death in 1989, and which constitute the untenable

and unjust conditions against which readers of Thrasher's words are encouraged to react. In this way, Thrasher struggles simultaneously *against* the totalizing force of Canadian state rule and *in the service of* Inuvialuit cultural, political, and physical continuance. "I am not a broken man," he writes. "The experience I have had will be valuable to my people in the future. . . . We were a real people once. We will come up again" (TS 292-93).

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NOTES

1 Inuvialuk (plural: Inuvialuit) is the current name for the Inuit people of the Western Arctic coast. Known to early anthropologists as the Mackenzie Eskimos, they were originally comprised of regional groups like the Qikiqtaryungmiut, Kuukpangmiut, Kitigaaryungmiut, Inuktuyuut, Avvarmiut and Igluyuaryungmiut (Alunik et al. 13-17). Inuvialuit means "the real people" (Alunik et al. 1). Thrasher frequently uses the term "Eskimo," and also, occasionally, "Inuit"; the latter is a more general term for Arctic coastal peoples and is more commonly used in the Eastern Arctic.

2 Unless otherwise noted, all citations from Thrasher are from his unpublished typescript (rather than his published collaborative autobiography). The published version will be referred to as *Skid Row Eskimo* and the typescript will be referred to as the prison writings, or the typescript, and cited as TS.

3 The causal relationship between governmental instruments of social engineering and addiction, poverty, and violence in Indigenous communities and among urban Indigenous peoples is well documented. For discussions of social dysfunction as part of the legacy of residential schooling, see Aboriginal Healing Foundation, Miller, and Milloy. For discussions of the role of the Indian Act in regulating Indigenous identities, forcing Indigenous peoples off reserve, and creating the Indigenous diaspora see Lawrence. Governmental efforts to transform Inuvialuit identities and socio-economic conditions have included the withholding of federal funding from Inuvialuit who did not register their children in federally recognized schools, a strategic plan to force traditionally nomadic families to settle in urban communities (see Alunik et al.).

4 Given the cost of travel to and from the Inuvialuit Settlement Region and the need to consult extensively with members of the Thrasher family—the author died in 1989—the editing process has been and will continue to be lengthy. We nonetheless hope to see a re-edited critical version of Thrasher's collected prison writings to press within the next three years.

5 For a more detailed discussion of the complex conditions of editing and publication for this work, see McKegney 59-75.

6 Given that Inuit are not "Indians"—they do not have Status under the Indian Act—we adapt this term to "Inuk" (the singular of Inuit) throughout the paper.

7 It must be noted here that like all traditions, those of the Inuvialuit are adaptive and ever-evolving. In other words, we wish to trouble the colonially constructed binary between "authentic" pre-contact cultural purity and "assimilated" post-contact contamination; this deficit model demands cultural stasis *only* of Indigenous populations in order to conclude from alterations over time that Indigenous nations are no longer "traditional" and therefore no longer "own" the lands of their forebears and no longer constitute barriers to settlement and resource exploitation (See Konkle, "Indian Literacy, U.S. Colonialism, and Literary Criticism" in *Postcolonial Theory and the United States*). Standing Rock Sioux scholar Vine Deloria Jr.'s comments about Indigenous spiritual systems are instructive here with regard to Indigenous traditionalism: "Unlike many other religious traditions, tribal religions . . . have not been authoritatively set "once and for always." Truth is in the ever-changing experiences of the community. For the traditional Indian to fail to appreciate this aspect of his heritage is the saddest of heresies. It means the Indian has unwittingly fallen into the trap of Western religion, which seeks to freeze history in an unchanging and authoritative past" (15). Although living in the context of conditions largely created by colonial impositions and bearing the marks—indeed, the scars—of various instruments of social engineering from the residential school to the evangelical church to the prison, Thrasher remains in many ways a traditional Inuvialuit thinker.

8 Rasmussen was a Greenlander, and was thus able to speak to and understand Ivaluardjuk. He did not record the original Inuktitut version of this song, but rather wrote it down from memory in Danish. As such, it is no doubt only an approximation of the original, particularly after having been rendered into this English version.

9 The poem, with which this section of the manuscript begins, concludes with the lines, "The north wind who brought the Inuvialuit here / Listen to the north wind and look at the northern lights / The north wind brought us it will take me away. / The name Inuvialuit will be only in the wind. / Tima oblacoontaok tupakupta. / That all tomorrow too if we awake" (TS 324).

10 In Thrasher's case, "the conditions that make possible his autobiography include not only the time, isolation, and sobriety forced upon him, but also the utilitarian potential of writing for a judicial audience," whom both Thrasher and his lawyer William Stilwell hoped to influence with the manuscript and who "could quite literally 'punish' [Thrasher's] narrative inclusion of certain ideas and incidents" (McKegney 71).

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rob mclennan

lake, verse

rarely freezes; same
material signature

as readily as the city

    you have to choose
    all immediate, space

    solid, arms
    a school day kids

clean air of Lainna
made me wise, ingested

one hundred forms of prose

    as possible, by degrees;
    the still-hot ashes,

    the Virgin Mary's toes

shouting out as thick; the air,
across the water

further,

Stephanie Oliver

Diffuse Connections

Smell and Diasporic Subjectivity in Larissa Lai's *Salt Fish Girl*

This paper marks a conceptual shift from the visual and auditory frameworks that tend to characterize postcolonial studies. Visual paradigms have been the predominant mode of conceptualizing the politics of representation, regimes of racialization, the power of the gaze, and the dynamics of visibility and invisibility that are key to processes of social marginalization.[1] Other critics, in turn, have adopted auditory approaches to investigate questions of who can and cannot speak, and the problem of speaking for others.[2] As a field that has emerged in relation to postcolonial theory, diaspora studies has also adopted these approaches.[3] The prevalence of vision- and audition-centric critiques attests to the dominant role that sight and, to a lesser extent, hearing play in Western constructions of racialized "others." While these critiques have been, and continue to be, invaluable to postcolonial and diaspora theory, the critical focus upon sight and hearing has led to the reinscription of the same sensory hierarchies privileged by Western thought. These studies thus overlook the important ways that alternative sensory modalities, such as touch, taste, and smell, inflect diasporic experience.

Recent theorizations of diaspora as a form of embodied subjectivity have led to considerations of how "lower order" senses influence diasporic experiences. Critics suggest that diasporic dislocation is shaped by the sensory dimensions of everyday life's contingent material conditions. A number of studies have recently explored the importance of food tastes and smells for diasporic subjects, as these sensations have the ability to evoke memories of past "homelands." This paper extends these studies by strategically disarticulating smell from taste in order to consider smell in its

specificity. Smells mark bodies differently than tastes, as diasporic subjects are often constructed as carrying the olfactory traces of past homelands on their bodies. Smell, with its diffuse material processes and metaphorical dimensions, offers a framework for articulating a range of experiences connected to past and present places of habitation. The first part of my paper theorizes "diffusion" as an olfactory process that has the ability to both evoke diasporic memories of past homelands, and mark diasporic bodies as "foreign" in the places they live in the present. I read discourses of diffusion as embedding the West's epistemological desire to authenticate origins and construct rigid boundaries. At the same time, however, I argue that smell's diffuseness also has the potential to challenge Eurocentric desires to fix origins and impose borders. I reconceptualize diffusion as a process of movement and mixing that involves intimate intersubjective encounters. I also suggest that diasporic subjectivity itself may be thought of as subversively diffuse, as it involves a blending of experiences in different times and places. Diasporic subjectivity is shaped by memories of past homelands that emerge through evocative aromas and inflect diasporic life in the present. It is also shaped by olfactory experiences in present living places—including encounters with smell-based discrimination—that may complicate relationships to past homelands. By emphasizing the intermingling of contingent experiences associated with different times and spaces, a theory of diffusion potentially moves beyond the limitations not only of vision- and audition-centric approaches to diasporic subjectivity, but also of smell-taste frameworks that focus predominantly on diasporic subjects' relationships to memory, and more specifically, nostalgic longing for past homelands.

Literature is a critical site for thinking through the diffuseness of smell and diasporic subjectivity. Olfaction is often constructed as a purely visceral, unmediated sense (Drobnick, "Introduction" 1). This view is reinforced by the lack of a vocabulary for clearly describing and classifying odours (Rindisbacher 15). Yet it is precisely this seeming impasse of language that makes it important to interrogate the metaphors used to describe olfactory experiences. Larissa Lai's 2002 novel *Salt Fish Girl* is permeated by representations of scent that challenge and rewrite conventional olfactory metaphors. The second part of this paper turns to Lai's novel for a preliminary reading of the dynamics of diffusion in contemporary diasporic writing in Canada. The text suggests that protagonist Miranda Ching's diasporic subjectivity is shaped by smell-based discrimination in the Eurocentric urban space she presently inhabits. I focus on how these experiences intermingle with, and

thereby inflect, her relationship to memories of past "origins." The novel also explores how Eurocentric discourses attempt to control the diffuseness of odours and diasporic subjectivity by emphasizing authentic origins and essentializing racial differences. By examining how Lai's novel defamiliarizes histories of olfactory discrimination against Chinese immigrants in Canada, while also suggesting that non-essentialist approaches to scent and diasporic experience may produce alternate forms of diffuse connections in the present, this paper underscores the importance of taking an olfactory approach to diasporic subjectivity.

The Dynamics of Diffusion: Theorizing Smell and Diaspora

My theorization of diffusion emerges from recent critiques that challenge the notion of diaspora as a static object of empirical analysis and instead emphasize diaspora's subjective dimensions. Although most critics agree that "diaspora" describes "a scattering of peoples who are nonetheless connected by a sense of homeland, imaginary or otherwise," Lily Cho argues that "[b]eyond that, things get murkier" ("Turn" 12). Cho and David Chariandy recognize diaspora's historically specific relationship to Judaism, yet they argue against scholars who attempt to define diaspora's major historical and geographical features in order to delimit its conceptual and ontological boundaries. Cho considers this definitional tendency reductive because it "understands diasporas as objects whose major features and characteristics can be catalogued and classified" ("Turn" 14). Chariandy contends that this approach also privileges certain diasporas, and thus threatens to "make all other conceptualizations of diaspora derivative or secondary, or illegitimate" (n. pag.). He argues that it is necessary to move beyond a "traditional social scientific preoccupation with ontology (what is a diaspora?) and its concomitant positivistic methodologies and biases" (n. pag.). Taking up this call, Cho theorizes diaspora as "first and foremost a subjective condition" (14). According to Cho, this condition is "marked by the contingencies of long histories of displacements and genealogies of dispossession," which are linked to histories of colonialism and imperialism, processes of racialization, and the dynamics of globalization, transnationalism, and postcolonialism (14). As a form of subjectivity, diaspora encompasses "the subjective conditions of demography and longings connected to geographical displacement," "the deeply subjective processes of racial memory," and the feelings connected to "homeland, memory, [and] loss" (14-5). Chariandy similarly argues that diasporic subjectivity is shaped by "irrepressible

desires, imagined pasts, [and] projected futures" that result in complex and heterogeneous relationships to notions of home and homeland (n. pag.). While both critics draw attention to the subjective experiences of diaspora, they only briefly gesture towards the material conditions of everyday life that shape these experiences.[4] Building upon and extending the work of Chariandy, Cho, and others, I want to focus more closely on the sensory dimensions of everyday material practices that inform diasporic subjectivity.

By considering how the contingent material conditions of everyday life shape diasporic subjects in a particular time, place, and body, my theorization seeks to negotiate a balance between the shared experiences of diasporic communities, and the specific experiences of particular diasporic subjects. As Avtar Brah notes, home is often figured as "a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination. In this sense it is a place of no return, even if it is possible to visit the geographical territory"—or homeland—"that is seen as the place of 'origin'" (192). Studies of diasporic subjectivity that focus primarily on the psychic and somatic dynamics of longing for home may risk essentializing a "diasporic psyche" preoccupied with loss and nostalgia.[5] Yet Brah also gestures towards the contingencies of diasporic experiences by suggesting that home is not only a geographical locale or a mythic place of desire in a collective diasporic imaginary. She suggests that home is also the "lived experience of a locality," including "[i]ts sounds and smells" (192). Brah accounts for the contingent material conditions of daily life by suggesting that these lived sensory experiences are "mediated by the historically specific everyday of social relations," including "the varying experience of the pains and pleasures, the terrors and contentments, or the highs and humdrum of everyday lived culture" (192). Expanding on Brah's suggestion that the lived experience of a locality includes its smells, I want to focus on how scents affect diasporic subjects. According to Sara Ahmed, "[t]he immersion of a self in a locality" involves that locality "intrud[ing] into the senses: it defines what one smells, hears, touches, feels, remembers" (89). Scents are thus an integral part of the "lived experience of being-at-home" (89). This embodied experience "involves the enveloping of subjects in a space which is not simply outside them . . . the subject and space leak into each other, *inhabit each other*" (89, original emphasis). While Ahmed goes on to consider the unfamiliar sensory experiences involved in migrating to a new, unhomely location (90), other critics explore how diasporic subjects reconnect with feelings of "being-at-home" through familiar sensory experiences when they migrate to a new location.

Studies that explore scent and diasporic subjectivity tend to focus on how the tastes and smells of foods evoke feelings and memories of "being-at-home" for diasporic subjects, while also situating them within diasporic communities. As Wenying Xu argues, "a community's cuisine [is] a daily and visceral experience through which people imagine themselves as belonging to a unified and homogenous community, be it a nation, village, ethnicity, class, or religion" (3). A number of critics, including C. Nadia Seremetakis, Lily Cho, and Anita Mannur, provide valuable studies of the role of taste and smell in evoking feelings and memories of past homelands and situating subjects within diasporic communities, yet their work often combines the two senses. In "'How Taste Remembers Life': Diasporic Memory and Community in Fred Wah's Poetry," for example, Cho argues that the transmission of diasporic memories and the formation of diasporic communities occur through a "smell-taste experience" (98). Although Cho discusses olfaction's connection to memory,[6] she focuses predominantly on theorizing taste, arguing that "taste can evoke a memory that is not specific to an individual body but a memory that taps into a transpacific archive of experience. Taste can carry within it the sense of a particular location" (99). Invoking smell to theorize taste is understandable, for these senses are in many ways interconnected,[7] and olfaction is considered crucial to the production of taste.[8] Indeed, no senses operate autonomously, yet there is strategic value in isolating scent to consider its particularity (Drobnick, "Introduction" 3). Since smells mark bodies differently than tastes, they inform diasporic subjectivity differently. Thus while studies of taste and smell provide an important background for my work, I argue that it is crucial to theorize smell in its specificity, as it opens up thinking about the range of experiences that shape diasporic subjectivity. Examining smells' varied functions necessitates a movement beyond frameworks that focus primarily on memory, nostalgic longing, and relationships to past homelands, and involves a consideration of how experiences in the present place of habitation also shape diasporic subjectivity in ways that may complicate diasporic connections to the past.

Odours are invisible, intangible substances that seem immaterial, but paradoxically mark bodies in material ways. Whereas tastes are usually linked to localized substances directly touching the tongue, smells are more difficult to locate and identify. Scents are considered diffuse, pervasive, and often invisible (Miller 342). As diffuse entities, smells are characterized by their ability to "spread . . . through a space or region" ("Diffuse, *v.*"). Yet

scents are also constructed as "pour[ing] or send[ing] forth as from a centre of dispersion" ("Diffuse, *v.*"). This definition highlights the desire to attribute odours to an origin point, and thereby contain their ability to invisibly permeate space and blend with their surroundings. The term "diffusion" also has a specific resonance in scientific discourse, which describes it as "[t]he permeation of a gas or liquid between the molecules of another . . . placed in contact with it," or "the spontaneous molecular mixing or interpenetration" of gases or liquids "without chemical combination" ("Diffusion, *n.*"). This definition suggests that diffusion involves spontaneous encounters that enable entities to intermingle without combining. Entrenched etymological and scientific conceptions of diffusion inscribe a desire to retain essential differences, and thus obscure what I theorize as the contingent and uncontainable politics of diffuse interactions.

I want to appropriate diffusion from its genealogies in order to theorize its potential for challenging notions of pure origins and discrete boundaries, and to highlight the desires and anxieties underlying attempts to delimit smells' diffuseness. Drawing on Ahmed's theory of inhabiting space, I want to suggest that diffusion does not involve a neutral encounter of two distinct, pure entities that remain the same despite coming into contact. Rather, diffusion involves subjects and spaces intermixing, or leaking into each other, in a way that changes the entities involved. According to Constance Classen, David Howes, and Anthony Synnott, scents "cannot be readily contained" because "they escape and cross boundaries, blending different entities into olfactory wholes" (4). Since smells' very existence depends on mixing and blending, odours cannot be attributed to a clear source. Scents' materiality thus has the potential to subvert Eurocentric notions of pure origins and rigid boundaries. The West's "modern, linear worldview," embodied by the sense of vision, emphasizes "privacy, discrete divisions, and superficial interactions" and understands the subject as a coherent, unified self invested in notions of surface, distance, and detachment (4-5). The ideal body is figured as an impermeable entity (Grosz 201), and the nation, which is often "imagined as a body" (Ahmed 99), works according to a similar logic.[9] Smell, however, disrupts this illusion. As Classen, Howes, and Synnott argue, scent "threaten[s] the abstract and impersonal regime of modernity by virtue of its radical interiority, its boundary-transgressing propensities and its emotional potency" (5). Since odours enter bodies when air passes through the nose or mouth (Mennella and Beauchamp 201), smelling is an inherent part of breathing. Odours thus constantly threaten to subvert

notions of inside and outside, often without visual warning. From a Western perspective, then, smells are "especially contaminating and much more dangerous than localized substances one may or may not put in the mouth" (Miller 342). The West's construction of diffuse processes as potentially contaminating underscores Eurocentric anxieties about scents' ability to undermine notions of purity and boundaries.

While the West may seem to repress smell, dominant discourses indicate that scent plays a key role in organizing Western society. Classen, Howes, and Synnott contend that historically, the Western tradition has marginalized scent precisely because of its subversive potential (5). During the European Enlightenment of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, philosophers and scientists solidified smell's status as an insignificant sense by elevating vision as the sense of reason and civilization and associating smell with savagery and madness (Classen, Howes, and Synnott 3-4). Darwin and Freud argued that when humans evolved to be bipedal, sight took priority and scent, like instinct, became obsolete (Classen, Howes, and Synnott 4). Smell was therefore constructed as the antithesis of that which was physically—and by extension, intellectually and morally—"upright." Anyone who emphasized scent's importance was considered "insufficiently evolved" (4), and anyone deemed odorous—including women, racialized groups, and the lower classes (161)—was considered "uncivilized." Smells, "whether real or alleged," also became "indicants of moral purity" (Largey and Watson 30). Removing socially unacceptable body odours was considered necessary for "health" and "cleanliness," and applying fragrances indicated a desire to be "fresh and pleasing to others" (35). Failure to adhere to these standards of physical hygiene resulted in moral stigmatization (35). The West's very repression of scent inscribes a set of olfactory norms that inform its constructions of physical, intellectual, and moral "others."

The purported viscerality of smells must also be interpreted within the context of Eurocentric cultural values. While scents seem to incite polarized responses almost instantaneously,[10] the fear of odours exists "whether they can be actually smelled or not" (Drobnick, "Preface" 13-14). Germ theory may have disproved the notion that odours carry diseases, but scents are still considered "the very vehicles of contagion" because they are diffuse, pervasive, and invisible (Miller 342). The West's fear of smell is therefore more about the symbolic threat posed by diffuseness than it is about any "real" health hazard. The West governs from a position of "olfactory neutrality," whereby those in power construct themselves as the pure,

scentless centre and classify "peripheral" groups as odorous threats (Classen, Howes, and Synnott 161). Yet those at the centre must preserve their supposed lack of smell from the scents that seem to emanate from peripheral groups pressing in towards the centre (161). Smells are thus "the means by which the boundary between self and other is demarcated, as well as the supposed basis of prejudicial extensions of such demarcation" (Drobnick, Preface 14). The West thus mobilizes scent to discriminate against those who embody the threat of diffusion.

Diasporic subjects are often figured according to the same logic of diffusion that informs Western approaches to smell. The term "diaspora," which derives from the Greek *dia*, "through," and *speirein*, "to scatter," "embodies a notion of a centre, a locus, a 'home' from where the dispersion occurs" (Brah 181). Eurocentric discourses construct diasporic subjects as racialized "others" who spread from a "foreign" origin point, permeate national boundaries, and threaten to "contaminate" the supposedly pure populations that imagine themselves as "native" to the spaces they inhabit. By suggesting that diasporic subjects are essentially linked to "foreign" sources, the West conceals its own implication in the complex histories and practices that contribute to diasporic displacement. As Stuart Hall argues, the practice of constructing fixed origins and essential cultural identities "impos[es] an imaginary coherence" on diasporic subjects (235) and obscures the multiple journeys, divergent points of departure, and blended "origins" from which these subjects emerge. Diffusion thus provides a framework for considering the mixing and movement involved in diasporic experience, while also accounting for the Eurocentric desire to authenticate origins and maintain rigid physical and national boundaries.

Dominant discourses mobilize smell's diffuseness to construct diasporic subjects as odorous foreign "others." In anthropology, the term "diffusion" refers to "[t]he spread of elements of a culture or language from one region or people to another" ("Diffusion, *n.*" def. 3b). Like other definitions of diffusion, this conceptualization obscures the politics that inform the spread of "cultural elements" from one place to another. Whether diasporic subjects bring "cultural elements" such as food practices to their new place of habitation or not, Eurocentric narratives often construct them as carrying the olfactory traces of "foreign" homelands on their bodies. In his study of immigrant experiences in New York City, Martin F. Manalansan acknowledges that food aromas associated with past homelands may evoke pleasant memories and nostalgic feelings for diasporic subjects (45). Yet he

asserts that these feelings are often complicated by the fear that odours will "[adhere] to clothes, to walls and to bodies" and index diasporic subjects as "immigrant" (45-6). Manalansan contends that the "smelly immigrant" is constructed as "the natural carrier and source of undesirable sensory experiences and is popularly perceived to be the site of polluting and negative olfactory signs" (41). Manalansan's study draws attention to scents' ability to create anxieties not only for Western populations, but for diasporic subjects who want to avoid being ostracized as odorous others in their new place of habitation.

I want to suggest, then, that diasporic subjectivity itself may be thought of as diffuse in the sense that a diasporic subject's sense of self may be shaped by an intermingling of experiences in past homelands and present living places. As studies of taste and smell suggest, scents' ability to evoke memories and feelings associated with past homelands underscores how the past shapes the present. Yet it is also crucial to consider how odours—whether real or imagined—function in diasporic subjects' new places of habitation, particularly if these locations are predominantly populated by Western subjects invested in notions of discrete boundaries and pure origins. Diasporic subjects' own anxieties about olfactory discrimination may therefore complicate any positive associations with past homelands that scents might evoke. Smell thus provides a metaphor for, and acts as the material site of, a range of intersecting spatial and temporal experiences that inflect diasporic subjectivity. I now want to turn to Larissa Lai's *Salt Fish Girl* to provide a preliminary reading of how the novel takes up smell's metaphorical and material resonances to develop a diffuse framework for understanding diasporic subjectivity, while also drawing attention to histories of olfactory discrimination in Canada.

"[A] story about stink": Smell and Diasporic Subjectivity in *Salt Fish Girl*

Salt Fish Girl, as narrator Miranda Ching self-reflexively remarks, is "a story about stink" (268). Larissa Lai argues that smell, as "the most evocative of the senses," has an "emotional, intimate" connection that is useful for "min[ing]" the histories that diasporic subjects repress upon migrating to Western cultures ("Future" 172). In *Salt Fish Girl*, Lai uses smell to write a "founding myth about travel and dislocation" that "denies racial purity and . . . the primacy of the citizen tied to the land" ("Future" 173). Lai suggests that diasporic subjects have multiple "origins," which she describes as "pitstops" on multi-generational journeys that may span many parts of the

world (171). A number of critics focus on the connections between scent and the persistence of diasporic histories in *Salt Fish Girl*. Joanna Mansbridge argues that the novel uses scent to signal how "traumatic memories of the past . . . leak into the present" (124), while Tara Lee contends that smells in the text confront dominant subjects with histories of violence involving the racialized subjects upon which capitalism depends (97-8). Yet Lai is not only concerned with diasporic subjects' relationships to history and memory. She also recognizes that smell is "a powerful means by which the mainstream denigrates its others, particularly racialized and sexualized others" ("Future" 172). I want to focus on how Miranda's durian odour marks her as a racialized, feminized "other," and how experiences of olfactory discrimination affect Miranda's sense of self by altering her relationship to her diasporic memories and multiple "origins." *Salt Fish Girl* illustrates how Miranda's diasporic subjectivity may be thought of as subversively diffuse, in the sense that it involves an intermingling of contingent psychic and somatic experiences connected to specific experiences in past and present places of habitation, while also challenging Eurocentric attempts to inscribe pure origins and essential differences.

Serendipity, a walled city situated on the west coast of North America in the mid-twenty-first century, represents a futuristic Vancouver invested in a rigid olfactory order. On a visual level, the city seems idyllic: its lawns are "meticulously trimmed" (Lai, *Salt* 18), its "storefront windows gleamed with cleanliness, behind which beautiful things were displayed" (30), and its genetically-modified food is "always vibrant bright and regular in shape and colour" (31). Visual signs of cleanliness and health "translate an olfactory condition into a visual experience: to be shiny is to be odourless" (el-Khoury 26). The city's visual appearance thus contributes to Serendipity's construction as a space of olfactory neutrality. Although Serendipity's name denotes "happy and unexpected discoveries [made] by accident" ("Serendipity"), there is nothing serendipitous about this highly ordered space. The city is run by Saturna, one of the "Big Six" corporations that maintain "absolute power" over the world (14). Its "surface of sanitized efficiency" entices consumers and removes evidence of the clones that assemble consumer products outside the city's walls in the post-apocalyptic Unregulated Zone (Lee 96). The Chings, one of the few "Asian"[11] families living in Serendipity, were "fortunately installed" in the city before the corporations imposed strict immigration regulations (14). The Chings live in "a house full of secrets" (15), for they must repress their diasporic

connections in order to assimilate. The novel suggests that keeping silent about diasporic histories also involves olfactory silence. Since "good" diasporic subjects must "let go" of diasporic connections to the past (Cho,"Taste" 93), the Chings must not engage with "foreign" aromas that would allow memories of the past to seep into the present. They must also police themselves by eradicating any offending odorous traces that might mark them as different from Serendipity's mainstream olfactory order.

Miranda Ching's subjective experience of smell-based discrimination in Serendipity underscores how scents mark diasporic subjects as "foreign" in their current places of habitation. When the smell of durian aggressively permeates Serendipity's walls one day, Aimee Ching is seduced by the "pepper and cat pee" scent (15). The smell reminds Aimee of eating a durian that "her grandmother smuggled . . . in from Hong Kong, once upon a time" before Serendipity restricted its borders (14). The durian's pungent odour not only represents "capitalism's inability to suppress disruptive presences" (Lee 104); it also underscores scents' ability to bring memories and emotional associations associated with the past into the present. While durian's scent may productively insist on the past's ability to leak into, and thereby shape, the present, it also marks Miranda's body as a "foreign" subject in Serendipity. Aimee's husband Stewart brings her a durian from the Unregulated Zone to satisfy her newly-awakened desire for the fruit, and they have sex in its juices; nine months later, Miranda is born reeking of the durian's signature scent (15). Grown primarily in Southeast Asia and consumed widely in China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Singapore, the durian often appears in Western writing as "a figure of the exotic, the primitive, or the inexplicably alien" (Paul Lai 177-8). As Paul Lai argues, Miranda's smell "displaces visible racial difference" in the novel (180); her durian odour thus becomes the primary sign of her "Asianness."[12] Yet it is not only the smell's connection to an "Asian" "source" that produces anxieties for Serendipity's citizens; the scent's permeating abilities also threaten to contaminate residents by radically transgressing their bodily boundaries. Miranda's "all-permeating" smell "seep[s] into the skin" of those around her, "rush[es] up their nostrils and in through their ears," and "pour[s] down their throats when they [open] their mouths to speak" (Lai, *Salt* 17). Neighbours demand that the Chings take out the garbage and clean up their property (18), and Miranda's classmates tease her by calling her "Cat Box," "Kitty Litter," and "Pissy Pussy" (21). These nicknames associate Miranda with animals and female genitalia, making her "alien" status resonate on multiple levels (Paul

Lai 180). The Western tradition expects women to smell fragrant, not foul (Classen, Howes, and Synnott 162), and "feminine odours" associated with women's genitals are "signs of a contaminating . . . woman who rudely affronts others" (Largey and Watson 31). Since Miranda is unable to prevent her durian odour, which smells like "unwashed underwear" (Lai, *Salt* 13), from spreading through space and confronting Serendipity's citizens, she embodies a figure that transgresses both gender and racial olfactory norms.

The treatment of Miranda's odour signals both Eurocentric fears about "foreign" subjects "polluting" supposedly pure, scentless Western spaces, and diasporic anxieties about being constructed as contaminating threats. Stewart internalizes Serendipity's olfactory values and becomes obsessed with "curing" Miranda's odour. After years of failed treatments, Miranda discovers letters revealing that her father has committed her to a fifteen-year medical experiment with Dr. Flowers, a man whose name connotes his superior status as a sweet-smelling symbol of Serendipity's dominant olfactory order. The text later reveals that Dr. Flowers helped create the clones working in the Unregulated Zone's factories (252). Dr. Flowers' pathologization of Miranda's odour is "a result of capital's alliance with science to monitor and control the body" (Lee 98). By claiming that Miranda has a "new and undocumented disease" (Lai, *Salt* 71) and demanding that she participate in treatment outside Serendipity, Dr. Flowers essentially works with the municipal powers in eliminating her from the city's olfactory order. The drug trials and minor surgery he proposes (71) echo the cleansing process that durians undergo when they are imported to Canada. Paul Lai states that when durians cross Canada's borders, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and Canada's Department of Justice subject them to a "regime of purification" that involves treatment with sulphiting agents and radiation (178). The process attempts to "cleanse" durians of pests or pathogens that might infiltrate North American crops (178). The regulation of durians resonates with the notion of the "Asian" as alien in North America, and provides an analogy to the regulation of immigrants in North America for over a century (178). By identifying offensive odours with specific "foreign" sources that can be subjected to processes of decontamination, Eurocentric discourses and practices both inside and outside the text reveal a desire to contain the potential "infiltration" of both scents and diasporic subjects.

Dr. Flowers' construction of Miranda as diseased significantly affects her sense of self and reflects the damaging psychic effects produced by

smell-based discrimination in Serendipity. Miranda knows that her smell marks her as different from Serendipity's other residents, but she does not initially consider it a problem and does not want to be "helped" (Lai, *Salt* 36). Being labelled as diseased, however, alters Miranda's relationship to her body: "Suddenly, and for the first time, I felt dirty. I felt . . . shame" (72). Miranda tries to wash away her smell, scrubbing her skin "until it hurt" and she "felt blood rise to the surface. But the whole time, that foul pepper and catpee odour lingered through the scents of soap and shampoo" (73). Soap has historically been used as a "technology of social purification, inextricably entwined with the semiotics of imperial racism and class denigration" (McClintock 212). Miranda accepts soap's "magical" promise to "[wash] from the skin the very stigma of racial and class degeneration" (McClintock 214), and self-inflicts the "violence and constraint" of purification rituals (McClintock 226). Yet Miranda cannot remove her stench because she realizes: "It wasn't dirt. It came from the inside" (Lai, *Salt* 73). Miranda internalizes the belief that she is inherently contaminated, and potentially contaminating.[13] She does not recognize that her scent's polluting connotations are produced by Serendipity's dominant olfactory order, which identifies her as an inherent source of contagion and disease. Miranda's understanding of herself as contaminated is intensified by her first menstrual period, which she immediately accepts as a sign that those in power "are right to send [her] away" (73). By illustrating how Miranda internalizes her body's leakiness as a sign of inherently contaminated status as a feminized, racialized "other," the novel gestures towards the contingent material conditions of daily, lived experiences that shape Miranda's diasporic subjectivity in Serendipity.

Miranda's experience of olfactory discrimination alters her feelings toward her diasporic memories. The experiences of Nu Wa,[14] a mythical half-snake, half-woman creature who emerges in human form at different times and places throughout history, enter into Miranda's present experiences through memory. Nu Wa moves from nineteenth-century rural South China to industrial Canton, where she is enticed into migrating to the mythical, Western "City of Hope" on the "Island of Mist and Forgetfulness." After years of labour exploitation, Nu Wa returns to South China without having aged.[15] Miranda feels that it is "natural" to remember things that happened before her birth, even though the memories are highly subjective and sometimes frightening: "[t]hey happened to me; I was there, and the memories are continuous. Why should they be anything but?" (70). The text suggests that it is normal for

diasporic subjectivity to be inflected by memories, and indicates that these memories are not necessarily nostalgic, but may encompass a range of feelings. Yet Miranda's diasporic subjectivity is not only constituted by memories of Nu Wa's diasporic past; it is also shaped by experiences of smell-based discrimination in Serendipity that alter her relationship to the past. After Dr. Flowers' diagnosis, Miranda no longer considers her memories a "natural" part of her subjectivity; instead, she understands them as a symptom of her disease. She begins to think of herself as "a child afflicted by history, unable to escape its delights or its torments" (70). Miranda's specific encounters with scent in Serendipity blend with and affect her experiences of the past. The text thus suggests that Miranda experiences her diasporic subjectivity as diffuse, in the sense that it subverts notions of linear time, discrete space, and bounded bodies.

Miranda's eventual exile from Serendipity reflects the Eurocentric desire to send her "back" to her supposed "point of origin" in order to protect the city's purported purity and olfactory neutrality. Miranda is relegated to the Unregulated Zone, which is understood as the supposed source of her odorous problem.[16] The Unregulated Zone represents a peripheral threat to Serendipity's olfactory neutrality and symbolic purity. Like Miranda, the space is characterized by a "foul" odour: the air is "thick with the smell of old petrol, sulphur, urine and rotten food" (37), and the "terminally unemployed" living there smell like "steel," "blood," "shit," and "old potatoes—mingled with the smell of uncollected garbage and open sewers" (231). The mainstream media's construction of the stinking Unregulated Zone as "very dangerous" (20) reflects the fear that Serendipity's abjected social problems will infiltrate, and thereby disrupt, the city's ideal existence. The stench of the Unregulated Zone and its social problems are also linked to "Asianness." Durians grow wild in the Unregulated Zone (14), and the Chinese shopkeepers there sell herbal concoctions that "stink" (40). Hordes of clone workers created using the DNA of "so-called Third World, Aboriginal peoples, and peoples in danger of extinction" and freshwater carp are also kept in the Unregulated Zone's factories (160). The text suggests that a Chinese woman may have been a "source" for Evie Xin, an escaped clone with a salt fish scent (160). The corporations conceal the clones in the Unregulated Zone not only because they must hide capitalism's workings (Lee 96), but also because they must suppress the odours, such as Evie's fishy scent, that bear the traces of the contaminating processes in which the Big Six are implicated.[17] The odours associated with the Unregulated Zone

thus gesture towards the role that Dr. Flowers and the corporations play in producing Miranda, the Unregulated Zone, and its inhabitants as odorous, racialized "others."[18]

Salt Fish Girl implicitly invokes histories of smell-based discrimination against Chinese immigrants that have often been repressed in Canadian public consciousness. In her critical work, Lai argues that "[b]y extrapolating from things that are happening now and projecting into the future, we get a vantage point of sorts" ("Future" 172). A number of critics, including Rita Wong, Tara Lee, and Joanna Mansbridge, read the novel's futuristic setting as a commentary on the capitalist exploitation of racialized, feminized labour. For instance, Wong reads the Unregulated Zone as a "rational extension" of contemporary Free Trade Zones, whose policies "exploit and discard labour for the sake of momentary profit" (119). While these are valuable interpretations, I read the text's juxtaposition of the scentless Serendipity and the odorous Unregulated Zone as a futuristic version of the relationship between Vancouver's Eurocentric population and the city's emerging Chinatown in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. I thus argue that *Salt Fish Girl*'s futuristic setting engages with issues surrounding the historically racialized enclaves of Vancouver's Chinatown, rather than "moving beyond" them, as Glenn Deer suggests ("Remapping" 119).[19] As Lai herself argues in "Corrupted Lineage: Narrative in the Gaps of History," immigrants have been historically treated as "different" because of the "odd habits and foul smells" they "carried" to their new places of habitation (48). She further notes that odours "make it difficult still to rent an apartment or buy a condo or otherwise enter any kind of shared living space" (48). *Salt Fish Girl* thus underscores how Vancouver historically demarcated space according to discriminatory olfactory codes that persist in the present, and may continue to inform the racialization of diasporic subjects in the future.

Beyond what Constance Backhouse calls the "colour-coded" dimension of racist discourse in Canada, there is a recurring discourse of smell as a way of marking Chinese immigrants in Canada during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century. Although Chinese immigrants played a key role in building the country's infrastructure (Con et al. 49), many Eurocentric voices decried their presence, particularly on the west coast. As Kay Anderson argues, "[f]rom the late 1880s, the enclave of Chinese settlement at Vancouver's Pender Street was an important site through which white society's concepts about the Chinese were constituted and reproduced" (4). A number of public debates about Chinatowns were figured according

to the logic of diffusion, including one of the first proposals for a Chinese head tax. At the British Columbia Legislative Council in 1871, MP Arthur Bunster proposed "a poll tax of $50 per head per annum on all Chinese engaged in any occupation in this colony" (qtd. in Con et al. 45). Bunster argued: "I want to see Chinamen kept to himself [sic] and foul diseases kept away from white people. . . .Why when I drive . . . past the hovels, the stench is enough to knock me off my seat" (qtd. in Con et al 45). He also claimed that "their smelly baskets" pushed white people off the sidewalk (qtd. in Con et al 45). Bunster explicitly attributes a "stench" to Chinese immigrants and locates its origin in Chinatown. He suggests that this olfactory threat threatens to permeate, and potentially infect, the supposedly pure spaces and bodies of Vancouver's white population. Commissioner Chapleau echoes these anxieties in his report to the 1885 Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration. He claimed that the air in Chinatown is "polluted by disgusting offal" that is "apt to spread fever and sickness in the neighbourhood" and "may affect extensive districts" beyond Chinatown (qtd. in Anderson 81). Similarly, in 1896, Medical Health Officer Thomas labelled Vancouver's Chinatown a "cesspool," arguing that with "the continued deposition of refuse and filth . . . the atmosphere of the neighbourhood is saturated with evil odours" (qtd. in Anderson 84). These official discourses highlight the fear that illnesses might spread through scent and contaminate the "superior white race" if not closely monitored (Anderson 81). Although anxieties about Chinese immigrants "infiltrating" Canada were often framed in colour-coded terms of "yellow peril," anxiety also arose from the invisibility and diffuseness of "evil" odours that threatened the white population's supposed purity and superiority.[20]

Although Vancouver's Eurocentric residents did not want Chinatown's "stench" to spread among them, they paradoxically criticized Chinese immigrants for living together. Dominant discourses framed Chinese immigrants' cohabitation as a "herding instinct" and judged it as "directly opposed to our conceptions of civilized progress, morality and hygiene" (qtd. in Anderson 81). Vancouver's Chinese population was consistently constructed as part of a "degraded" civilization that could "live in places that a hog would die in stench of" (qtd. in Anderson 84). Narratives also suggested that Chinese immigrants did "not live like rats from force of circumstance," but "prefer[red] the stench and filth of their vile surroundings" (qtd. in Anderson 81-2). Essentializing discourses allowed Vancouver's white population to ignore the socio-economic factors

contributing to Chinatown's material conditions.[21] As Monica Chiu argues, the historical association of the Chinese with dirt and disease "speaks more clearly to the nation's own preoccupation with moral and medical self-hygiene than to that of the Chinese or other immigrants" (7). The dominant population's commitment to preserving their supposed purity produced a sense of moral panic. As Sean Hier and Joshua Greenberg argue, moral panic describes a group's consolidated response to a perceived threat to the social body and moral order (140). The threat, which may be real or imagined, is considered so dangerous that regulatory processes must be mobilized (140). These processes ultimately serve to reaffirm the dominant group's sense of moral and physical superiority. Thus Bunster and Chapleau indicated the need to regulate Chinese immigration more closely, health inspectors argued for "constant vigilance" in enforcing by-laws regarding Chinatown's population density and sanitation (qtd. in Anderson 85), and moral reformers lobbied for the medical and moral inspection of immigrants (Valverde 32). Vancouver's dominant population thus submitted Chinese immigrants to "regimes of purification" that extended racist surveillance beyond the realm of the visual to encompass the olfactory.

While *Salt Fish Girl*'s futuristic setting draws attention to how scents have historically been mobilized to discriminate against Chinese immigrants in Canada, the novel also suggests that olfaction may provide the basis for new forms of diasporic connection in the present, and ostensibly, in the future. When Miranda moves to the Unregulated Zone, she encounters the fish-scented Evie. The first two times they meet, Miranda falls into a "reverie" and murmurs, "[i]t's you" (105, 150). The text suggests that Miranda recognizes Evie as the future embodiment of Nu Wa's lover, the Salt Fish Girl, who also has a fishy scent (51). Evie's smell awakens in Miranda "a hunger without a name" that "had always been there" but "had suddenly become material" (105-6). The hunger evoked by Evie's odour represents Miranda's desire for an embodied sense of diasporic connection in the present. Yet the text does not idealize Miranda's "recognition" of Evie; rather, their encounters are riddled with suspicion and fear. Both times Miranda unconsciously claims to "know" Evie through her scent, Evie challenges her, asserting, "You're full of shit. How can you know anything?" (105) and "You don't know what you're talking about" (151). Evie's responses suggest that Miranda's "recognitions" are predicated on essentializing assumptions about Evie based on her fishy odour. Lai's novel thus problematizes the notion that one can presume to "know" another through smell, even if subjects seem to share a diasporic

connection to the past. Miranda and Evie both emerge from multiple "sources"; yet unlike Miranda, Evie embraces her complex origins and thus challenges the notion of contamination as a negative process.[22] Evie has created a community with other escaped Sonias, her clone "sisters," which "goes beyond the biological bond and involves the ties brought about by the same kind of suffering and exploitation" (Cuder-Dominguez 123). Evie does not adhere to the biological or genealogical ties that often define diasporic connections. Rather, she bonds with those who share her purpose of challenging the dominant capitalist order that constructs her scent as a sign of her status as a racialized, feminized, and dehumanized "other."

Evie and Miranda's diasporic connection is therefore not based on a sense of belonging to an idealized homeland, shared memories of a diasporic past, or an essentialist approach to odours; rather, it emerges from similar experiences of olfactory discrimination in the place where they presently live. Miranda and Evie form a strategic connection in order to challenge Dr. Flowers and the Big Six in their attempt to suppress rebellious workers and continue exploiting clones for capitalist purposes. Miranda eventually learns from Evie to embrace her own "putrid origins" (258) when she realizes that contamination is necessary for the production of life. After having sex with Evie "in the rot stink of decaying leaves and needles" (162), Miranda becomes pregnant with a baby she fertilizes by eating a mutated durian (258). She gives birth to a baby girl in a hot spring (269) that recalls the "dark and sulphurous" smell of Nu Wa's riverbank at the novel's beginning. Miranda and Evie's baby represents the agential possibilities of forming diffuse connections that are not based on a single origin point in the past, but converge through a common purpose in the present and produce new, necessarily contaminated—and productively contaminating—entities. As Miranda states: "[t]his is a story about stink, after all, a story about rot, about how life grows out of the most fetid-smelling places" (268).

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NOTES

1 See, for example, Frantz Fanon (1967), Chandra Mohanty (1984), Trinh T. Minh-ha (1989), Mary Louise Pratt (1992), and Anne E. Kaplan (1997).
2 See, for example, Gayatri Spivak (1988) and Linda Alcoff (1991).
3 See, for example, Smaro Kamboureli (2000).
4 Chariandy argues that rethinking approaches to diaspora "lead[s] us sharply back to everyday practices of diasporic life" (n. pag.), while Cho concludes that approaching diaspora as a subjective condition involves considering "the secret of memories embedded within the intimacies of the everyday" ("Turn" 28). Cho's other work focuses more on the sensory dimensions and material practices connected to diasporic experience, which I discuss below.
5 See, for example, Anne Anlin Cheng (2001).
6 Cho cites theories that suggest that the hippocampus, or "seat of memory," is connected to recognizing and processing scents ("Taste" 99).
7 There are a number of reasons why smell and taste are considered "two of the most linked senses": they are both understood as "chemical" senses that "ingest" and engage with sensory phenomena on a molecular level; they are usually perceived as one sensory experience during eating; they have been denigrated as mere survival mechanisms, too animalistic and subjective for reason and knowledge; and they have been aesthetically marginalized (Drobnick "Eating" 342).
8 As head colds demonstrate, interrupting air flow to the nose eliminates many of the subtleties of food flavour often attributed to taste (Mennella and Beauchamp 201).
9 David Chariandy contends that while power may also thrive on fluidity and fragmentation, "old-fashioned racial essentialisms and absolutist nationalisms" invested in rigid borders still exist (n. pag.).
10 Since there is no clear classificatory model for odours, they are often simply described as "good" or "bad" (Rindisbacher 10-11). This binary framework reinforces scent's moral resonances.
11 Miranda's mother Aimee describes Miranda as "the only Asian child in her class" (23).
12 Paul Lai's article, which also explores smell in *Salt Fish Girl*, primarily focuses on how scent informs the novel's revisioning of genres such as myth, history, fairy tale, and science fiction. While I take up his discussion of Miranda's durian smell, I do so to theorize specifically how Miranda's experiences of smell-based discrimination inform her relationship to her memories of the past, and thus play a role in her diffuse diasporic subjectivity.
13 Durian-growing countries may have also internalized the view that the fruit's smell signals its contaminated status. In Thailand, durian has been banned from public transportation and enclosed public spaces, and a Thai scientist has cultivated a scentless durian for international export (Paul Lai 177).
14 The text suggests that Miranda is a future embodiment of Nu Wa, who is coiled inside the durian involved in Miranda's "conception" (209). Yet the novel does not endorse the notion of linear, pure origins. The durian of Miranda's conception is also linked to corporate experiments that genetically modified fruit to help women conceive (258). Scientists could not contain the pollen from blowing away and mutating other fruits (258). This aspect of Miranda's "contaminated origins" draws attention to the dominant order's role in producing her scent—a role that they want to deny. Joanna Mansbridge suggests that "[b]y locating origins in divergent places," the novel "subverts both the notion of a

pure, singular point of origin while challenging the abjection of feminine elements in the construction of cultural identity" (125).

15 Rita Wong explores the gap between the City of Hope's false promises and Nu Wa's exploitation while living there (116). She contends that Nu Wa's experiences reflect myths of upward mobility that draw immigrants to Canada (121), and the realities of economic exploitation that racialized, feminized subjects often experience (109-10).

16 Officially, Saturna expels the Chings because Miranda returns the tax dollars her father collected to the public (80). The text later suggests, however, that the Chings are forced to relocate because of Miranda's "disease" (89).

17 Evie's fishy scent draws attention to histories of Chinese immigrant labourers in the west coast fisheries in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century. She represents a future embodiment of the "Iron Chink," a fish-butchering machine whose pejorative informal name, as Glenn Deer points out, bears the traces of the Chinese immigrant labourers who initially performed the deskilled, mechanized work of the machine ("Yellow" 27). She is literally produced as "a tool without an identity," like the Chinese immigrant labourers (27).

18 The Big Six's domain of control is called the "PEU," or Pacific Economic Union (160). "PEU" is a homonym for "pee-yew," a colloquial phrase that expresses disgust for an odour. The name thus points to the corporations' covert role in the very processes of mixing racialized identities that dominant discourses construct as contaminated.

19 My reading also differs from Deer's in that it explores the olfactory while his focuses on the visual. Deer explores how the novel's futuristic setting interrogates Vancouver as a "city of glass" that promotes an illusion of "transparency, freedom, fusion, and mobility" ("Remapping" 138).

20 Mariana Valverde notes that Canada's social purity movement of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century sought to "sanitize" racialized others not only physically, but spiritually and sexually. The "darker"—and I would argue, "smelly"—"races" were supposedly "lower," and were therefore "not in control of their sexual desires" (32). Since they had not received "proper Christian" training, they had "not produced the right kind of self" (32). The mostly male Chinese immigrant population was considered particularly threatening to the spirituality and sexuality of Canada's "pure" young, white women (111).

21 White landlords refused to sell or lease properties to Chinese immigrants unless it was on the fringe of town in undesirable locations (David Chuenyan Lai 34). The Chinese community was therefore confined to a swampy section of Dupont Street that was covered by water at high tide (Anderson 68). Dominant discourses also ignored that Dupont Street had not been connected with public sewers (Anderson 84), and failed to consider "the constraints on Chinese family settlement, jobs and pay discrimination" (85). As Maria Noelle Ng notes, Chinese immigrants may have also lived together to form community support systems "in order to survive in a hostile society" (160).

22 Evie's acceptance of her fishy odour and contaminated "origins" resonates on a gendered level. The smell of fish is linked to vaginas, and is often interpreted as a sign that women's genitals are inherently unclean (Mills 89-90). Evie refuses to internalize the patriarchal view that her fishy scent is inherently bad: her odour is constructed as a symptom of the same disease Miranda has, but she believes that if she does not "feel unwell," then "what's the problem?" (164). Evie subverts the notion that women's allegedly fish-scented genitals—and women themselves—are inherently unclean.

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Phinder Dulai

ash

if i bathed you in a red silk scarf
threw jasmine petals
warm from the sun
on to your single suited self
will this help your way?
stay still in the box my baba
let the hot flames gather you full

carry your small crimson ash
curling inward
glow and dis
appear

we drift and close our eyes
you the sky
blanket us
your closed lids
hurl us back to earth

i
icarus

would have leapt with you

Douglas Ivison

"It's no different than anywhere else"

Regionalism, Place, and Popular Culture in Lynn Coady's *Saints of Big Harbour*

The 2002 publication of Lynn Coady's second novel, *Saints of Big Harbour*, cemented her status as one of Canada's major young writers. Its success contributed to and can be partially attributed to an increasing interest in Atlantic Canadian writing beginning in the 1990s, as reflected in the publication of national (and in some cases) international bestsellers, major literary awards, and academic interest. This interest seems at least partially due to the perceived authenticity of Atlantic Canadian culture and its literature. Cultural and geographical specificity (i.e. its status as the product of a presumably local culture) and a realist aesthetics combine to produce a particularly valuable commodity in the context of late-twentieth and early-twenty-first century Canadian literature, as Danielle Fuller argues ("Bestsellers" 53).The last of three interrelated books primarily set in Cape Breton (following *Strange Heaven* [1998], nominated for the Governor General's Award, and the short story collection *Play the Monster Blind* [2000]), *Saints*' appeal is, in part, its status as Maritime literature, as an authentic portrayal of Cape Breton. For instance, the 2003 Anchor Canada paperback edition prominently featured a blurb from a review in *The Globe and Mail* that describes Coady as "a master chronicler of place and culture."

Yet, in interviews Coady frequently emphasizes her discomfort with the assumptions associated with the label "Maritime writer." In an interview with Michelle Berry (contemporary with the publication of *Saints*), for instance, she comments on the "expectation that I'm a traditional sort of writer simply because much of my writing happens to focus on so-called traditional communities and people. . . . since I write about the Maritimes, there's this

bagload of clichés that seems to dog me" (82). It's not that Coady rejects her categorization as a Maritime writer; in fact, she embraces it. In her introduction to the anthology, *Victory Meat: New Fiction from Atlantic Canada*, Coady clearly and unambiguously identifies herself as an Atlantic Canadian writer, but she also insists that as an Atlantic Canadian she is part of—not apart from—the modern world: we "use email, collect Air Miles, and have the entire third season of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* on DVD. . . . Atlantic Canadians, and Atlantic Canadian writers, have grown up right alongside of the rest of the Western world" ("Books" 3). What Coady does reject is the series of stereotypes and assumptions that are associated with Cape Breton, the Maritimes, and Atlantic Canada. In her interview with Berry, she states: "I try to stay true to my experience of Cape Breton without being stereotypical and reductive" (82-83). The challenge for Coady (and other Atlantic Canadian writers), then, is to write about place, particularly a marginalized place like Atlantic Canada in general or Cape Breton in particular, without reinscribing the series of "stereotypical and reductive" images and assumptions associated with that place. In her Cape Breton fiction, Coady presents us with a portrait of late-twentieth-century Cape Breton while resisting the sentimentalizing and idealizing tendencies frequently associated with regional writing, tendencies which often attempt to fix places and societies like Cape Breton's as pre-modern, quaint, and authentic.[1] In *Saints of Big Harbour* in particular, Coady disrupts such expectations by presenting an understanding of place in keeping with Doreen Massey's claim that "the identity of place . . . is always and continuously being produced" (171), that place does not simply exist but is rather "constructed out of a particular constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together at a particular locus. . . . Each 'place' can be seen as a particular, unique, point of . . . intersection" of "networks of social relations and movements and communications" (154). Coady does so in part by situating her largely adolescent and post-adolescent characters in a world defined by participation in transnational popular culture rather than traditional or folk culture, and by emphasizing the banal samenesses rather than the unique particularities of Cape Breton. The result is that Cape Breton is "no different than anywhere else," as Coady describes it to Berry (86).

Atlantic Canada and Atlantic Canadian writing have typically been discussed in terms of regionalism. As David Harvey notes, the term "region" conventionally implies subordinate, distinctive, and more authentic (170), and, as Glenn Willmott observes, "in modern regionalism especially, the

figure of the region tends to be opposed to that of a centralizing modern society" (145). Constructed through a series of binary oppositions, the region is typically understood as less developed, premodern, powerless, yet (and as a result) more authentic, organic, and homogeneous. In this view, a "region" like Cape Breton is simultaneously devalued as being politically and economically marginal (and even a drain on the resources of the nation-state) and valued as providing an escape from the vicissitudes of the modern world and access to a rooted, more authentic way of life and relationship to place. As Coady puts it,

> whenever a distinctive culture . . . is taken note of by a larger culture . . . two things happen simultaneously. On the one hand, the distinctive culture gets marginalized.
>
> . . . The second is an offshoot of the first, but is much wider-ranging, seemingly benign, and therefore insidious: the culture gets fetishized. ("Books" 1)

As Coady's comment suggests, whether marginalized or fetishized, the consequences for a "regional place" like Cape Breton remain the same: economic and political disenfranchisement, the reduction of a complex and heterogeneous society to a series of stereotypes, the elision of any similarities to the centre, and the valuing of that culture solely for its presumed difference from that centre. The result, then, is to construct a static and nostalgic image of a regional place and its society. Moreover, as David Creelman reminds us, regionalism does not provide neutral, objective descriptions of particular places and societies but ideological constructions ("Swept" 66). Tony Tremblay reads regionalism "as a construction of the centre rather than the margins" (24), arguing that "regions produce narrative in a wider context of pre-existing myths that have already in large part defined them" (29). Alternatively, as Frank Davey observes, regionalism provides a strategy "for resisting meanings generated by others in a nation-state, particularly those generated in geographic areas which can be constructed by the regionalism as central or powerful" (4). "However," Davey continues, "it is important to note that it is usually also a strategy for resisting other meanings generated in its own region—meanings such as nationalism, feminism, class, ethnicity, localisms, or race" (4-5). The ideological work performed by regionalism, then, often perpetuates the existing socio-economic order, both internally and externally, an order in which many inhabitants of the region are disempowered and that resists change. This is an order from which Coady's adolescent and post-adolescent characters are largely alienated and in which they are marginalized and their experiences are devalued.

Traditionally, an emphasis upon place has been central to definitions of Canadian literary regionalism, and as a result place has often been seen as the key aspect in regional identity formation. As Janice Fiamengo notes, this understanding of regionalism "privileges geographical location over all other aspects of identity, suggesting that the fact of living in a certain place has a force greater than family history, gender, or political affiliation in shaping identity" (242). Such an understanding of regionalism focuses in part on, as Willmott writes, the "evocation of the unique spirit of a place" and the "native author's rendering of the experience of a place" (145).[2] Regional writing, then, is expected to examine the particularities of a specific place and explore their impact upon its inhabitants. One of the ways that Coady resists such expectations is by rarely providing detailed and vivid description of physical environment. *Saints*, for example, is notable for the absence of visual description of Big Harbour or its surroundings. Furthermore, there is little that is unique in the description of the town, which is largely characterized by generic banality. The key locations—mall, arcade, hockey rink, bar, high school—could exist anywhere. When Guy Boucher, more or less the protagonist, goes into Big Harbour to pick up his mother, for instance, he hangs out at the mall and the arcade (5). On the occasion that *Saints* does provide a visual description, as in the case of the high school, it does not emphasize a vernacular or quaint architecture but rather generic contemporary architecture: "I can't believe the school—it's enormous. It is made practically all of glass, so the cloudy grey light fills the whole place—it's like I'm still outside" (30). The defining features of the community are most often chain stores and restaurants—Canadian Tire, Sobeys, Shoppers Drug Mart, KFC, Dairy Queen (in *Strange Heaven* the site of a murder), etc.—not quaint local stores firmly rooted in the history of Big Harbour. The local businesses that are referenced, such as Leland MacPhedron's bar, are largely devoid of "local" detail. Moreover, the largely Acadian community outside of Big Harbour that is Guy's home (until his family moves into Big Harbour) is even more vaguely described and only passingly identified by name as D'escousse (although it is referred to by such pejorative nicknames as "Frog-town"). Even the fact that Big Harbour is located on Cape Breton Island is under-emphasized, with only occasional references to that regional setting. Ultimately, there is little about Big Harbour that renders it distinct or unique, as is emphasized by its generic name. In fact, the town might be better described as what Marc Augé calls a "non-place": "a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity" (77-78).

Related to traditional regionalism's emphasis upon place has been an emphasis on environmental determinism, an assumption that the landscape and surrounding natural environment produce a unique regional identity, and thus a unique literary response. From such a perspective, as Lisa Chalykoff observes, "Canonical works of regional literature are those which 'reflect' with the greatest 'accuracy' the 'inevitable' effect that a land-based regional essence exercises 'uniformly' on its inhabitants" (166). Just as *Saints* does not focus on the particular characteristics of Big Harbour itself, however, it also pays little attention to the natural environment in which the town is located, and the characters rarely take note of their natural surroundings or provide any indication of the environment's impact on their lives. In contrast to what might be expected of a novel set on Cape Breton, there are no images of a harsh, wind-beaten landscape or the immense sea, or other such clichés. The few descriptive passages that do exist are decidedly unpicturesque, as is the case in this description of the harbour:

> Off to the waterfront to see the sun rise above the frothy squalor of the strait—to watch its rays illuminate the purple clouds of gunk that are cheerfully and steadily belched heavenward from the pulp mill day and night, bullying and crowding the real clouds out of existence. A Big Harbour morning. (174)

This passage describes an industrial landscape, rather than the expected natural one, thus resisting the tourist gaze often catered to by regional writing, but even this description is an exception in the novel, and, moreover, is not assigned any real deterministic power. One might be forgiven for assuming that such a passage of environmental despoliation and industrialization be read as reflective of or even as a source of the alienation, degradation, and inauthenticity of the lived experience of Pam Cormorant (who is the focal character in this passage) and the other adolescents of Big Harbour. The truth of the matter, however, is that it is the mediascape (Appadurai 35)[3] rather than the landscape—"natural" or industrial—that has deterministic power in the novel, at least with respect to the lives of the adolescent characters who are the novel's focus. In *Saints of Big Harbour*, geography is displaced as a source of meaning and identity construction, and largely absent.

Massey notes that traditional "ideas of place-identity are . . . always constructed by reference to the past" (8). In discussing *Strange Heaven*, Creelman notes that "Coady completely dispels any nostalgic impulse that might have entered the text and promised to anchor the young woman [Bridget Murphy] to her past or heritage" (*Setting* 190). Similarly, the adolescents of Big Harbour demonstrate a near total ignorance of and

indifference to the past. There are residual traces of conflict between Acadians, like Guy Boucher, and the descendants of Scottish settlers, who make up the majority of the inhabitants of Big Harbour. Guy, for instance, is repeatedly referred to as that "French guy" or that "French fuck" when negative rumours about him begin to circulate. It is worth noting, however, that Corinne first describes him as the "French guy" (128) as a means of creating her fantasy stalker, whom she renders exotic by emphasizing his "frenchness" (i.e. foreignness) and the fact that he is "from out of town" (127). Guy's "frenchness" has no real meaning for him or others of his generation, however, as "most of us don't even speak any French" (5). Similarly, when Guy sees a photograph of a boy in a tartan vest, whom his mother describes as "a little highlander," Guy is unable to make sense of that cultural reference: "I don't know what that's supposed to mean," he thinks (19). Terms such as "highlander" and "French guy" have been evacuated of historical and cultural meaning for Guy's generation. In fact, they have no sense of historical pride or roots, little sense of connection to ancestors or to the past. If there is a past, it is located elsewhere, "deep in the backwoods of Cape Breton," the home of Pam Cormorant's relatives, "who look like something out of the movie *Deliverance*" (95). Note that from Pam's perspective, her relatives can only be understood by reference to popular culture. The past they represent is alien and of little relevance to Pam and her generation in Big Harbour, and is certainly absent from Big Harbour itself.

The place of regionalism is constituted in part by an "authentic" local culture and perpetuated through the transmission of local knowledges from generation to generation. As might be expected, then, *Saints of Big Harbour* is nearly entirely devoid of references to local or folk culture and traditions. The adolescents of Big Harbour are participants in popular, not folk culture. As John Fiske puts it, "Popular culture, unlike folk culture, is made out of cultural resources that are not produced by the social formation that is using them" (170). From Guy's *Star Wars* sheets (82) to Corinne's Calvin Klein jeans (148), from Corinne's favourite drink, Diet Coke (29), to Vachon cakes (119), from Charlie perfume (263) to Brut, Hugh Gillis' cologne, and his Trans-Am (153), the lives of Big Harbour's adolescents are marked by the proliferation of brand names, and the absence of anything signifying local culture or local cultural practices. Even Guy's relationship with his mother is mediated through the smell of Vaseline Treatment for Extremely Dry Skin (9; 33). Karnage, the house band in Leland's bar, does not play traditional folk music, but satisfies customer demand by performing a "kickass version

of 'Sweet Home Alabama'" (154) and a ZZ Top cover (157) before satisfying its own punk leanings with the Sex Pistols' "Anarchy in the UK" (158). After its set, it is replaced with Marvin Gaye "blar[ing] from the sound system" (159). Howard Fortune listens to Neil Young (120) and Hugh plays George Thorogood (153) and AC/DC (313) in his Trans-Am. Rather than Highland dancers, there is Len Bird's breakdancing (158). And there are TV shows and movies, as references to American television shows, such as *Quincy*, *Happy Days*, *Little House on the Prairie*, and the *Dukes of Hazzard*, and American movies, such as *Rocky*, *Star Wars*, and *Deliverance* are strewn throughout the novel. The one exception might seem to be hockey, given its prominent presence in the culture of Big Harbour (and in Canadian culture more generally), but the rivalry between the teams from Big Harbour and the neighbouring community of Port Hull quickly degenerates into a "carnival of violence" (77), both off-ice (77-78) and on (88).

In *Saints of Big Harbour* it is not place, landscape, and/or history that is constitutive of identity, but popular culture. Television, not traditional culture, shapes their language, providing them with vocabulary and cultural references. Hugh, for example, uses the phrase "I'm here to tell you" after hearing it used on TV (230), and Guy "learns the language of television, what he believes must be the language of America" (182). His uncle Isadore complains that it is now necessary to understand TV in order to understand everyday conversation: "Now it was as if people spoke in some kind of code," he says (47). Guy compares his uncle at one point to a "fat Clint Eastwood" (11), while the bar patrons refer to Isadore as Quincy and to Leland, the bar owner, as Boss Hogg (*Dukes of Hazzard*). Like the heroes in a TV cop show (such as *Starsky and Hutch*), Hugh and Howard "perfected the choreography of climbing out of the car at precisely the same time, unfurling their bodies, slamming their doors in unison for maximum intimidation effect" (311). Frequently, TV provides the standard against which Guy measures his life, as when he enthusiastically praises his mother's confrontation with Isadore for being "just like TV" (247) and when he describes Alison's defence of him to Constable MacLellan as being "like watching TV" (393), or when, alternatively, he is embarrassed at a school dance that doesn't measure up to what he has seen on *Happy Days*: "On television, nobody danced like that" (79). We are told that "[t]he advent of television had intensified his embarrassment about his life in general" (79), as Big Harbour at times looks ridiculous and lacking by comparison. As Coady observes to Berry, "TV informs you of your lack. Insists upon it" (75). Even though, as Guy

realizes, life portrayed on TV is "not how it is in real life" (*Saints* 182), it has a comprehensibility, desirability, and cultural impact otherwise lacking in Big Harbour. For instance, while violence is profound and cathartic on TV, in Big Harbour it is meaningless, arbitrary, and omnipresent (182-83).

That which is desirable is what is on TV, or from somewhere else. For Big Harbour's adolescents to be "not from around here" is of great value. For example, "a lot of the girls at school think [Guy's English teacher] Alison Mason is incredibly hot," even though he is in many ways a pathetic figure: "It's just because he's American" (7). Similarly, Corinne is initially drawn to Guy because she thinks he's "not from around here": "I think saying it made her feel sophisticated but it also made me feel pretty cool, because I realized I could've been from anywhere, instead of just out in the sticks, out in Frog-town" (7). Corinne listens to music imported from Germany, and creates an imaginary boyfriend "from the city" (31), whose most important characteristic is that "[h]e is not from around here, that is the main thing" (123). By contrast, for the older inhabitants of Big Harbour local status is still to be valued, as in the confrontation between Constable MacLellan and Alison near the end of the novel. Investigating the alleged crime committed by Guy, the Constable challenges Alison's right to intervene based solely on the fact the he's "not a local fella": "'Here is my point,' said MacLellan. 'I have known Fred Fortune my whole life. And I have known Isadore Aucoin my whole life and this is my community. I don't know what it is to you, but this is where I was born.' MacLellan stood there. Apparently this was all there was to his point" (392). Yet, the confrontation ends with MacLellan being forced to realize that as grounds for authority and judgment such localist claims are of little value. In Alison's words, "this is absolute *nonsense*" (392). In this scene, then, the authority of the local is refuted and subverted. Significantly, the figure able to protect Guy is the outsider Alison, not the insider Isadore, "a local boy" who had known MacLellan "for years" and who presumed that his local status would be sufficient to end the investigation (348).

As Massey writes, in the late twentieth century it was "commonly argued . . . that the vast current reorganizations of capital, the formation of a new global space, and in particular its use of new technologies of communication, have undermined an older sense of a "place-called-home," and left us placeless and disorientated" (163). Such a sense of disorientation, which may be seen as "threatening to fracture personal identities," may lead to a desire for a stable and fixed sense of place "as a source of authenticity and stability" (Massey 122). In *Saints*, it is Guy's uncle, Isadore Aucoin, who most insists on

such a conservative sense of place, and who most stands in opposition to popular culture's dominance and the perceived homogenization of Big Harbour. Nostalgic for the stable patriarchal order embodied in his father ("he wondered where he was supposed to get his sense of what was what without his father there to let him know" [48]), Isadore demonstrates anxieties about his place in the family, the community, and society more broadly, and responds to the threats to this identity through his hyper-masculine and often excessively violent performance in a desperate attempt to "stop the world from getting worse" (49), to fix it in place. For Alison Mason, Isadore is in many ways a folk hero who represents a contrast to the "cold, urban, inauthentic America" that Alison fled (213). Alison sees "Isadore as some kind of primal force—a mythical, working-class superhero" (222) as someone who is "more tuned in than [Alison] was, as having a more fundamental, primal connection to the world around him" (217). In Alison's eyes, Isadore is a born storyteller (74) and "the ultimate specimen of manhood," as he tells him (240). To Alison, Isadore is authentic, rooted, and masculine; he represents a traditional masculinity and traditional cultural values in a modern world from which such things are increasingly absent. He embodies what Alison was looking for when he moved to the "Canadian outback" (236). As a born storyteller, Isadore is suggestive of and identified with the storytelling traditions and oral culture often associated with traditional societies and thus frequently understood as more authentic. Unlike most of the other "French" characters in the novel (and certainly unlike Guy's generation), he scatters French expressions such as "mon petit" (23) throughout his speech, suggesting that he is more deeply rooted in Acadian culture than are the other characters. Isadore is not only associated with regional folk culture, but also with the national, particularly through the Canadian flag stolen from the Legion that he insists on flying from the roof of the family home and which he occasionally salutes (14). Suggestively, as Guy notes, "the flag sort of flops to life for a moment, then hangs limp again, as meaningless as can be" (14). Isadore is also associated with Toronto, the financial and economic centre of Canada, having moved there when he was eighteen. His relationship to it is ambivalent, as he simultaneously desires and condemns it: "Clearly he pined for the city and believed it was in his blood and was hurt, for some reason, by its memory" (67). His relationship with Toronto exemplifies the centre-periphery relationship between the Maritimes and Toronto, with its history of marginalization and exploitation (real and perceived), a relationship that is simultaneously

constitutive of "regional" identity and a source of dissatisfaction for the inhabitants of the region. Isadore is cast in a dependent relationship with the centre that has left him dysfunctional and non-productive, as, in many ways, a stereotype of an Atlantic Canadian. Isadore's memories of Toronto fill him with a sense of lack. Whereas Guy judges Big Harbour against the TV standard, Isadore measures it against his experience in Toronto, refusing to watch local hockey because it can't measure up to sitting in "the front rows of Maple Leaf Gardens while The Rocket sails one in as pretty as you please" (45). As a classic symbol of a central-Canadian-based national identity (one based on the relationship between Toronto and Montreal as representatives of English and French), this phrase not only articulates a traditional sense of national identity (in which Atlantic Canada can only passively participate through choosing either Toronto or Montreal), but it is also a discourse located long in the past, as by the early 1980s the rivalry between the Maple Leafs and Canadiens no longer has the resonance it did in a six-team NHL, and Rocket Richard is a hero of the distant past (pre-Quiet Revolution, pre-Referendum), thus locating the nationalism associated with it in the past. Moreover, Isadore refuses to watch the Maple Leafs on TV, for it only reminds him of his failure and marginalization: "he had been there once, but wasn't anymore" (47). For Isadore, national popular culture, exemplified by NHL hockey, marginalizes him, constructing Big Harbour as a place of failure and insignificance. Furthermore, his attempt to reclaim hockey by coaching Guy ends in failure. When Isadore begins coaching Guy, he realizes that "this new experience of hockey could be the greatest of his life. For the first time since he had played as a teenager, he would have some measure of control over the outcome" (53), but Guy quickly becomes disenchanted with hockey and his uncle and stops playing (93), not only rejecting Isadore's attempt to exert a form of patriarchal authority over Guy, but once again confirming Isadore's lack of control over the world around him.

In seeking to preserve his world as he knows it, Isadore rejects trends from elsewhere that have trickled into Big Harbour, such as the new lights in the bar: "All the clubs got them up in Halifax now," Leland, the owner, says, which the young think are "cool" but which Isadore condemns as a "real slut of a thing . . . [that] can stay up in Halifax" (215). Just as he can't make sense of the code of TV, moreover, he also is unable to read his niece Louise, who as a teenager adopts a Goth identity (a transnational youth identity also adopted by Ann Gillis [43]): "since he had no understanding of what else she could possibly be trying to achieve in making herself up this

way, it seemed to Isadore that Louise was simply becoming a crazy person" (66). Outside influences such as these are incomprehensible to Isadore, rendering his everyday existence less meaningful and his place in the world less certain. More than anything, however, Isadore rejects TV and hates "how it had crept into everybody's lives and taken over so completely in the past twenty or so years" (47), forcing Guy's mother to hide the TV from him. It is the act of stealing that TV in order to sell it which transforms Isadore's life (245), initially rupturing his relationship with his family, as Guy's mother responds to his claims to be the saviour of the family by stating that "you've been our ruin" (246), and in his absence creating a moment when she and Guy can finally discuss Guy's father (248). Attempting to sell the TV, Isadore slips on the ice, breaking the set and hurting his back (273). Rendered weak and helpless by the back injury, Isadore is forced to recuperate in his sister's apartment. Isadore, however, has finally become seduced by the power of TV, spending all his time watching game shows, particularly that epitome of American consumerism, *The Price is Right* (287).

Only after this acceptance of TV is Isadore somewhat ambiguously reincorporated into the community that had temporarily cast him out. He is, however reluctantly, given a place in his sister Madeleine's apartment, significantly not the family home, however, and welcomed back to Leland's bar by its owner, although the other patrons are less enthusiastic (379-384). By the end of the novel, then, Isadore is no longer the "authentic" folk figure resisting the incursions of an alien, inauthentic, consumer culture. Moreover, whatever alternative to the dominance of global popular culture he may have represented is undermined by the fact that he is an abusive, manipulative, violent man, a "Bully Incarnate," as Alison thinks of him (72). What he is trying to preserve, or more accurately recover, is patriarchal authority. Isadore desperately struggles to play the role of father, to rule the family (Guy is fatherless and Isadore lacking a family), to reassert a traditional masculinity that he associates with his father. Without that, Isadore's life is purposeless, as he bemoans the fact that "he was failing to keep everyone young and happy the way his father had been able to do" (49), yet he actually destroys what he claims to wish to preserve, as is reflected in the destruction of his mother's china, described by his sister as "the family heirlooms" (106). Through Isadore, then, traditional culture and regional, locally determined identity are associated with a traditional and ultimately destructive patriarchal culture. Guy's final rejection of Isadore, albeit in defence of his father, when he, supported by Alison, hits Isadore over the head with a shovel (387-88),

is not just a rejection of him and the traditional masculinity he embodies, but also a rejection of the parochial cultural view and identity he articulates throughout most of the novel. This rejection is affirmed by Guy's choice to move in with and adopt as a father figure the American Alison Mason, he of the ambiguously gendered first name and pacifist tendencies.

Pam Cormorant's father is at first the opposite of Isadore. He had grown up "deep in the backwoods of Cape Breton" but had gone to school and "stayed just long enough to have his accent ridiculed out of him, then used his homogenized speech and his half-assed education to get himself a good position at the mill" (95). He "spoke like he was from Ontario" (96) until he lost his job, after which he started drinking, gradually stopped dressing in formal office attire, and went "back to speaking accented and old-fashioned like his relatives" (96); significantly, he also takes out his failure and despair on his daughter, telling her that she is fat and that "I just don't see it happening for you" (99), reinforcing the brute male chauvinism associated with the regressive traditional masculinity performed by both Mr. Cormorant and Isadore. Whereas Isadore resisted homogenization and held on to his version of the traditional culture with which he had grown up, Mr. Cormorant repressed all traces of that identity in pursuit of financial success, only to revert to a stereotypical version of that identity when his financial and career success is taken away. His rejection of the traditional culture that produced him renders him, unlike the adolescents of Big Harbour, "inauthentic," as he puts on a mask purely as a means of achieving career success. By contrast, his second cousin Ronald is a more "authentic" traditional Cape Bretoner who lives "in a trailer and sh[oots] the animals who [stroll] across his yard and br[ings] the butchered carcasses to his relatives and neighbours, just as his own father used to do" (96). Well-meaning, kind, and comfortable with himself, Ronald is, however, a character out of time: "He didn't realize that now they had the Co-op and Sobeys for their meat, and not as many people liked eating fresh-killed deer and rabbit anymore" (96). Ronald is seemingly oblivious to the societal and cultural changes that so trouble Isadore, and is thus able to continue living as his father had. Neither Mr. Cormorant nor Ronald, however, is any more successful than Isadore in adapting to life in the late twentieth century, and Ronald's subsistence existence, in which he largely ignores the consumer culture in which the Cormorants exist, is not presented as a meaningful alternative to the lifestyle of the Cormorants or the other inhabitants of Big Harbour. Mr. Cormorant is truly placeless, and only recovers a sense of place

as he regresses into his past. Ronald has a strong sense of place, but place that is static and nearly entirely isolated from the wider world.

Big Harbour's adolescents experience place as "a contingent, dynamic, and influential 'permanence'"[4] (Harvey 194), and their experience of place is by no means uniform, as the stories of Howard Fortune and Hugh Gillis illustrate. Howard and Hugh are the two young men who could have left Big Harbour (like the rest of the "1980 honours graduating class" [145]) but have remained. They have little in common other than this fact until they bond in an orgy of ultra-violence driven by Howard's urge to punish "the French guy" who has allegedly wronged his sister, Corinne. Howard had left Big Harbour to attend university but returned after his first year, instead taking a job in the fish plant (124-125). He eventually leaves the family home, moving to an apartment in Donnell Cove: "a terrible place, celebrated for its lobster pound, fish plant, and its parish priest of twenty years, recently discovered to be a pederast" (265), a place in keeping with stereotypical images of Cape Breton. In his flight from whatever he experienced at university, Howard, like Mr. Cormorant, retreats into the past, as represented by Donnell Cove. Unlike Mr. Cormorant, it is not his past, as he has no personal claim on the lifestyle associated with Donnell Cove, and in fact he never quite fit into Big Harbour either (147). In the end he presumably commits suicide, though his fate remains ambiguous (396-97). Certainly, Howard's retreat to Donnell Cove has not resolved his anxieties and insecurities, anymore than did his violent pursuit of Guy. Hugh, by contrast, never left Big Harbour, but simply stayed after graduating from high school, giving as his reason: "I like it here" (147). Unlike Howard, however, Hugh did not go to work in the fish plant, a traditional job choice, but instead took college courses in computers (147), obviously associated with the future and a non-traditional lifestyle. The choices that Hugh makes, then, reflect what Massey calls a progressive sense of place, one in which place is not static or insular but changing and formed in part by relations with the wider world (155; 161). Hugh may participate in the mindless violence initiated by Howard, but he gradually becomes disenchanted with that behaviour and with Howard himself, particularly after being criminally charged along with Howard. In particular, he is concerned that having a criminal record might limit his options, and his ability to move and pursue opportunities, that it might fix him in place (367). Comfortable in Big Harbour for now, Hugh does not wish to cut himself off from the world.

If, as it is often argued, the spatial restructuring associated with globalization has "left us placeless and disorientated" (Massey 163), then

Corinne Fortune might be seen as the character best exemplifying that condition. After all, she is the character who in many respects seems most distanced from local culture and most engaged in global culture, with her imported German music, Calvin Klein jeans, and fantasies about being "not from here." Not only that, but she clearly escapes into the fantasy she creates about her stalker and boyfriend and seems increasingly disconnected from everyday life in Big Harbour, eventually resulting in her disappearance from the community, as she is committed to a "psych ward" in Halifax (338). Yet, she is driven out of Big Harbour as much by the local rumours that were generated by her fantasy as by the fantasy itself. Moreover, her desire for that which is "not from here" is a consequence of her desire to escape the limitations and constraints of life in Big Harbour; it is a product of Big Harbour itself: "You know this town like the inside of your brain. . . . the town is all around and everywhere, there is nowhere you could go you haven't been before" (116). It is not so much that Corinne is lacking a place as a result of the homogenizing influence of popular culture, but that she wishes to escape a place that is confining and all too well known to her.

Gwendolyn Davies has argued that in twentieth-century Maritime writing, "the 'home place' emerges as a symbol of cultural continuity and psychological identification in the face of social fragmentation, outmigration, and a continuing hardscrabble economy" (194). The Aucoin family home is the only site in the novel that could conceivably play that role. Decaying and run down, claimed by Isadore, the house is something to be escaped, as the rest of the family eventually do when they move into an apartment, in part to escape from Isadore (110). By the end of the novel, however, it has been freed of those negative associations, as it is in the process of being renovated by Guy's sister, Louise, and her husband, Dan C. McQuarrie. As Guy notes, the new kitchen cupboards smell of "fresh white paint" on the outside and "the smell of trees" on the inside; they smell simultaneously new and "authentic" (411). The renovated family house exemplifies the ideal sense of place being articulated by the novel. It represents the valuing of the past, but in such a way that allows for change. It represents a sense of place that is rooted but not static, that is flexible and open rather than insular, as suggested by the patio that Dan C. is currently in the process of building. Like the novel's portrayal of the home, the relationship between Louise and Dan C. embodies a sense of place that is rooted in the local but is not nostalgic or static. At first glance, Dan C. may be the type of stereotypically authentic local character one might

expect to encounter in a novel about Cape Breton. A scallop farmer from Glace Bay (103), he speaks Gaelic, and has a "pretty thick accent" (410). Yet, significantly, for him scallop farming is not an occupation determined by familial tradition but rather one he chose as a means of escaping "the mine and the steel plant" (104) in which his family had traditionally worked. Superficially traditional and local, Dan C. refuses to be bound by tradition and does not hesitate to make things new. In marrying Dan C., Louise has escaped the ineffectual masculinity associated with her father and the domineering, destructive masculinity and regressive place-identity associated with Isadore.[5]

In her discussion of contemporary Atlantic Canadian women's writing, Fuller argues, "By foregrounding the dynamic relationship that exists between place, culture, and identity, contemporary Atlantic writers counter the static stereotypes peddled by the tourist trade" (*Writing* 36). *Saints of Big Harbour* must be read in those terms. It does not articulate "a desire for an impossible or forbidden past" or "express a sense of loss," which Willmott sees as a defining characteristic for modern Maritime writing (191). For good or bad, the lives of the adolescent characters in *Saints* are formed (and possibly deformed) by the global popular culture that penetrates their everyday existence, not by a static sense of place, locality, and regional identity. In refusing to present traditional culture as a viable source of meaning for the community in and around Big Harbour, by refusing to present life in the town and its surroundings as quaint and more authentic, by emphasizing sameness rather than difference, *Saints of Big Harbour* challenges and resists the conventional and idealized understanding of the Maritimes as it circulates within dominant culture, and thus the traditional conception of regional writing.[6]

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NOTES

1 As Ian McKay has influentially argued, such sentimental idealizations of the rural Folk are metropolitan constructions resulting from the urban elites' anxieties about the impact of modernity (275). He observes that the Folk are "a socially constructed subject-position within antimodernity. *There never were any Folk*" (302; italics his).

2 Here Willmott is paraphrasing David Jordan (8-10).
3 According to Appadurai, mediascapes "refer both to the distribution of the electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information . . . and to the images of the world created by these media" (35).
4 Here Harvey is drawing on Alfred Whitehead's description of places "as 'entities' that achieve relative stability for a time in their bounding and in their internal ordering of processes. Such entities he calls 'permanences'" (Harvey 190).
5 It should be noted, however, that her escape does seem to confirm a conventional understanding of gender, however positively represented, that is associated with local tradition.
6 Herb Wyile makes a similar point in his discussion of *Strange Heaven*: "Coady's East refuses the polarized alternatives of what might be termed a homespun, Made in Canada, lower-case orientalism. It is neither the idealized, pastoral 'ocean playground' of Anne Shirley nor the retrograde, underdeveloped, and parasitic 'culture of defeat' of Stephen Harper" (100).

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Ends of Days

Caroline Adderson
The Sky is Falling. Thomas Allen $32.95

Douglas Coupland
Player One: What Is to Become of Us: A Novel in Five Hours. Anansi $19.95

Yann Martel
Beatrice & Virgil. Knopf Canada $29.95

Reviewed by Brett Josef Grubisic

The threat of nuclear annihilation exerts life-altering influence in Caroline Adderson's coming-of-age novel, *The Sky is Falling*. In particular, naive Russian literature sophomore Lisa Zwierzchowski's stroll past an accommodations board results in fateful cohabitation in a house of radical anti-nuke students. The impact is so profound that she's still experiencing fallout two decades later.

Opening in 2004, *The Sky is Falling* introduces Lisa Norman, an affluent housewife and occasional copy editor with a troublesome maid—and anxious dreams about a terrible week in 1984 that are triggered by newspaper headlines about political activists newly released from prison, her former housemates.

Flashbacks to that formative time comprise the novel's crux; and Adderson's depiction of her protagonist's transformation from unworldly wallflower to ambivalent participant in anti-nuclear actions is captivating. From the fraught household meals to Jane's romanticism and her earnest donning of contradictory viewpoints and identities, the novel ably captures the volatile dynamics of personality evolution. The addition of comic elements—reminiscent of the ludicrous squabbling activists of Margaret Atwood's *Lady Oracle*—is a welcome counterbalance to the build up of interpersonal (ideological and sexual) conflicts.

The shorter sections in 2004 are less satisfying. A privileged "saved" adult looking back at her "ruined" past, Jane is not terribly sympathetic. Nor is she interesting: rich idle women complaining about the domestic help are a tough sell.

When Jane decides to visit Sonia, one of the activists who spent years in jail for a failed bomb plot in 1984, she journeys to the "metastasizing suburbs"—a decrepit area of boxy rundown rental apartments where the cars and their drivers are wrecks—and meets Sonia's prison-forged girlfriend Brenda: "Muscular, T-shirt so tight across her biceps the tattoo looked like it was being squeezed out. Half pit bull, half dyke." Retreating to her comforts while wondering if she would have ended up in Sonia's living hell had she made a different choice decades ago, Jane's gated-community smugness strips her of humanity.

Speculation about the end of the world has been a hallmark of Douglas Coupland's fiction since 1991's *Generation X*. Featuring five introspective types experiencing a colossal global meltdown, Coupland's *Player One: What Is to Become of Us*, the print version of his 2010 CBC Massey Lectures, encapsulates the author's stylistic and thematic signatures.

The "Novel in Five Hours" begins in the manner of a creaky joke: "Five people

walk into a bar, and the bartender says to the priest . . . " Set in a cocktail lounge in the Toronto Airport Camelot Hotel—an "achronogeneritropic space": a "nowhere/everywhere/timeless place[]," as defined in "Future Legend," the novel's glib *Generation X*-referencing final section—*Player One* quickly disgorges the troubles and ruminations of the lounge's occupants; each of the novel's five one-hour segments dedicates a chapter to scrutinizing an individual's hand-wringing.

Between "Hour One" and "Hour Five," alienated and adrift protagonists Rick (bartender), Luke (pastor), Karen (secretary), Rachel (rodent breeder) and Player One (disembodied and allusive, recalling a Greek chorus, *Our Town*'s Stage Manager, and *Avatar*'s avatars), interact and grow pensive as they drift between hopefulness and despair.

Action changes with panicked news anchor announcements of soaring oil prices (followed by the abrupt cessation of all broadcast signals minutes later as the world tumbles into crisis). As they tentatively band together, the characters remain fond of frequent mental pauses, echoing Margaret Atwood's Crake as they draw conclusions—and drift between hopefulness and despair: "I'm not even going to single out human beings as the Number One disaster on this planet, I'm going to single out our *DNA* as the criminal. Our DNA is a disaster . . . And this is what it gets us in the end. Bar mix. Blindness. Toxic snow. A dead energy grid. Phones that don't work. We're a joke."

In keeping with a so-so joke, *Player One* has sporadic effervescence with a fleeting shelf life. It's fitfully intriguing but easily forgotten. As a work purporting to "explore the crises of time, human identity, religion, macroeconomics and the afterlife," its willful lack of substance and its resolve to focus on ideas for just fractions of a page render it oddly redundant: these characters, these ideas, and this trademark style have been in wide circulation since 1991.

As with *The Satanic Verses*, it is difficult to read *Beatrice & Virgil* with no awareness of the slim book's brief media saturation: prepublication hype for Yann Martel's first novel following the Booker Prize-winning *Life of Pi* highlighted its extravagant advance and murmured of enduring conflicts between Martel and his publisher; soon after, attention turned to the many blistering reviews it received in North America and the UK.

Lauded as the would-be genius publication of the spring season and, weeks later, widely decried as a "pretentious . . . shoddy piece of work" (as *The Spectator* claimed) or "so dull, so misguided, so pretentious that only the prospect of those millions of *Pi* fans could secure the interest of major publishers and a multimillion-dollar advance" (*The Washington Post*'s summation), the novel managed to become notorious for its reception rather than for its contents.

Sadly, that reviewer ire had greater clarity than the novel. Progressively confusing, emotionally uninvolving, and seemingly incomplete as a meditation on the Holocaust, *Beatrice & Virgil* is a curiosity, an ambitious but baffling and failed experiment.

The novel's beginning, autobiographical if told with fable-like simplicity, describes the life of Henry, an author whose second novel won him prizes and fame and whose unorthodox third book (the form: an essay and a novel conjoined; the subject: a new way to represent the Holocaust, the theory literally sewn to the practice) lands him in hot water with his bean-counting publisher.

Henry subsequently ceases to write and moves (wife in tow) to an unnamed "storied metropolis where all kinds of people find themselves and lose themselves," and launches into a dilettante lifestyle—taking music and Spanish lessons, joining an amateur theatre group, working part-time in a fair-trade cocoa cooperative/cafe, and answering letters from ardent fans of his exquisite earlier novel, which had "helped them pull through a crisis in their lives."

"And then one winter day," a package arrives that pushes Henry's life—and *Beatrice & Virgil*—into Bizarro World. The package contains a copy of Gustave Flaubert's 1877 fable, "The Legend of Saint Julian the Hospitator," which the novel replicates over twelve pages of paraphrases and odd excerpts (e.g. " . . . lake . . . beaver . . . his arrow killed it . . . "); there's also a violent two-act play titled *A 20th-Century Shirt*, starring two animal protagonists, Virgil and Beatrice.

Martel dedicates fifty-nine pages to reproducing parts of this lengthy unfinished play, written by an elderly taxidermist (named Henry) who has apparently memorized reams of Samuel Beckett and is obsessed with allegorizing the Holocaust. Once the Henrys begin interacting in person, antagonism culminating in a Grand Guignol finale is a matter of course.

In the hospital afterwards, Henry (the best-selling author) begins to write again. With such an ending, Martel ends up emphasizing the overcoming of writer's block. As for the lofty ambitions relating to Art and the Holocaust, they're subsumed by a perplexing tale with little sense of purpose.

Altering Historical Circumstances

Michael Barnholden

Circumstances Alter Photographs: Captain James Peters' Reports from the War of 1885. Talonbooks $35.00

Reviewed by June Scudeler

As a Métis person, the prospect of reviewing *Circumstances Alter Photographs: Captain James Peters' Reports from the War of 1885* (or as Métis call it, the 1885 Resistance) did cause me a bit of apprehension. Peters, born in Saint John, New Brunswick in 1853, was a captain in the Royal Canadian Artillery's "A" Battery. Peters took the world's first battlefield photos at the Métis victory at Tourond's Coulee (Fish Creek), where one of my ancestors was killed and another wounded, as well as photographs at Batoche.

However, Michael Barnholden, who translated *Gabriel Dumont Speaks,* a series of interviews with the Métis buffalo hunter and leader of the Métis forces, tellingly entitled this book, *Circumstances Alter Photographs,* a reference to Peters' admission that the photographer may not possess the ability to choose his subject or the "narrative framing of the subject." Peters was fortunate to have the 1883 "detective" camera, which could be carried over the shoulder, along with a dozen prepared glass plates, enabling Peters to take photos during battle. While there are photographs of the American Civil War and the Crimean War, these were taken after the battle, making Peters' photos the first ever taken during battle. Not all of Peters' photographs are of battlefields; "Métis Women" shows four women carrying some of their possessions to a refugee camp piled with Métis belongings. Peters also took photographs of Poundmaker, Beardy, and Miserable Man. In keeping with Western tradition, Miserable Man's wife is nameless as she is referred to as "Mrs. Miserable Man."

Barnholden provides extensive historical and critical commentary on Peters as well as Peters' dispatches from the front printed in newspapers. The surprise in *Captain James Peters' Reports from the War of 1885* is Peters himself. Barnholden describes him as critical of the Canadian military; Peters referred to General Middleton, leader of the Canadian forces, as "the d____d old fool of a General" and expressed some sympathy for the Métis and First Nations fighting in 1885. He sardonically referred to a photo of Canadian officers at Batoche as "Big Guns." Peters also notes with some sympathy, "One old brave said that it would be cheaper for the Queen to give him pork than pay for all these soldiers. This was not a bad hit." This sympathy only comes after battle; previously Peters describes the Métis as "murderous

brutes" who have ruthlessly slaughtered priests and settlers.

While Barnholden does a good job with the critical apparatus in the book (although a map of Peters' journey with the "A" Battery would have been a welcome addition), I am wary of the lack of Métis voices. While those interested could read *Gabriel Dumont Speaks* separately, excerpts from the book would provide a counterpoint to the Canadian version of events.

Quêtes

Pierre Barrette
Epiphany, Arizona. Noroît 15,95 $

Michel Pleau
La Lenteur du monde. David 15.00 $

Martin Thibault
Les Yeux sur moi. Noroît 16,95 $

Compte rendu par Emmanuel Bouchard

Quatrième recueil de Pierre Barrette publié aux éditions du Noroît, *Epiphany, Arizona* relate le voyage d'un couple sur les routes du sud des États-Unis. Ce qui est remarquable dans ce *road book* (c'est le titre de la première partie), qui peint d'une manière convaincante l'immensité du territoire, l'aridité des déserts et l'infini des routes, c'est le caractère intime de la quête d'absolu à laquelle se livrent les protagonistes; une quête aux résonances mystiques qui s'accomplit souvent dans des lieux clos, comme cette « Chambre 33 » au milieu du désert, près de la frontière mexicaine, où les amants voyagent à la verticale, à la recherche de ce qui les dépasse : « Ta fureur est solaire, ton désir sans fond, et nous mourrons chaque jour un peu plus d'être sans foi soudés l'un à l'autre ». Voilà bien le sens de cette « Epiphany » qu'ils atteindront au terme du voyage, ce « vide parfait qui ouvre des cercles autour [d'eux] comme une légende écrite en travers de l'horizon ».

Récipiendaire du Prix du Gouverneur général en 2008, *La Lenteur du monde*, neuvième recueil de Michel Pleau, poursuit également une quête de sens, traduite éloquemment dans ces deux vers du poème éponyme : « c'est d'une voix féconde / que j'avance tranquille jusqu'à moi ». La voix féconde du poète, c'est celle de l'enfance et de l'origine qui pointe ça et là dans un monde en apparence immobile à force de lenteur. Se déploie peut-être dans ce *mouvement* toute la dynamique du recueil : la rencontre d'une existence en évolution et du constant retour vers « le paysage premier », « la première forêt ». La thématique de la genèse traverse le livre et prend diverses figures (celles du premier amour, de la lumière naissante, du printemps ou même de la parole qui peine à éclore), comme si le voyage intérieur, car c'est bien de cela qu'il s'agit, ne pouvait se passer d'un ancrage dans l'espace, voire dans la nature. N'est-ce pas d'ailleurs cette nature qui, en fin de parcours, traduit le plus sûrement l'ambition du poète : « c'est alors que le vent / donne le ciel aux arbres / et que l'on veut devenir soi-même / vent et arbres // c'est alors que l'on veut devenir / devenir réellement nos gestes / devenir devenir / visible jusqu'au bout des mains / jusqu'au bout du jour / jusqu'au bout de l'ailleurs / où la vie est déjà commencée »? L'achèvement : le trait le plus visible de cette écriture tout intérieure.

Les éditions du Noroît offrent une nouvelle édition du recueil *Les Yeux sur moi*, qui avait valu à son auteur le prix Jovette-Bernier l'année de sa parution, en 1999. Les textes de Martin Thibault abordent le réel d'une façon à la fois grave et amusée. L'enfance, l'amour et la poésie en sont les thèmes de prédilection : regard d'un père sur sa fille (et inversement), mais également regard d'un homme sur sa propre enfance, d'où jaillissent des souvenirs familiaux qui s'accrochent à des images bien dessinées; mises en scènes amoureuses formant, par endroits, de véritables petits tableaux narratifs; incarnations de la figure du poète qui doit sans cesse lutter contre lui-même

ou contre son entourage (ce banquier, par exemple, qui « *ne peu[t] prêter pour écrire* » parce que « *ça prend une garantie* quelque chose comme une dent en or / dans un sourire pourri »). Ludique, cette poésie du regard, qui n'hésite jamais à jouer sur les mots, réussit à atteindre une intimité profonde : celle d'une existence toujours à l'affût des autres.

The Year of Memory and Discovery

Judy Fong Bates
The Year of Finding Memory: A Memoir. Random House $29.95

Rabindranath Maharaj
The Amazing Absorbing Boy. Knopf Canada $29.95

Reviewed by Shao-Pin Luo

Judy Fong Bates' memoir, *The Year of Finding Memory*, comes after a novel, *Midnight at the Dragon Café* (2004), and a short-story collection, *China Dog and Other Tales from a Chinese Laundry* (2007), both critically acclaimed. The book's beautiful cover of the green Chinese countryside is overlaid with Chinese characters that advise "caution" and "care" and with stamps from Canadian immigration documents. The story begins, as many immigrant narratives do, with the proverbial suitcase/cardboard box that contains the author's father's Canadian citizenship certificate dated 1950, along with the head tax certificate that cost its holder five hundred dollars. Unhappiness permeated Fong Bates' parents' life in Canada, where they operated a hand-laundry in small-town Ontario, a land that, after decades, still remained foreign to them. It is the complex feeling of rage, grief, and a desire to bring together the "two stranded parts" of her parents' lives that prompted Fong Bates to make two trips in 2006-2007 to China, the ancestral land of her parents.

In her Author's Note, Fong Bates makes it clear that her memoir is a work of creative non-fiction. Indeed, although perhaps less innovative in experimenting with the genre of memoir, *The Year of Finding Memory* is written in the tradition of the Chinese American writer Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts*. The word "finding" in the book's title is an intriguing choice. The author left Mainland China at three years old and arrived in Canada after two years in Hong Kong. She remembers "almost nothing" of China: "My childhood memories of China have a womblike quality to them, free floating and seen through a watery lens." The act of writing and remembering is a complex process; memory itself for Fong Bates is elusive, fragmentary, and unreliable, embellished by her mother's stories and those of her relatives whom she encounters in China. These stories contain contradictions, willful elisions and outright lies as well as grains of truth. The book is full of phrases such as "I imagined," "I pictured," "I can only guess," "I will never know," as well as lingering questions: where exactly was the place where the author was born, why did the mother marry the father, and ultimately, what makes a person leave or stay in a place? Having grown up in Canada, the author has "great curiosity but no real emotional attachment" to China. Once in Kaiping County, in Guangdong Province, southern China, as she explores the villages and towns and meets with her long-lost relatives, the stories her mother told come to life in front of her eyes. To her own surprise, she detects a familiarity in the rhythm of speech in an older sister whom she had not seen in fifty years, and in her niece she finds familiar "the way her eyes crinkled into the shape of crescent moons, the curve of her mouth when she smiled." She imagines the life of her parents in these places, and her mind is brought to the turbulent history of twentieth-century China: the Second World War, the Communist Takeover, the Cultural Revolution, and the

more recent modernization. However, Fong Bates' interest and focus is on personal family history. She yearns to see a China that belonged to her parents' time, symbolized by the traditional rooftops with the ornamental dragons and the watch towers that have stood through the centuries that she describes with care and documents through photos.

Finally, the journey becomes a process for the daughter to work through feelings of embarrassment, resentment, and incomprehension towards her parents, to reach, if not epiphanies, then a "richer sort of knowing" and an understanding of the parents' past, their burdens and hardships, secrets and shame, isolation and bitterness, and the racism and prejudices they suffered in their new country. In language that is vivid and compelling, Fong Bates gives voice to the stories of her parents and the history of that generation of immigrants who struggled to survive and sometimes failed, and the heroism and meaning in that failure. As she watches her husband Michael tending his garden and remembers her father recreating China in his garden full of Chinese vegetables, Fong Bates contemplates the concepts of home and garden, finding "seeds of affinity" with her parents and with China: "We had our seeds, even though we'd come all the way to China to find them."

An accomplished writer of three collections of short stories and three previous novels, Rabindranath Mararaj has lived for many years in Ajax, Ontario. One could perhaps call his latest novel, *The Amazing Absorbing Boy*, "the year of finding Canada," or more specifically Toronto. The book's use of the comic-book genre to portray experiences of immigration brings to mind Michael Chabon's *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*—a much grander and more sophisticated novel: not only do both novels begin with a seventeen-year-old, comic-book-obsessed protagonist named Sammy, but more importantly, they also share the common themes of orphanhood and being an immigrant in a metropolitan city.

After his mother's death, Sam sets off from Trinidad for Toronto in search of his father, who abandoned him and his mother when he was only six. A "*nowhereian*," or a wanderer, according to uncle Boysie, Danny Persad is someone who "never got out from his make-believe world and so could never change" and whose life, Sam subsequently discovers, consists of smoking on the balcony and watching *Mythbusters* and *MacGyver* on TV. Like Fong Bates' memoir, this novel is partly an account of a father's silent failure in Canada. Sam views his new surroundings with innocence and wonder and as if they were panels in comic-books, full of surprises and dangers. He imagines the people on the subway as "mole people" and runs into characters from comic books such as a "big shaved-head monster that looked exactly like Bane from the *Batman* comics." The comic-book approach provides the young narrator, who regards himself as a "strange visitor from another planet," with an immediate way to make sense of an alien landscape. One of the central questions posed in the novel is "What is a regular Canadian?" As Sam wanders around the city, he encounters an assortment of eccentric and fantastic characters. Among them, there is the Christopher Plummer Man, one of the old-timers at the Coffee Time, who greets people in their own languages, be they Japanese or Persian, and from whom Sam learns about Cabbagetown and Brantford, as well as Chinatown and Little Italy: "Just cross the street and you are in a different country. Everybody's here." At the gas station where Sam finds temporary work, there is Paul the Petroman who tells him about the cab drivers who "were all doctors and lawyers and inventors and refugees and terrorists and Nazis and escaped criminals from other countries." Among Paul's customers, one of the most enigmatic is Dr. Bat, short for Bharanbose Atambee

Tulip, who has a pet lizard named Trudeau, is in search of Chinooks or the baby Dalai Lama in Newfoundland, and wants to write a book about ice kangaroos, snow crabs, and a superhero named Captain Hindustani. At the library where immigrants congregate for assorted seminars and resources, Sam meets the Chimera, who has been composing a poem since 1984 but cannot advance beyond the first two lines: "the snow piffles / Like orphaned kittens."

Eventually, Sam signs up for a diploma in Communications and Culture at the college, taking classes in internet films and streaming videos as well as folklore, which allows him to make connections between avatars from video games and shape-shifting *lagahoos* and ball-of-fire *souyoucants* in Caribbean folklore. In the process of gathering stories and, as it were, gaining the magic of Caribbean shapeshifters or the powers of superheroes, Sam has himself become the amazing absorbing boy, adroit at "adaptation and improvisation": "My world wasn't make-believe but was a patch of every amazing thing that I had touched and absorbed." So it is in the settings of the coffee shop, the gas station, an antique store, a video shop, the library, and Union Station, where there is "a caravan of people, moving and moving," that Mararaj, through Sam, succeeds in conjuring up with compassion and humour a myriad of immigrant characters and in capturing their voices and accents, their histories and stories, their unfulfilled aspirations and dreams of having a house, a place, a community, and most of all their desire for expression, to tell their stories in poems, novels, movies, and in the end, coming to a composite portrait of a typical Canadian.

Portraits de la littérature québécoise

Jacques Beaudry
La Fatigue d'être : Saint-Denys Garneau, Claude Gauvreau, Hubert Aquin. HMH 18,95 $

Antoine Boisclair
L'École du regard. Poésie et peinture chez Saint-Denys Garneau, Roland Giguère et Robert Melançon. Fides 29,95 $

Compte rendu par Frédéric Rondeau

Dans l'essai intitulé *La Fatigue d'être : Saint-Denys Garneau, Claude Gauvreau, Hubert Aquin*, Jacques Beaudry—récipiendaire du « Prix de l'essai Victor-Barbeau 2009 »—revient sur la question des écrivains suicidés soulevée dans ses ouvrages les plus récents : *Cesare Pavese l'homme fatal* (Nota bene, 2002); *Hubert Aquin : la course contre la vie* (HMH, 2006) et *Le Tombeau de Carlo Michelstaedter*; suivi de, *Dialogues avec Carlo* (Liber, 2010). Selon Beaudry, un mal de vivre—recouvrant le sentiment d'être le « jouet de Dieu » pour Garneau, le « prisonnier des institutions » pour Gauvreau ou un « condamné à mort » pour Aquin—pèse sur les trois écrivains et semble les avoir menés au suicide. Privilégiant un ton personnel, qui n'a rien à voir avec l'essai scientifique ou universitaire, Beaudry s'applique moins à commenter une littérature hantée par la mort à venir, qu'à démontrer que le suicide constitue, paradoxalement, une sorte de couronnement, d'aboutissement triomphant de la lutte contre la « fatigue d'être » menée dans l'écriture. En ce sens, l'essayiste affirme, au sujet de Gauvreau, que « [l]e polytraumatisé aux fractures multiples dont les bronches et la trachée sont inondées de sang est l'ultime objet créé par le poète ». Beaudry soutient également, à propos de la mise en scène d'une tentative de suicide d'Aquin, que si ce dernier « n'avait pas été sauvé *in extremis* ce soir-là, il aurait réalisé le crime parfait, un meurtre capable de procurer une satisfaction profonde à l'auteur qui poursuit

dans ses romans les reflets d'un crime dont l'archétype dort au fond de sa conscience ». Beaudry emprunte aussi par moments un registre plus narratif lui permettant de créer des effets dramatiques et d'octroyer une valeur symbolique, voire même « esthétique », à leur mort. De ce point de vue, il écrit, à propos de Garneau : « [l]e jeune homme qui se sait le cœur faible et néanmoins s'élance un soir d'octobre 1943 dans une épuisante course en canot sur la rivière, rame avec rage parce qu'il ne peut plus se contenter de la mesure mesquine qui lui est accordée ». Revenant sur le suicide d'Aquin, l'auteur avance que « [l]a décharge de fusil qui en un éclair fait voler sa tête en éclats est un défi à la fatigue, la sienne jamais détachée de la nôtre. Avant qu'on ne l'entende détoner, elle a déterminé en lui une mobilisation générale de toutes ses forces, et donc : PLUS DE VIE! ». Beaudry ouvre et rassemble des pistes de lecture intéressantes, mais celles-ci ne sont pas toujours suffisamment explorées et développées pour emporter l'entière adhésion du lecteur. La structure du livre—composé de courtes parties, d'environ cinq pages chacune, alternant constamment d'une œuvre à l'autre—nuit ainsi au propos. En outre, si Beaudry puise certes aux poèmes, aux pièces de théâtre et aux romans des auteurs, c'est d'abord aux textes plus biographiques qu'il recourt, particulièrement aux journaux, aux correspondances et à certains essais. Les analyses littéraires proprement dites sont plutôt rares et les citations choisies très succinctes. Selon l'essayiste, l'œuvre des auteurs auxquels il s'intéresse est une préfiguration de leur destin funeste. À cet égard, l'essai de Beaudry rappelle *HA! A self-murder mystery* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003) de Gordon Sheppard qui témoignait d'une fascination comparable pour la vie et la mort d'un écrivain.

Dans l'ouvrage d'Antoine Boisclair intitulé *L'École du regard. Poésie et peinture chez Saint-Denys Garneau, Roland Giguère et Robert Melançon*, l'approche adoptée est totalement différente. L'étude de Boisclair se consacre essentiellement à ces trois poétiques singulières et aux rapports qu'elles entretiennent avec les arts visuels. S'attachant à rendre compte de la période allant de 1934 à 2004, l'auteur met en évidence la place fondamentale de la peinture dans l'expansion de la modernité artistique au Québec—il n'est en effet que de penser à l'influence d'Alfred Pellan ou de Paul-Émile Borduas—, et propose une réflexion plus générale sur la littérature, plus particulièrement la poésie. L'examen de cette problématique conduit l'auteur à la situer hors des limites de la littérature québécoise et des bornes du siècle dernier, en rappelant notamment l'antique « articulation d'un dialogue entre la poésie et la peinture ». Les trois auteurs principalement étudiés dans ce livre « ont tous entrepris un dialogue théorique ou poétique entre les arts visuels, plus précisément avec la peinture ». Or, l'intérêt de cet ouvrage ne repose pas uniquement sur le dévoilement du rapport, finement exposé et analysé, entre la poésie et la peinture, mais aussi sur la « manière de voir » spécifique, le « partage du sensible » qu'il instaure comme l'écrit Jacques Rancière auquel Boisclair fait référence. Ce livre constitue, en ce sens, une brève « histoire » des modes de visibilité au Québec. Car l'auteur réserve aussi quatre sous-sections aux œuvres de René Chopin, de Gilles Hénault, de Jacques Brault et de Fernand Ouellette. S'il eût été pertinent d'approfondir quelques analyses de poèmes afin de consolider certaines hypothèses, il n'en demeure pas moins que Boisclair fournit une contribution déterminante, non seulement parce qu'il rapproche trois poètes n'ayant pas été étudiés ensemble jusqu'à présent, mais aussi parce qu'il a le grand mérite de révéler l'abondance et la profondeur des échanges de la poésie québécoise avec la peinture au XX^{e} siècle.

Folle jeunesse

Marylène Bertrand
Offrandes de la jouissance. Noroît, collection Initiale 15,95 $

Charles Drouin
Ne pas humecter. Noroît, collection Initiale 15,95 $

Laurent Poliquin
Orpailleur de bisous. Interligne, collection Fugues/Paroles 12,95 $

Compte rendu par Cyril Schreiber

Paru en 2009, *Offrandes de la jouissance* est le premier recueil de poésie de Marylène Bertrand qui, pour son entrée dans le monde littéraire, s'attaque à un sujet osé et casse-gueule : le sexe, et plus précisément la jouissance. Tout au long de cinq parties émaillées de citations pertinentes d'Annie Leclerc, Bertrand propose une réflexion originale et sincère sur ce sujet encore trop tabou. Par l'acte sexuel, c'est la vie qui est sublimée, c'est le bonheur que la femme, poète, veut atteindre. La poésie de Marylène Bertrand est ainsi très vivante, et les mots composés (nuage-amant, raison-navire) y sont récurrents. Un premier recueil fort réussi et audacieux, qui promet de belles choses de la part de la jeune poétesse québécoise.

Après *Maison vide*, le jeune poète québécois Charles Drouin récidive avec un recueil de poésie personnel et original, *Ne pas humecter*, qui promet de grandes choses mais s'essouffle rapidement. Dans la première partie, « porto et porno » (notons au passage les noms des cinq parties qui sont novateurs, cocasses, très poétiques), un homme rencontre une femme et l'aime. Mais celle-ci, prenant peur face au réel engagement (« tu as couru si vite pour éviter la seule phrase qui / importe »), s'enfuit, laissant l'homme seul et abandonné. C'est ensuite la dégradation de cet homme qui est illustrée dans « retailles d'hosties ». Malheureusement, ce fil narratif, encore plus percutant et touchant lorsqu'il est mélangé à la poésie concrète et prometteuse de Drouin, disparaît petit à petit dans le reste du recueil, où le je prédominant se mélange à un il qui aurait pu souligner l'aliénation de ce je poète, mais qui est amené malheureusement trop maladroitement. La dernière partie, le prologue, met en scène une petite fille qu'on soupçonne être la femme du début, lorsqu'elle était enfant. Mais ce n'est pas précisé, et on doute encore de la pertinence de cette finale. Le dernier poème du recueil, cependant, s'avère efficace : « j'ai étranglé ces voix une à une / je m'ennuie d'elles // j'aurais dû nous noyer / dans la mer noire / en un paragraphe ». *ne pas humecter* oscille ainsi entre poèmes brillants et manque de structure.

S'il est l'un des représentants de la jeune poésie franco-manitobaine, Laurent Poliquin vient de publier son cinquième recueil, *Orpailleur de bisous*. C'est ici un sujet casse-gueule et pas si fréquent : la relation entre un père et un fils, ou plutôt la fusion entre ces deux êtres qui doivent apprendre à se connaître. On sent toute l'expérience vécue de Poliquin, lui-même père, dans ses poèmes, puisque le langage poétique sonne vrai, juste, touchant. À la fois personnel et universel, ce recueil, composé d'épisodes heureux ou non de la paternité, permet de découvrir une voix littéraire unique très talentueuse. On regrettera seulement parfois un certain travail visuel inutile (le fait de séparer un mot en cinq lettres distinctes, par exemple). Mais sinon, une belle surprise qui vient de l'Ouest francophone, et un véritable poète à (re)découvrir.

Celebrating Lowry

Bryan Biggs and Helen Tookey, eds.
Malcolm Lowry: From the Mersey to the World.
Liverpool UP £14.95

Reviewed by Paul Tiessen

For Malcolm Lowry (1909-57)—as this portrait of a novelist ever in passage keeps reminding us—"cheerfulness was always breaking in" no matter how distressing the

evidence. This book signals that now, one hundred years after his birth, the time is right for a cheerful celebration of his life and language, and that a perfect place to begin is near Liverpool, especially its environs west of the River Mersey. There, on the Wirral Peninsula, we are invited into the starting point of Lowry's world-wide voyaging during which joy and anguish offered each other figure and ground. But in this book, joy, however slyly expressed, emerges as the dominant trope.

Malcolm Lowry: From the Mersey to the World is a visually arresting hard-cover volume beautifully and brashly produced by Liverpool University Press. The editors and over twenty other contributors provide a lucid meandering—a sharp-eyed "drifting," both meditative and documentary, through space and from place to place—that resonates with Lowry's resistances to rigidly linear narrative lines and revels in his investigations of spatial depths and circular structures. They evoke his encounters with particular worlds. They adapt his method of weaving together place and subjectivity to explore life and work along a spatio-aesthetic "Lowrytrek" haunted by the originary bifurcated space of the Wirral and Liverpool, and taking us (as in essays by Michele Gemelos and Annick Drösdal-Levillain) to fresh ways of seeing the lunatic city of Lowry's New York and the Dollarton idyll of his Burrard Inlet.

Visual images—some rooted in Lowry's Mexico—dominate close to half of the book's 160 pages. Pieces by more than a dozen artists include surrealist works by Edward Burra that bookend the collection: *Skeleton Party* (watercolour) at the start and *Dancing Skeletons* (gouache and ink wash) at the end. Comical but macabre works by Adrian Henri that include his *Day of the Dead, Hope Street* (acrylic) also cluster near the front, signalling that a birthday party of sorts is underway. Imagistic photographs and moody film stills by Cian Quayle and vivid photo documents by Colin Dilnot (along with essays exploring the Isle of Man and the Wirral Peninsula by these two artists) map worlds that once left their stamp on the young Lowry.

Anchored theoretically by Mark Goodall's essay, "'Lowrytrek': towards a psychogeography of Malcolm Lowry's Wirral," the writers in this collection enact echoes of Lowry's sojourns and wanderings, and the richness of his language. Lowry "let his poetic sensibilities flow, creating a mesmerizing terrain of linguistic play," Goodall observes, suggesting also the method of this book. Rotating around Goodall's essay are twelve meditations and statements in a variety of genres, some by fresh voices arriving in Lowry studies, offering delicate reflections from the personal to the poetic to the scholarly, ending with seasoned Lowry biographer Gordon Bowker's cryptic summation of Lowry and also his characters: "usually in motion, usually in search of salvation of some kind—sobriety, sanity or love."

Place au spectacle!

Marie-Claire Blais

Mai au bal des prédateurs. Boréal 27,95 $

Compte rendu par Véronique Trottier

Presque d'un seul souffle, avec ce style effréné auquel elle nous a habitués depuis *Soifs* (1995), Marie-Claire Blais nous invite, dans son roman *Mai au bal des prédateurs*, à contempler la vie à travers celle d'une foule de personnages. L'auteure aborde une multitude de thèmes, dont la maladie, le vieillissement, les problèmes environnementaux, la guerre, les préjugés, qui représentent autant de « prédateurs » pour l'être humain. Ultimement, la mort traverse aussi tout le texte, hante sans cesse les personnages. A priori, rien de bien réjouissant, mais « [l]a vie cesse-elle parce que la mort nous accompagne partout » ? Faut-il perdre

espoir parce que l'horreur et les périls nous guettent? Le roman choisit la vie, concilie inquiétude et optimisme, montre côte à côte la vie et la mort, l'espérance et la hantise. Il lance un appel à l'évolution du monde, à la liberté, à la tolérance. Ce rapprochement entre l'ombre et la lumière est porté en bonne partie par le monde des travestis, qui occupe la majeure partie du livre. L'auteure nous introduit dans cet univers méconnu, souvent méprisé, qui se montre sous nos yeux comme s'élevant vers la noblesse et le sacré. Les artistes du cabaret sont présentés comme des reines, au cœur même de leur royaume. Les toilettes des bars de la ville deviennent des temples, sur lesquels veille Yinn, un jeune travesti, le prince des déshérités, le messie des exclus de la société. Alliant beauté et laideur, féerie et drame, marginalité et universelle fraternité, cette communauté insolite symbolise un monde où tous auraient une place.

L'écriture de Marie-Claire Blais rythme aussi le cours du récit sur celui de la vie, qui défile sous nos yeux dans le ruissellement continu des pensées et des perceptions des personnages. Et comme la vie, le roman ne se divise pas en chapitres, ni même en paragraphes clairement définis, laissant libre le flux des pensées humaines dans leur nature remuante, toujours en mouvement. Quelques immenses phrases rendent compte d'une infinité de réalités, douloureuses et parfois tragiques, qui coexistent et assaillent tour à tour l'esprit, permettant de mettre au jour la complexité humaine, par fragments. Chacun d'eux nous effleure un moment, fragile et éphémère comme la vie, cède la place à un autre, revient, dans l'élan d'une ronde ininterrompue. On passe de l'individualité des personnages aux grandes questions sociales, dans un univers où le passé côtoie le présent, l'illusion la réalité, selon la logique d'un désordre organisé qui ressemble d'autant plus à une danse que chaque pas est accompagné de sa musique. Pour rendre la réalité plus digeste, moins désespérante, toutes les formes d'arts sont d'ailleurs mises à contribution. L'auteure met en scène un véritable spectacle, où tout et tous peuvent s'exprimer. Il n'est d'ailleurs pas anodin que plusieurs personnages soient des artistes, des créateurs, le passage par l'art semblant constituer la voie la plus sûre vers le salut. Et le roman incite à faire de la vie ce qu'en fait Marie-Claire Blais : une œuvre d'art.

But Enough About You

Tim Bowling
The Annotated Bee & Me. Gaspereau $18.95

Johanna Skibsrud
I Do Not Think That I Could Love Another a Human Being. Gaspereau $19.95

Paul Tyler
A Short History of Forgetting. Gaspereau $19.95

Reviewed by Tim Conley

Gaspereau Press certainly does produce handsome volumes, but the poetry so bound shows how treacherously fine is the line between precarious and precious.

Tim Bowling's title is not *The Annotated Bee & I*—not, one suspects, because he is averse to grammar but because the rhyme in *The Annotated Bee & Me* is so gosh-darn homey. More literally, though, there's the inspiration and object of his "annotations," a 1961 chapbook from his "Great-Aunt Gladys Muttart" about the family history of beekeeping, an object which apparently requires annotation because it can't speak for itself. Bowling tries to balance the cloying with the profound as he admires his museum piece: "The provenance is intimate, contained within a family. / The annotation is intimate, contained within a language." The irritation is intimate, contained within a parody.

A prefatory note called "Propolis" (defined –and thereby annotating the annotating preface to the annotations—as "a mysterious substance produced by

honeybees") details this provenance in prose, not trusting the verse to convey the facts, and concludes by declaring this book "sometimes dark" and "whimsical," itself "a kind of honey whose presentation pays homage to the vast and short distances between the generations of every family." If you can't find this honey in the Mixed Metaphor aisle of your supermarket, try the Nostalgia department's freezers:

> And now? The prospective groom will flash the question
> on the giant electronic scoreboard at some stadium,
> although it is more accurate to say that permission
> is no longer either a correct or incorrect fashion
> and likely neither bride nor groom will be a virgin—
> much more than the hand has already been given.
> Moreover, no hand today would enact a construction
> like "asked permission of." That just isn't written.
> And since a regular rhyme scheme is also verboten,
> I'll end clumsily: the young still fall in love.

Kids these days! Not only do they not respect conventions like rhyme and chastity, there's even the chance that they might look askance at clichés (the use of German "verboten") and stentorian euphemisms ("much more than the hand"—tee hee!).

Johanna Skibsrud has a better title: *I Do Not Think That I Could Love a Human Being*. The emphasis is still intractably on the lyric self (two *I*s to Bowling's single *Me*), but in fact it operates as a hermeneutic shell: this happened to *me*, and because *I* am so very deliberately a singular *I*, you cannot gainsay this, never mind conceivably participate in this song for *my* voice. Others need always to be qualified: in "You Spent All Day in the Water," all observations of "you" (or others) are interrupted with "to me" and "I thought" and "I think" and "So I understand it," with a rhythm that leaves no doubt about how unimportant it is what you spent all day doing, except that "I" took notice of it. And the poem ends with a pious acceptance of the sublime (here the ocean) that is in fact a narcissistic assimilation:

> I had all along, imagined it, and from
> an early age so that—although still
> inscrutable and vast—it became for me an
> agreeable incomprehension, which
> I accepted; like heaven.

That's badly punctuated prose, and too much of the book is made up of it.

I Do Not Think begins with a self-conscious reminiscence of a canoe trip ("Which begs the question: / Why write this poem in present tense, / knowing what I know?") and ends with a narrator alone atop "high mountains" contemplating how she might speak of otherwise unspeakable mysteries. Poetry for Skibsrud seems to be a way of not talking to others, of getting distance from experience and the world, and though several of the poems might fairly be characterized as "love poems" in some sense, the remote control of the whole only occasionally, indirectly questions itself:

> It would be a sad life, though, to
> sustain myself this way, only abstract
> rose to rose, and, next year would settle
> for some
> less than perfect offering.

Leonard Cohen, thou shouldst be reviewing at this hour!

"As first collections of poems go," its back cover copy tells us, "Paul Tyler's *A Short History of Forgetting* is remarkable." One feels a little sorry for a poet so damned with faint praise by his own publisher, but also for the glum sort of inevitability that drives (if that is the word) so many of the book's poems. This is occasional verse that presents "short history" as a narrative model keen on snappiness and tight closure. The title poem is, aptly, about packing to leave and an observance of a man who "knows the line between stealing and archaeology,"

though the observation makes it "easy to see the border / between memory and history." Snug abstractions.

Tyler enjoys (enjoyably) lists of objects, discreet manifests of curios and detritus, and (perhaps less enjoyably) pithy consolations. Watch for war mementoes and the snows of yesteryears. In his portraits of the inhabitants of a nursing home, each dutifully concludes with a poignant brushstroke of pathos: "it sounds like forgiveness"; "his forgetting gently consumes him"; "You are the last one to say her name." An account of late-night reading demonstrates his manner as well as his mind:

> Stay a little longer, the story goes. Half-read, you are stitched by possible endings. There's that sound, repeated in your ear, a crisp turning of hours; it keeps you here.

Six Kings and a Pawn

Stephen R. Bown
Merchant Kings: When Companies Ruled the World, 1600-1900. Douglas & McIntyre $34.95

Helen E. Ross, ed.
Letters from Rupert's Land, 1826-1840: James Hargrave of the Hudson's Bay Company. McGill-Queen's UP $49.95

Reviewed by Ted Binnema

Six "merchant kings" and one obscure employee of the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) feature in these two starkly different books. In separate chapters, Stephen Bown examines the careers of Jan Pieterszoon Coen (of the Dutch East India Company), Pieter Stuyvesant (Dutch West India Company), Robert Clive (English East India Company), Alexandr Baranov (Russian American Company), George Simpson (HBC), and Cecil Rhodes (British South Africa Company). These men's leadership of large monopolistic companies put them in positions of economic power and civil authority in vast territories. The main theme permeating the book is that power and authority were lenses magnifying the unsavory aspects of each man's personality—especially inclinations towards violence, autocracy, and arrogance. Bown's are portraits of cold and ruthless men.

Merchant Kings ably does what Bown intended it to do: provide a general audience with a good read. It is neither analytically innovative nor interpretively sophisticated. The book has no citations, and only a short bibliography featuring secondary sources—some quite old. The need for entertaining stories evidently convinced Bown to repeat some unlikely arguments and interpretations. It doesn't matter. Only credulous readers will read the book as fact. Bown's work laudably contributes to the aim of sustaining public interest in history—something we academic historians haven't done much lately.

George Simpson's career with the HBC coincided almost exactly with that of James Hargrave. But Simpson—the subject of one of Bown's chapters—was very different than Hargrave, the subject of Helen Ross's *Letters from Rupert's Land*. Ross' book consists of a forty-page introduction and about 350 pages of primary documents, mostly letters written by Hargrave to his Lowland Scottish emigrant parents and siblings in Lower Canada, and his extended family, close friends (and eventually his fiancée) in Canada and Scotland, but it also includes his 1820 engagement contract with the North West Company, and journals he kept during 1828 and 1829 to send to his family.

Ross is not an academic historian, but her informative and carefully researched (but somewhat stilted) introduction and the useful annotations to the letters are aimed at a scholarly audience. Some readers familiar with the unpublished Hargrave papers might be disappointed in the letters Ross selected for publication. They might prefer selections from the same papers published by G.P. de T. Glazebrook (1938) emphasizing the fur trade and the life of traders, and

by Margaret Arnett MacLeod (1947), to highlight a woman's perspective. The fact that Ross was drawn to Hargrave's letters because she herself is descended from him might tempt some to dismiss the collection as rooted in filiopietism. But give the collection a chance. You might become captivated by the poignant story the letters reveal.

James Hargrave's letters offer valuable evidence relating to the history of families, the history of migrants, and the history of religious thought. Specifically, they reveal Hargrave's drive to better his station in life (and his desire to see his immigrant family flourish in Canada), his deep love for his family, his abiding affection for Scotland, and his devout Presbyterianism. Hargrave comes across as a warm and sensitive man—the opposite of any of Bown's merchant kings. The letters also offer some insight into the intellectual life at HBC posts. Hargrave, like many of the HBC's educated men, read voraciously.

Readers of *Letters from Rupert's Land* will see dimensions of fur-trade life quite different from what they might expect. Hargrave was employed by the HBC at York Factory—the company's North American headquarters along the bleak coast of Hudson Bay. But his life resembled the life of a twenty-first-century urban office worker more than the stereotypical fur trader. Desk-bound for twelve or more hours a day, Hargrave grew overweight and stressed. Torn between his love for his aging parents and his desire to earn enough money to retire early, he put off furloughs in the hopes of securing promotions. He learned no Cree, and showed little interest in the Native people who visited the post. He evidently developed no attachment to Rupert's Land. Someone writing a novel about life in the fur trade would find some grist here.

Although they are very different books, Bown's and Ross' will both find niches. Bown's entertaining and generally informative book will appeal particularly to an educated and curious public. Ross presents a collection of letters to which scholars and writers will be able to resort for insights into the life of a Scottish immigrant to Canada, turned fur trader.

Explorer ciel et grotte

André Brochu
Cahiers d'Icare : Poésie. Triptyque 16,00 $

Michaël La Chance
[mytism] Terre ne se meurt pas. Triptyque 25,00 $

Compte rendu par Émilie Théorêt

Deux cahiers, celui des « Choses du jour » et celui des « Voies de nuit »; deux mouvements, l'un ascendant, l'autre descendant. L'écriture permet l'envol du corps. Les mots rédempteurs, comme des plumes, constituent ce premier cahier, ces ailes, qui permettent la haute voltige. Près du soleil, ils traduisent les joies de la chair dans l'amour, le corps généreux d'une femme aimée, la présence de Dieu, l'espoir, la grâce. Dans toute cette lumière « le contraire de la mort n'est pas la vie / mais la montée jusqu'à l'éclat de l'être ».

Ces mêmes ailes de mots, alors qu'elles se déplument, entraînent aussi la chute. Le verbe icarien aborde alors la mort, la misère et l'injustice humaine, la guerre, les horreurs d'Auschwitz, la décrépitude du corps, l'écoulement du temps. Dans toute cette boue, le corps de la chute ressent la vieillesse, le froid, l'imminence de la mort; il sent sous ses pieds, cette terre sanguinolente, emplie des cadavres du passé. Revêtant les allures d'un adieu, les derniers poèmes témoignent de l'approchement du corps vers l'Éternité, vers un paradis sans espoir, vers l'oubli.

Cependant, le désespoir ne l'emporte pas. Tel qu'on le lit en début de recueil, « qu'importe si lavé de tes délires tu te connais en toi / plus proche de la mort et délivré des vanités du planement ». De fait, l'humilité des mots, en reconnaissant la chute, permettent la grâce. En ce sens, les mots ne sauvent-ils donc pas de soi et du désespoir de la fin?

Le voyage dans la verticalité proposé par Michaël La Chance ne constitue pas une perte d'altitude, mais plutôt une exploration du gouffre que chacun de nous constitue. En ce gouffre réside la « poësis originaire », que l'histoire humaine aurait perdue. Le poète propose de quitter le bruit et l'échec de la parole pour aller vers le mutisme. Il s'agit de visiter l'obscurité en laissant derrière soi cette lumière trop vive qui brûle : ce langage trop abusé et devenu insignifiant. En ce creux, il découvre de nouvelles perceptions, quelques filets de lumières : « sous sa voûte d'aplomb le monde brille encore par ses interstices ». Dans ce retour à la matrice, la « Terre ne se meurt pas » : elle continue d'inspirer.

Au travers de cette quête « éco-poïétique », le lecteur parcours un univers aux multiples citations, exergues, images et symboles. Le texte abonde et noircit l'espace du livre, sous forme de poésie sur les pages de gauche et sous forme de prose et de métadiscours sur celles de droites. À cela s'ajoute la diversité graphique et les inscriptions phonétiques. La facture fragmentaire et surchargée du recueil témoigne du mouvement des perceptions et du sujet dans la fluidité de la vie. Par ce surplus visuel et sémantique, on est tenté de se questionner sur l'entreprise de l'auteur à faire parler le silence. Car c'est difficilement, au-delà du bruit si fortement imprégné dans l'univers saturé du recueil, qu'il faut tenter d'en trouver la vision.

Témoignage et réflexion

Fulvio Caccia avec Bruno Ramirez et Lamberto Tassinari, éds.
La Transculture et ViceVersa. Triptyque 26,00 $

Compte rendu par Lucie Lequin

En 2007, une vingtaine de personnes se sont réunies pour célébrer *ViceVersa* et revoir cette aventure intellectuelle et artistique qui a duré quinze ans. Les fondateurs Fulvio Caccia, Gianni Caccia, Antonio D'Alfonso, Bruno Ramirez, Lamberto Tassinari y étaient, de même que des collaborateurs, des illustrateurs et des lecteurs, au fond des penseurs, qui réfléchissent à la transculture, dont Walter Moser, Pierre Ouellet, Simon Harel.

Le livre réunit les textes des participants et retranscrit, dans la troisième partie, les « Dialogues croisés » entre les illustrateurs et les photographes qui ont collaboré à *ViceVersa.* Il se divise en cinq parties; la première et la dernière comprennent des textes de création ou de réflexion philosophique. La quatrième partie, plus mémorielle, relate des faits et des rencontres entre les fondateurs, de même que d'autres témoignages soit de personnes qui ont collaboré plus tard, soit des lecteurs attentifs à la transculture. La plupart de ces textes sont personnels. La contribution de Fulvio Caccia est surtout une réflexion sur le devenir immigrant et aurait pu être placée dans la deuxième partie. Ces textes intéressent pour la petite histoire de *ViceVersa* et des fondateurs ou collaborateurs. Ils disent aussi la passion et l'urgence qui les animaient. Si un jour, un chercheur retrace la grande histoire de *ViceVersa*, il devra s'y rapporter.

C'est la deuxième partie comptant sept réflexions majeures qui m'a le plus intéressée parce qu'elles débordent amplement sur la transculture plaçant l'effet *ViceVersa* dans un contexte large, et, en ce sens, sont d'intérêt pour tous les chercheurs s'interrogeant à ce sujet. J'en signale particulièrement trois. Le texte de Ouellet inscrit *ViceVersa* dans

la lignée des phares intellectuels et culturels que sont, entre autres, *Le Refus global* et *Les Herbes rouges*. Il y voit un « nouveau partage du sensible » qui redessinent les rapports entre les êtres, les idées . . . Harel s'attarde aux écrivains italo-québécois qui auront été « parmi les premiers à faire le deuil de leur ethnicité afin de promouvoir une nouvelle forme de représentation du collectif québécois. » Moser, par une relecture d'un texte de Pierre Nepveu, montre comment s'est opérée la domestication nationale de la transculturation. Il est impossible de rendre compte de tous ces textes, parfois provocateurs (la nouvelle canadianité de Van Schendel, le transionisme de Anselmi), mais leur lecture vaut le détour soit pour nourrir sa propre pensée soit pour nuancer, voire mettre en doute ce qui est dit.

Seriously Taken

David Carpenter
Welcome to Canada. Porcupine's Quill $27.95

M.A.C. Farrant
Down the Road to Eternity: New and Selected Fiction. Talonbooks $19.95

Cynthia Flood
The English Stories. Biblioasis $19.95

D.C. Troicuk
Loose Pearls and Other Stories. Cape Breton UP $14.95

Reviewed by Kathryn Carter

To quickly catch the flavour of these highly accomplished but quite different collections, imagine if they were arranged on a menu. D. C. Troicuk's stories are appealing and meatily satisfying appetizers, teasing the palate but delivering as much substance as any entrée. The twist here is that the appetizers should consist of Kam lunchmeat or Maple Leaf cookies and should ideally be consumed in a Cape Breton kitchen or out of a miner's lunchbox. David Carpenter and Cynthia Flood offer heavy main course selections: Carpenter delivers a gamy mixture of venison, sardines, cocoa, and backwoods pine in stories that stretch out into novellas. A meal of pancakes and bacon eaten in Carpenter's work is chewed slowly by a father, "each mouthful . . . a separate incident in the morning's events, which he was putting into proper sequence," while a bulldog is fed quietly under the table. This is the kind of manly breakfast needed before heading outdoors to get in the truck and hunt something as many of his characters do. At the other end of the spectrum, perhaps, is a scene from the same story, "Luce," in a setting north of Yellowknife: "silver pitchers of water and bowls of ice, silver siphons of soda water, regiments of bottled stout, ale, Canadian Pilsner, and a large tray of gin and whisky bottles" followed by a complete recipe for roasting pike with marjoram, butter, savoury, and oysters. Flood's stories, which unravel into a novel-length set of interconnections, present a sodden English concoction of rum, puddings, and the smell of wet wool. Oh wait. One of Flood's characters describes it for us already: "grey potatoes, fish drowned in scorched white sauce, and stodge with caramel." The dessert course then belongs to the lemony absurdist filigrees of M.A.C. Farrant. Her dessert contribution might even be a "Kristmas Kraft" made of luncheon meat, olives, cocktail wieners, and Velveeta Cheese. Each collection showcases a mature writer with a very sure sense of his or her own voice.

Loose Pearls is D.C. Troicuk's first book of stories (released of course from Cape Breton University Press) although many have been previously published in highly regarded journals. She has been praised for illuminating the culture of Cape Breton, and stories like "The H Factor," featuring the abortive pipe dreams of disenfranchised Cape Breton worker Neil, do not disappoint. Similarly, "Overburden" features miner Roddie McSween in a moving evocation of a Cape Breton life sunk by the lack

of choices. Point of view is used effectively. For example, the reader encounters Devon in "What Happened . . . Again" only in approximations. We are not immediately told of his limitations, and understanding grows as slowly as empathy as the story unveils itself. Troicuk employs stylistic innovations to convey multiple points of view in "Thirteen," a brooding and regretful meditation not on lost chances, but on those shadows of human connection that are so fragile and nascent they hardly even amount to a chance. In this case, a woman notices that her teenage crush, who did not notice her as a teenager, has returned to town with a daughter and no wife. The possibility of new beginnings and adult redemption from teenage ignominy hovers over the story, but instead, it ends tentatively, " . . . once—she couldn't be certain because of the shadows—but just once she thought she caught him looking her way." Her stories unfold gently and cover a great deal of human territory; they are dark and fully imagined.

David Carpenter's award-winning work (which recently garnered new awards) is prefaced with an introduction from Warren Cariou, who pronounces the writer to be a "master of voice and character." The characters ring true, and they are characters not always evident in fiction: blue-collar heroes of the backwoods populate the novella "The Ketzer," for example. His milieu is unapologetically, un-ironically Canadian and appropriately titled *Welcome to Canada*. The book should, by rights, reek of wood smoke. His characters use words like "hoser" and quote from Robert Service, and they appear in stories that are honest, hungry, and muscular, stories that bear-hug the reader with firmness of purpose rather than aggression.

The celebrated and anthologized Cynthia Flood offers a completely realized world in *The English Stories*. Engagement with the world of words is what stays with you after these stories end, that and the impossibility of acceptance for the displaced main character, Amanda. She is a Canadian girl who finds herself at a school in England for two years, pulled along like flotsam in the eddy of her parents' lives. Flood prefaces the work with a quote from Thomas Flanagan, "It is rather the rule than the exception in human affairs that the principal actors in great events lack all knowledge of the true causes by which they are propelled." This insight or philosophy gives an underlying logical coherence to the varying points of view conveyed in each of the stories. Tilly and Milly Talbot, the sheltered sisters, lead lives of quiet desperation in "The Usual Accomplishments," as does Mr. Greene, history teacher, and closeted Scotsman in "A Civil Plantation." Flood shows us that none of us ever get a complete and true perspective on events, even those—especially those?—that happen in our own lives. Our fate is identical to Amanda's.

M.A.C. Farrant teams up again with Talonbooks to deliver a new selection of stylistically inventive and energetic stories. Many are brief reflections asking probing questions about—for instance—laugh tracks, as in "The Bright Gymnasium of Fun." Commas take on a life of their own with consequences for storytelling in "The Comma Threat." In another story, porcelain figures come to life and run away for "fragile sex" during a vacation. Farrant's penchant for the aphoristic is shown to best advantage in the story "Point Ten," which offers five connected lists that derive much energy through centripetal force: they are bound together in structure and theme but shoot off, delightfully, in all directions. For example, one item in the first list reads: "When love is lost do not be ashamed. Turn the memory of love on its side and push and pull and stroke it. Soon you will have a colourless, odourless shape like a glass dome, practical enough to encase your heart in." This, among other items

on the lists, blends her trademark humour with a poet's visceral turn of metaphor to very good effect. Farrant has a lightness of touch, and her writing is not too charmed by its own cleverness; she achieves something quite tricky there. With an eye to the world that is somewhat aslant, her stories cannot nestle neatly into the forms usually associated with realism, and the formats she chooses are refreshing: at her best, it feels as if she is getting at the heart of something that takes other writers much longer to lead us to. "Life is too important to be taken seriously," Oscar Wilde famously said, and this is a dictum that seems to guide these stories. Without giggling and without mocking judgment, she reveals for readers the joyful incoherence of human history so that she can say with a kind of infallible logic, "All men named Bob are secret pillars of the universe, as are all women named Janice." By the time you reach this story near the end of her collection, your only answer as a reader is "why yes, of course."

Par petites lampées

André Carpentier
Extraits de cafés. Boréal 25,95 $

Compte rendu par Geneviève Dufour

Le fragment est une forme qui semble chère à l'auteur André Carpentier. Il en est à sa troisième œuvre du genre, exploitant le bref et le discontinu. *Extraits de cafés* s'insère donc dans une lignée de récits (*Mendiant de l'infini. Fragments nomades* et *Ruelles, jours ouvrables. Flâneries en ruelle* parus comme *Extraits de cafés* aux éditions Boréal) qui mettent de l'avant les talents d'observateur de l'écrivain. L'œuvre est divisée en deux parties : « Au gré du temps » et « Au gré des carnets » fractionnées, elles aussi, en sous-parties. La première section, comme son nom l'indique, répertorie les anecdotes selon l'heure du jour, tandis que la seconde organise les événements selon des thèmes : l'amour, la solitude, le mouvement, la lecture. Dans l'ensemble, il s'agit de brefs textes reposant sur la description. Or, les événements sont rendus non pas par l'entremise de la consignation minutieuse mais plutôt par le biais du détail signifiant capable de saisir en peu de mots l'essence d'une ambiance, les traits d'un inconnu, d'un serveur. André Carpentier parvient rapidement à cerner les singularités de chacun, à dresser des portraits, des esquisses de portraits devrait-on dire, vu la brièveté avec laquelle sont présentés les protagonistes de ses récits. Cette brièveté est permise grâce à l'usage efficace de la métaphore et de la métonymie : « Ici, des vieux aux yeux mouillants, dont un bonhomme avec des abajoues de hamster, auprès d'une dame d'autrefois. Plus loin, sur une table, gît une main tremblante de vieille femme, à mi-chemin d'une tasse vide et d'un reste de gâterie. » Ici, l'acuité du regard n'est pas le fondement de l'écriture puisque la représentation souvent métonymique amplifient les traits décrits. Ainsi, construire un portrait fidèle n'est pas la finalité des fragments. Celle-ci repose en fait sur le rendu des pérégrinations réflexives de l'auteur attablé, seul, devant son café. Il médite sur la création littéraire, sur la philosophie, sur les figures d'écrivains. L'influence de Merleau-Ponty et de sa *Phénoménologie de la perception* est d'ailleurs aisément repérable. Ce dernier est cité explicitement à quelques reprises et les sens, atteignant parfois un niveau de saturation, sont convoqués dans le rendu de l'expérience : « J'en viens, dans une confusion des sens, à écouter des visages, à toucher des voix, à sentir des murs, à goûter des parfums, à fixer des brioches, et c'est là que tout commence. » On explore la phénoménologie comme on pèse le poids de la solitude. Les cafés sont certes le lieu de la foule, mais aussi un repère pour les solitaires. Bref, il s'agit d'une œuvre à consommer par petites lampées car elle reprend sans cesse le même leitmotiv et crée un effet de redondance.

Rendez-vous avec la mort

Jean-François Chassay
Sous pression. Boréal 22,95 $

Jacques Rousseau
ROM (Read Only Memory). Triptyque 22,00 $

Compte rendu par Virginie Doucet

Un brillant physicien aux compétences sociales limitées pense au suicide. Sa vie professionnelle est réussie, mais sa vie personnelle l'est moins et il n'arrive pas à trouver un sens à son existence. Rationnel jusque dans ses pensées suicidaires—« il ne se considère pas comme un dépressif, simplement un désespéré rationnel au bout du rouleau »—il décide de se donner une dernière chance en demandant à neuf de ses connaissances d'essayer de le convaincre que la vie vaut la peine d'être vécue. Ces rencontres se dérouleront toutes la même journée et chacun n'aura droit qu'à une heure pour tenter de ranimer sa flamme qui, s'ils échouent, s'éteindra à jamais.

Les chapitres alternent entre ses propres pensées alors qu'il se rend d'un rendez-vous à l'autre et le discours de ceux qu'il a choisi de rencontrer en cette possible dernière journée de sa vie. Les neuf rencontres sont présentées comme des monologues où le suicidaire n'a pas de voix et où les gens révèlent finalement davantage leurs propres problèmes qu'ils ne réussissent à convaincre le principal intéressé de vivre.

Même si l'idée de départ était intéressante, les personnages de Chassay n'arrivent pas à s'imposer. On ne sent pas bien leur individualité percer à travers leur logorrhée; ils finissent par tous se ressembler dans leur égocentrisme et leur manière de s'adresser à leur ami qui, monologue oblige, leur met dans la bouche des phrases peu naturelles où ils décrivent leur interlocuteur : « Ah, t'es drôle, tu rougis ! . . . Bon, tu hausses les épaules et penches la tête, tournée à trente-cinq degrés au sud-est. Bien ça, toi. »

Mis à part un défilé intéressant des grands suicidés de l'histoire, d'Ajax, roi de Salamine, à Dédé Fortin, en passant par Virginia Woolf et Hemingway, l'histoire imaginée par Chassay reste peu crédible.

C'est aussi à une rencontre avec la mort que nous convie Jacques Rousseau avec *ROM*, son dernier roman. Une jeune psychologue prometteuse a été trouvée morte au département de psychologie de l'Université de Trois-Rivières. Le meurtrier a reconstitué, avec le cadavre, la scène de l'Ancien Testament où la femme de Loth, fuyant la ville de Sodome en flammes, se fait transformer en statue de sel parce qu'elle a regardé là où elle ne devait pas. C'est la secrétaire du département qui découvre sa collègue pétrifiée : « En face d'elle se trouvait une femme immobile, pieds nus, avec pour seul vêtement un grand drap blanc . . . Le drap ne couvrait que l'épaule droite, laissant voir le sein gauche, un petit sein ferme avec le mamelon recouvert de poudre blanche. »

La jeune femme chargée de l'enquête, Agathe de Francheville, n'a que quatre jours pour trouver le ou la coupable si elle ne veut pas que la Sûreté du Québec reprenne l'enquête. Aidée de sa mère, de la secrétaire du département de psychologie et d'un collègue policier, elle se lancera sur différentes pistes pouvant la mener au meurtrier. L'affaire se révélera être une histoire d'abus sexuels découverte entre autres grâce à la mémoire d'un ordinateur, d'où le titre du roman, *Read Only Memory.*

Le roman de Jacques Rousseau est bien ficelé et divertissant, mais le suspense n'est pas maintenu assez longuement et les personnages ne sont pas assez nuancés. Jacques Rousseau, ancien professeur au département de psychoéducation de l'Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, parsème habilement son roman de références à la psychologie qu'on aurait souhaité voir développées davantage.

Le cœur de la tempête à lire

Herménégilde Chiasson et Louis-Dominique Lavigne
Le Cœur de la tempête. Prise de parole 13,95 $

Compte rendu par Jean-Sébastien Ménard

Herménégilde Chiasson et Louis-Dominique Lavigne signent, avec *Le cœur de la tempête*, une pièce destinée à un public adolescent mettant en scène un couple de baby-boomers, Michel et Christiane, qui, même s'ils s'aiment encore, décident de rompre le soir du réveillon de 1999. Il faut dire que lors de leur mariage, ils avaient élaboré et signé un contrat où ils stipulaient qu'ils s'engageaient à rester ensemble pendant vingt-cinq ans, à la suite de quoi ils devaient obligatoirement se séparer « afin d'accueillir le cœur neuf de ce nouveau millénaire ».

En ce soir de fête, ils doivent donc trouver comment annoncer la nouvelle à leurs enfants, Sébastien et Geneviève, qui sont conviés au foyer familial pour célébrer la venue de l'an 2000 avec eux. En les attendant, Michel et Christiane se souviennent de leur passé, de leurs parents et de leur jeunesse tout en discutant de celle de leur progéniture. Au fil de leurs conversations et de celles qu'ils ont au téléphone avec leurs enfants, le lecteur se familiarise avec le cheminement personnel de chacun des personnages. Retour vers le passé, mise en perspective du point de vue de chaque génération vis-à-vis des autres, discussions autour des choix de vie des jeunes, et réflexions sur l'avenir ponctuent ainsi le 31 décembre 1999 de cette famille grâce à laquelle le nouveau millénaire s'ouvre sur une note d'amour et d'espoir malgré les différents et les conflits qui ponctuent leur vie.

Avec cette pièce, Chiasson et Lavigne affirment avoir voulu « mettre en parallèle [leur] adolescence et celle des ados ». Ils explorent ainsi avec justesse les rapports entre les générations et leurs préoccupations.

Il faut, par ailleurs, souligner que cette pièce a été conçue pour être jouée par un comédien et une comédienne qui doivent « interpréter tous les personnages qui y évoluent. Comme si ceux-ci faisaient partie de l'univers psychique de Michel et Christiane [les baby-boomers]. Comme si toute la pièce, au fond, se passait dans leurs têtes », dans un décor plus suggestif que réaliste.

À lire, et surtout à voir sur scène.

The Many or One

Kevin Connolly
Revolver. Anansi $14.95

David W. McFadden
Be Calm, Honey. Mansfield $18.99

Lisa Robertson
Lisa Robertson's Magenta Soul Whip. Coach House $16.95

Reviewed by Douglas Barbour

The back cover of Kevin Connolly's *Revolver* argues that his poems "present a challenge to the idea that an honest poetic voice need be singular, static, egocentric, and bound by convention." An ideal devoutly to be wished. And Connolly is not alone in practicing it.

In *Revolver*, Connolly stages a number of formal approaches to vary the speakers of his poems. And they do speak: complaints, jokes, cries of love, anger, put downs, sardonic asides, almost all addressing someone, in postmodern variations on the apostrophe. And although he does so in many voices, there is a general, even continuing, sense of wit, language, and a sardonic view of the world throughout.

Connolly essays his own version of the gloss, some sonnets, rhyming quatrains, as well as various kinds of free verse. He likes to borrow and change, using collage and cut-ups to give his speakers wide room to manoeuver. "Standard," for example, mixes phrases from The Great American Songbook. Sometimes such play goes

on a little too long, as in "Antonia Is Not the Plasterer." In the very powerful "No Windows," a stream of images about child abduction, the shifting repetitions create a mood of unfocused terror. On the whole, *Revolver* provides a wide range of emotion and intellectual engagement.

David McFadden's uniquely eccentric stance is fully present in the 129 sonnets of *Be Calm, Honey*. Although adopting an array of personae and voices, the poems do seem to concentrate on death, the pastness of the past, and the losses others' deaths have brought. Being McFadden, he often confronts these losses, real or anticipated, with a wicked if understated sense of humour.

Although they look traditional, with their octaves and sestets, McFadden's sonnets are about as open as they can get, casual and sly. Written between January 2004 and June 2008, these poems annotate a time in both his and his readers' lives; if half of them seem almost hermetically personal (but who is the person saying these things?), the rest reach out to remind us of the dangerously slapstick world we share. The large range of moods in *Be Calm, Honey* reflect both the times and the generous spirit of the writer. Many provoke laughter, yet a general underlying sense of melancholy hovers over the whole. The final poem captures that latter tone perfectly: it begins, "When my mother died I saw her standing / alone at midnight at some railway station"; it mentions that, "She was different than she'd been in life"; and it ends, "The train pulled out silently and empty. / I was the only person left on the planet."

Lisa Robertson keeps telling it ever more slant. In *Lisa Robertson's Magenta Soul Whip*, she whips many souls into subtle shapes, as various "I"s speak learnedly, if obscurely, about a world itself far too complex to pin down in lyric description. Even more than Connolly, her writing refuses the singular, static, egocentric, and convention-bound. Robertson writes beautiful sentences and lines that almost make ordinary sense but never quite fall into that trap. As a "quotation" suggests, "Her pronoun is sedition unrecognized as such." But that's only one screen of a "Voice-Over for Split-Screen Video Loop." Which simply extends the on-going construction of confusion that is this book.

Robertson is one of our most crisply intelligent writers, and the poems and prose pieces in *Lisa Robertson's Magenta Soul Whip* (that possessive signalling one particularizing quality of this text), with their allusiveness (in all senses: history, philosophy, art criticism are but a few of the implied intertexts), continually knock readers off their conventional responses, asking that they follow the curlicues of thought-in-motion the writing displays. One poem that deploys all of Robertson's gifts, "On Painting," begins with a reference to Pliny's thoughts on the art, slides to Egypt as possible origin, back to Pliny on painting and war, with asides on other possibilities, until its first part moves beyond Pliny:

> Each earth has a property and a use. Pliny
> speaks of each.
> But generally it's worth repeating: the
> earth is an island mixed with blood.
> In its furnace we concoct colour.

In the next two parts "painting" becomes a person, a social effect, something government will silence if it can. Yet the tone remains cool, there is no "political" rhetoric; rather there is an invitation to think the possibilities along with the poem.

"On Painting" provides but a modest taste of what Robertson offers in this volume. All the pieces, whether verse or prose, are essays in the old sense, attempts to make the process of thinking (with heart) visible, "lisible." Take "The Story," in which the narrating "I" attempts verb after verb, until:

> And all the roads grew dark
> with my longing and my tears. It snowed
> in darkness. I strewed, I strove, I swelled
> all night.
> The truck sheared through the Night.

Or any of the pieces: Lisa Robertson writes along a line between language that mocks meaning and facile conventions. *Lisa Robertson's Magenta Soul Whip* insists that language moves, with exquisite care, along that knife-edge, dangerous and cool, emotions banked but fiery beneath the text's apparently calm and collected surface.

Inventer la vie

Gil Courtemanche
Je ne veux pas mourir seul. Boréal 19,95 $

Compte rendu par Jean-Sébastien Ménard

Gil Courtemanche signe avec *Je ne veux pas mourir seul* un roman où l'amour et la mort se côtoient intimement. Dans ce récit autofictif, l'auteur met en scène son double. Ce dernier, au cours de la même semaine, apprend que sa femme Violaine le laisse et qu'il a le cancer. Pour lui, « la peine d'amour . . . semble plus tragique » que la maladie. Sa Violaine était son « système immunitaire, l'antibiotique absolu ». Sans elle, la vie n'a plus le même éclat. En fait, ses jours ne sont bientôt plus qu'une succession de tristesse et de morosité.

Autour de lui, quelques personnes, dont sa sœur, tentent de l'épauler, de l'accompagner et surtout de l'égayer. Toutefois, cela s'avère difficile, voire impossible à faire puisque si Violaine a été « sa naissance », elle est aussi « sa mort ». Ainsi, ce ne sont pas les traitements contre son cancer ou encore ses visites dans les hôpitaux qui s'avèrent le plus difficile à supporter, mais bien l'absence de cette femme qu'il adore et idéalise. En effet, vivre sans elle, selon lui, n'est pas vivre, c'est une forme insidieuse de mort, « une sorte de cancer émotif ».

Au fil des traitements contre sa maladie, le protagoniste se souvient de sa relation avec Violaine. En fait, il vit le deuil de ce qu'ils ont été et de ce qu'ils auraient pu devenir. C'est à travers cette « mort » qu'il se bat contre son cancer pour prolonger, comme il le souligne avec lucidité, « la tristesse de sa vie »; cette vie qu'il juge avoir ratée en dépit de ses succès d'écrivain et de journaliste. Se jugeant condamné à la fiction, c'est par l'écriture qu'il trouve la force de survivre, en « inventant la vie pour ne pas mourir ».

Avec ce roman, Courtemanche prouve à nouveau qu'il est un grand auteur. Par son écriture, il arrive à illustrer avec finesse la douleur ressentie lors d'une peine d'amour et à décrire le voyage intérieur effectué par celui atteint d'une maladie annonciatrice d'une mort éminente.

Quand la littérature veut sauver le monde!

Gil Courtemanche
Le Monde, le lézard et moi. Boréal 22.95 $

Marc-Alain Wolf
Sauver le monde. Triptyque 20,00 $

Compte rendu par Jimmy Thibeault

Le Monde, le lézard et moi de Gil Courtemanche raconte l'histoire d'une prise de conscience à l'égard des injustices que vivent les plus démunis de ce monde. Ce récit passe par la voix narrative de Claude qui raconte comment il en vient à perdre toute illusion face aux institutions du droit et à traquer, lui-même, un chef de guerre congolais accusé d'avoir exploité des enfants-soldats en leur faisant perpétrer d'horribles crimes. Pourtant, on apprend que Claude s'était fait juriste justement pour occuper une position lui permettant d'intégrer les institutions qui lui donnerait le pouvoir de réparer les injustices sociales qui l'entourent. Or, alors qu'il travaille à la Cour pénale internationale de La Haye, Claude apprend que le dossier de Kabanga, qui le préoccupe depuis des mois, est rejeté pour des raisons de bris de procédure, ce qui a pour effet de libérer le chef de guerre et de le renvoyer au Congo où il peut reprendre ses occupations et pourchasser les témoins de l'accusation. Face à l'échec

du système pénal, Claude quitte son travail et se rend lui-même dans la petite ville qu'habite Kabanga et il aide les victimes de ce dernier à trouver la force de terminer ce que la Cour pénale internationale n'avait pu faire : Kabanga est jugé et exécuté.

On retrouve également, chez les personnages de *Sauver le monde* de Marc-Alain Wolf, ce désir de participer à l'amélioration des conditions d'existence des autres individus. Ici, cependant, il est moins question de justice sociale que de don de soi, voire le sacrifice de soi pour le bien-être de l'autre. Dans ce roman fondé sur l'espoir—vain?—de sauver le monde, on retrouve trois personnages dont la survie dépend du sacrifice de chacun, mais surtout de la jeune Natacha, pour l'autre. Louis Gouru, d'abord, est celui qui permet à Natacha, avec l'aide de François, un ami médecin, de donner un sens à la vie de la jeune femme qui souffre de troubles psychologiques. À son tour, elle permet à Louis de réaliser son rêve de fonder une maison d'édition qui se spécialise dans l'édition des auteurs laissés pour compte. L'aide qu'apporte Natacha au projet est d'autant plus importante que Louis est atteint d'une maladie dégénérative. La jeune femme est également au centre de la réalisation du projet médical de François qui perçoit la jouissance sexuelle comme un outil de prévention de la maladie. Mais, comme le projet de Louis, celui de François est confronté à des difficultés de taille, alors qu'une jeune avocate lui fait un procès pour harcèlement sexuel. Encore une fois, c'est l'intervention de Natacha qui permettra de sauver la mise. Le roman, à la fin, soulève cependant une question qui reste en suspend : jusqu'où peut aller le don de soi? Peut-être jusqu'à l'effacement complet de son individualité . . .

Un thème, deux poétiques

Gracia Couturier
Chacal, mon frère. David 22,95 $

Michel Ouellette
Fractures du dimanche. Prise de parole 16,95 $

Compte rendu par Stéphane Girard

De leur coin de pays respectif, les auteurs Gracia Couturier, acadienne, et Michel Ouellette, franco-ontarien, ont tous deux fait paraître récemment des romans qui mettent en scène des personnages d'écrivain (un poète d'une part, une dramaturge de l'autre) aux prises avec d'importantes interrogations liées à la filiation, à la création, à l'existence et à des situations personnelles troubles. Si ces ouvrages recouvrent ainsi un même univers thématique, ils ne pourraient être plus différents au niveau de leur poétique, alors qu'ils optent chacun, formellement parlant, pour deux versants bien distincts de la modernité littéraire.

Le roman de Couturier, *Chacal, mon frère*, s'articule autour d'une rivalité fraternelle au cœur d'un petit village forestier du Nouveau-Brunswick : Bruno, ténébreux, psychotique et (sous le pseudonyme de Chacal) poète s'oppose aux succès d'Étienne, fils prodige rêvant de littérature et hésitant entre les deux femmes qu'il aime. Le nœud du drame réside dans le fait que « Bruno est revenu vivre à Sainte-Croix pour écrire sa dernière œuvre. Non pas une fiction celle-là, mais un récit de vie, le récit qu'il manipule au gré de sa vengeance. Il est revenu afin de pouvoir agir directement sur les antagonistes. » La narration de ce projet d'obscure vengeance meurtrière (parfois interrompue par la poésie mièvre et d'un lyrisme banal du personnage de Bruno) détaille également la dangereuse drave pratiquée par les ancêtres, la mort du curé Brisebois qui émeut cette communauté tissée serrée, la récitation d'une « dizaine de chapelets » par-ci et le terrifiant « grand mal » qui frappe un personnage

par-là . . . L'écriture de Couturier, platement réaliste, repose ainsi principalement sur des clichés du terroir dont on s'étonne encore de la vitalité, ce qui donne au final une œuvre franchement prémoderne et anachronique.

Dans une optique tout autre, *Fractures du dimanche* de Ouellette aborde des thèmes similaires mais procède, justement, d'une poétique fracturée, alors qu'on y hésite entre écriture narrative et dramatique, le tout entrecoupé de la description des tableaux peints par l'un des personnages et ponctué de « scènes manquantes » qui trouent, ici et là, le récit. Les réflexions de Philippe, Diane ou Madeleine sur l'identité subjective (« Debout face à la grande porte-fenêtre, je pense à la vie, à ma vie. Qui suis-je? Périodiquement, la question revient perturber ma quiétude inquiète. »), la question nationale (« Mon pays est impossible. Il n'est pas possible. Il est virtuel parce qu'il n'existe que dans l'esprit. Il n'existe que par ses frontières virtuelles. ») ou leur statut méta-référentiel (« Est-ce moi qui parle ou suis-je le porte-parole d'un auteur dramatique en manque d'inspiration? ») cèdent peu à peu la place à une interrogation plus générale sur l'écriture. « Vous étiez dans ma pièce », annonce enfin aux trois autres le personnage d'Élodie, dramaturge, « dans ce texte avorté qui ne sera jamais une pièce de théâtre. » On retrouve en quelque sorte en abyme le problème même du projet de Ouellette, qui oscille entre dialogues factices et didascalies invariablement empreintes d'une narration paradoxalement en lutte contre le narratif. Les audaces formelles que l'on retrouve dans *Fractures du dimanche* imposent nécessairement distanciation, voire incrédulité, ce qui sied mal, nous semble-t-il, au propos d'ensemble. Les quêtes désespérées de ces personnages exigeraient empathie, compassion, commisération; on n'a à leur proposer qu'une lecture oblique, amusée mais désintéressée, bref, postmoderne.

Splashed and Swallowed

Michael Crummey
Galore. Doubleday $32.95

Beatrice MacNeil
Where White Horses Gallop. Key Porter $32.95

Greg Malone
You Better Watch Out. Knopf Canada $29.95

Reviewed by Samuel Martin

Michael Crummey's new novel *Galore* may owe a literary debt to Gabriel García Márquez, but the world of Paradise Deep is no Macondo rip-off. Crummey's multi-generational epic may seem like magical realism at first glance—considering a man is birthed from the belly of a whale in the first few pages—but the book owes more to Newfoundland folklore than it does to Marquez.

Crummey has said in recent interviews concerning the book that it was his intention to salvage stories from traditional and contemporary Newfoundland folklore and to tie them together in the fictional world he was creating. This fictional world is the outport of Paradise Deep, run by the unscrupulous merchant King-Me Sellers, who is always at loggerheads with Devine's Widow, the town's matriarch, and Father Phelan, a whoring priest with a big heart and bigger libido and an earthy sense of the sacred.

Into this almost medieval world the Sea Orphan is born out of the belly of a beached whale. "The Great White" they call him, or "St. Jude of the Lost Cause," eventually becoming simply Judah—a mute albino who is the novel's silent other. The perpetual mystery surrounding Judah, signified by the stink of fish that never leaves his skin, is what continues to interest the reader in this character throughout the book. But it is Father Phelan who is the novel's great comic creation, and perhaps one of Crummey's most hilarious and moving characters to date.

Phelan's rapacious presence is so strong in the first half of the book that the second half suffers somewhat for his absence, though

his spirit and his influence on the community continue in the later generations.

There are many stories in this novel—some magical, others mundane, all steeped in deep humanity and all woven masterfully together in this whale of a novel written in the tradition of Patrick Kavanagh's *Gaff Topsails*. In *Galore* Michael Crummey has written his finest and certainly his funniest novel so far. It's the type of novel that will swallow you whole for three days and submerge you in a fictional world as magically real as the one you left behind.

Not all novels, however, require fantastical occurrences to lift both plot and characters off the page. Beatrice MacNeil's *Where White Horses Gallop*—an anticipated follow-up to her well-received first novel *Butterflies Dance in the Dark*—takes the reader into the era of the Second World War through the fictional experiences of three friends in the Cape Breton Highlanders. Hector MacDonald, Benny Doucet, and Calum MacPherson are all from "the white shingled houses of Beinn Barra" and the novel oscillates between their experiences in the Allied trenches overseas and the lives of those they left behind in Cape Breton.

There are many storylines on both sides of the Atlantic and MacNeil has a smooth way of transitioning from dream to reality, past to present. However, the two distinct worlds created in the novel—Europe's battlefields and Cape Breton's hills—jar against each other. Though this works situationally, it does not always seem to work stylistically. Everyday life in Cape Breton is starkly different from life on the front lines but there are times in this novel when scenes in the trenches are more vivid than scenes from home, causing Beinn Barra to come across as overly romanticized and less believable than the tragedy that befalls Benny Doucet, once a talented fiddler, on no man's land.

This is not to say that I disagree with Alistair MacLeod's assessment of the novel; MacNeil certainly does have "brilliant insight into the souls of the wounded." Though Benny Doucet becomes a tragic figure, it is *how* his downfall deepens the wounds in his friends and family that becomes the true tragedy of this novel largely concerned with the effects of war on a community.

MacNeil sets out to honour the men who served in the theatre of war as members of the Cape Breton Highlanders, and she does this with poetic flare and reserved narrative economy. She shows the suffering and loss on both sides of the Atlantic, as well as the impossibility of fully returning home. There are moments in this novel that splash like winter sea spray on the face—moments that wake you in a trench in Italy or at a funeral in Beinn Barra. It is ultimately these moments that stay with you after the last page of this impressionistic and often impressive second novel.

A novel succeeds or fails on its ability to narratively connect the strands of many smaller stories with the larger whole. In a memoir, however, narrative connectivity is found in the form of someone's life and plot plays second fiddle to situation—often the funnier the better. Greg Malone's memoir *You Better Watch Out*, about growing up in 1950s St. John's, Newfoundland, is a work that highlights hilarious and often terrible or moving memories from Malone's past.

His gift as a comic (he co-founded the comedy troupe CODCO) not only matches but also perfectly balances his gift as a raconteur, reminiscent of the late Frank McCourt. Malone can splash you awake to your own prejudices in recounting his childhood struggle to come to terms with his stark difference from the other boys at St. Bon's. He can also humorously bless you in his telling of how, as a young boy, he would play Mass with his brothers, all dolled up as the archbishop (or sometimes even the pope), administering his own homemade sacrament of ironed bits of bread.

One of the great strengths of this memoir is Malone's disarming honesty. Even

though he paints a terrible portrait of life in St. Bonaventure's—instances of physical and emotional abuse by The Christian Brothers—he also introduces the reader to a good priest he met in his time at St. Bon's, a man who became his mentor and eventually his friend. This ability to perceive the good and the bad in humanity is held together by Malone's deep love for *all* the people he writes about—even the old city of St. John's.

One of the most moving and troubling portraits drawn in this memoir is of Malone's father—a man who loved sports and scouts and who could not understand or accept his son who would rather play house and dress as a woman.

Malone tells "stories of little disasters, small betrayals, secret dramas, and the fierce storms that rage in the undefended hearts of the young." Even though his personal memoir does not strive for the epic heights of MacNeil's *Where White Horses Gallop* or Crummey's *Galore*, the humanity of Malone's work runs just as deep and perhaps deeper for being remembered rather than imagined.

Though little may seem to connect these three books—aside from Canada's east coast—all of them on the level of pure storytelling can suck you in and swallow you whole, submerging you in worlds as diverse as an old haunted Newfoundland outport, the bloody trenches of World War II, and St. John's in the 1950s. Though Crummey, I think, is the most sophisticated of this triumvirate, I do recommend all three of these writers and their respective worlds.

Comic Bildungsromans

Michael Davie
Fishing for Bacon. NeWest $22.95

John Paul Fiorentino
Stripmalling. ECW $24.95

Cordelia Strube
Lemon. Coach House $19.95

Reviewed by Crystal Hurdle

Protagonists range from sixteen to thirty-one in three clever bildungsromans: *Lemon*, *Fishing for Bacon*, and *Stripmalling*. Though the latter's Jonny suggests a pre-mid-life crisis, he seems as young as Davie's eighteen-year-old Bacon and Strube's worldly-wise, arch Lemon.

Fishing for Bacon is number twenty-six in the Nunatak first fiction series. Davie's cartoonist background shows nicely in the caricature of Bacon's mother, who advises "men are pigs," and grandmother, who spouts Korean proverbs while smoking weed in a magic can. Bacon, in his quest to find his special somebody (Kenny Rogers' gospel), meets an even stranger posse of women than his relatives: manipulative mole-faced Sara, married realtor Karla with a penchant for university freshmen to occupy both herself and her condos, Korean "Meryl Streep," who speaks in Zen-like lines from English movies. In a fun circumscribed movement from Bellevue, to the wicked big city of Calgary (its speed cunningly described), and the resort town of Waterton, where even the workers are as transient as the tourists, he realizes that there's no place like home. Over the course of a couple of months (whew!), he is "ram-bagged" by Karla's husband's scrotum, loses the family car in a quintessentially Canadian collision with a moose, works as a dishwasher, and has both his money and then a newly purchased car stolen. As a naïf, he falls somewhere between "[w]hack job" and "sweet." While the "Aw shucks" tone is grating, what saves it from being a

Dickheadsian novel (though it reads like modern Henry Fielding) is his eventual realization of his naiveté.

Fish and food imagery, often incongruous, add to the punny humour. Sara's "nipples were perfect, as rosy as the inside of a gill," and when a classmate asks him if he's "pop[ped] Sara's cherry," he thinks, "It seems to me more like Sara had picked the fruit herself and hurled it at me like a scud missile." Adding to the farce is his mother's face rearing up at inopportune times, warning against girls, even before he's much aware of his problematic penis and his "bad timing."

With colleague Woodrat (short for Katherine, she says), he sets up a "limited liability partnership." Her quirks include eating the unfinished desserts of customers, but only those that "need" to be eaten. She also entrances fish (and Bacon) by twirling twigs, and the spincasting fisherman learns that there's more than one way to do something (or somebody).

Jonny, in *Stripmalling*, is both a character and the narrator (and more?). The Pirandelloesque quality appeals, as does the bricolage style. The form becomes the content. A pun on Fiorentino's previous fiction, *Asthmatica*, here called *Asthmatronics*, further blurs the line between fact and fiction. Like Davie's Bacon, Jonny is a goof, a person with "the heart of an Olympian but . . . unfortunately, the brain of a special Olympian."

A sequence of entries of "Jonny's mid-life Crisis Report," in which he whines about working for Shill [sic] Gas Station and then the monolith Hypermart, while sleeping in his car, doing drug deals, and attempting to be a writer, is countered by occasional entries of "The Dora [his significant other] Report." She writes dismissively: "at some point he stopped being Jonny, and became a character named Jonny in one of his stupid stories."

Fiorentino's poetry background shows in his economy, fragmentation (the whole narrative is fragmentary—are the Extras part of the novel?—and pleasing lists, one consisting of only the names of his circle of friends and their employers "Then" (various) and "Now" (all Hypermart). The personal *is* the political.

Illustrations by Evan Munday, also a character in the comic book *Stripmalling,* tease out the humour and fill in the blanks. For example, aspiring writer Jonny's verbal explanations of his proposed impolitic comic sketches, such as "Helen Keller's Voice Mail," become hilarious, when a woman with no facial expression stands by an answering machine that snarls, "Helen? Pick up the phone, Helen. I know you're there." "Babies with Tourette's" reveals an aghast mother listening to her baby say "Margaret Atwood." (Alice Munro also gets teased.)

Workshopped comments on the text of Jonny's comic AFTER the appearance of the strip are very funny. "Jonny is on the phone" is met with "literally? or is he SPEAKING on the phone?? be clear!" The last graphic in "Final Credits: Lame Teen Comedy Freeze Frame Wrap-ups" has an image of the "reader" with a copy of the book, "whose critical and commercial fate is yet to be determined, but it's not looking good." One would hope that readers are less pedantic than the critic and enjoy the gentle self-reflexive mockery.

Master (mistress?) novelist Strube's Lemon is the most strongly realized and engaging of the three protagonists/first-person narrators. She lives with her stepmother, was almost killed by her adoptive mother, and is suspicious of her birth mother's wish to meet. The adults in Lemon's world, including a cross-dressing History teacher and a "comfortably clueless" librarian, seem to have little to offer. The book opens with the stabbing of her vice-principal stepmother by a student, revealing the micro-macro theme: High-school life may be a crock, but it is as dangerous as a war zone. The book develops by a series of juxtapositions: real vs. literary, local vs. far away. Parallels between genocide

and high-school life are *not* over the top. Nastiness occurs not only in third-world countries. Close to home, a friend's mother, ill, struggles with maintaining employment and vital health benefits.

Lemon's paid employment at Dairy Dream offers a cheeky look at retail (as in *Stripmalling),* but her volunteer employment at a hospital, where, nurturing, she befriends cancer kids, makes one want to cry at life's injustices.

Vulnerable, Lemon wishes to seek redemption through reading, but it is not enough. She reads *Clarissa, The Great Gatsby, Jane Eyre*, several plays by Shakespeare, and more. She perceptively reduces all of the classics to tales about pining women. Of Shakespeare, "I can't stand all this love-at-first-sight bilge, couples obsessing over each other before they've even had a conversation. People are always blaming Hollywood for our screwed-up perceptions of romance, but as far as I'm concerned, it started with Shakespeare." History, like literature, is similarly (and amusingly) cut down to size. During English class discussions, shocking comments by the sexually abusive jocks and party girls reveal the brutality of high-school life, in which a lock-down is understated, and gang date rape is planned as party entertainment.

The book exposes such sordid issues as suicide, the holocaust, violence, the degradation of women, and fakery. Lemon wishes for "an advertising campaign that makes killing a sign of weakness . . . that makes not killing sexy . . . "Her stepmother deplores Lemon's penchant for "Sick Topics" (as might the reader), but they are so rife, Lemon cannot but continue thinking of them. She shows her compassion and humanity in not sloughing them aside.

The book's ending is too rushed, with a rapid climax and epiphany, not to mention the disappointing sudden loss of earlier pivotal events such as repercussions to the friend's date rape; however, the ending's hopefulness does not seem out of place. The book, depicting almost nihilistic events, is big-hearted and funny because of its narrator, whose voice and vision are cynical, poignant, piercing, mordantly funny. "Low self-esteem is a term used to excuse rudeness, laziness, meanness." This is black humour at its best. Lemon herself should be on her stepmother's shelf of Extraordinary Women.

Do Bacon, Jonny, and Lemon find what they are looking for? Jonny has completed his novel, spincasting Bacon knows you can go home again, and Lemon recognizes who her real mother is. More self-aware, she will travel abroad into what seems to be a brighter future, as might all three protagonists, who will likely now make lemonade from the lemons they will continue to be dealt.

Collecting His Wits

Arthur Davis and Henry Roper, eds.
Collected Works of George Grant: Volume 4 (1970-1988). U of Toronto P $215.00

Reviewed by George Elliott Clarke

Edited consummately by Arthur Davis and Henry Roper, this fourth and last compilation of the books, articles, talks, and jottings of the Christian *philosophe,* George Parkin Grant (1918-88), establishes that the polemical intellectual never had a dull thought. Indeed, the *succès de scandale* of Grant's 1965 extended pamphlet, *Lament for a Nation: The Defeat of Canadian Nationalism,* which sparked both English-Canadian nationalism and anti-Vietnam War protest, ensured he now had to explain and defend his "prejudices."

Thus, in the early 1970s, Grant defines terms he once took for granted (excuse the pun). Now, "excellence," "great," "noble," "tradition," and "tragedy," *et cetera* (a classicist's vocabulary), are spelled out, programmatically, to attempt to stave off potential *misprision.* Simultaneously, Grant

apologizes for *Lament,* explaining, in 1973, "anger is a bad motive for a philosopher."

Yet, because he now boosts partisan conservatives, Grant offers opinions that seem gross idolatry. So, in a 1971 squib, US President Richard Nixon is viewed kindly as a Republican doing his damnedest to end a war perpetrated by evil Democrats. After Nixon meets his Watergate, so to speak, in 1974, Grant imagines, "the bell of liberalism sounded in [his] fall." Grant does not acknowledge the countless deaths that Nixon countenanced in Cambodia. Similarly, Grant approves of President Ronald Reagan's anti-abortion stance, but is silent on the Great Communicator's assault on Grenada and bankrolling of the bloody, "Contra" insurgency against Nicaragua's Sandinista government. Grant seeks to buttress ballot-box conservatism, but the pacifist ends up backing warmongers. He knows better: "ideologies are surrogate religions pretending they are philosophies."

Grant's philosophical sallies also merit reservation. In 1971, he salutes the desire "of many French-Canadians to exist as a Franco-American community in the midst of the homogenized English-speaking sea." But he references the First Nations, in 1974, as only "some easily conquered Indians." He identifies the "West" with Plato and Christ, i.e. with European Caucasians, but the victims of Occidental enslavement and imperialism are cast, again in 1974, as "alien races." Grant also lauds Britain for exercising "some restraints [in] imperial adventures": Here's cold comfort for "colonials" massacred by British arms. Grant writes sensitively of Jews in 1974 and denounces anti-Semitism in 1979; yet, in 1983, he affirms Adolf Hitler's "agony of loneliness in the gaudy decay of pre-World War I Vienna, and his identification of the Jews with that society. . . ."

For a politic cleric who savages UK/US imperialism, Grant's practical omission of "race" is weird. Reading him, one cannot know that the struggle against African servitude helped to shape modern ideals of liberty. True: in 1974 Grant condemns UK Prime Minister Winston Churchill's appeal to "pure racial will"; in 1983, he observes that French author Céline narrates "the collapse of the 'white' races"; and, in 1988, he says, "the central stage of world history now moves from Europe to Far Asia, as China is developed." Yet, Grant never cites anti-imperialist philosophers like Julien Benda, or decolonization thinkers such as Frantz Fanon, or even that avatar of wicked statecraft, Machiavelli. Nor does he recognize African-American leader Martin Luther King's radical, non-violent, Christian movement. Grant's views on Occidental "destiny" descend from Oswald Spengler's in *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*—or *The Decline of the West* (1918), a racialist tome that Grant references in 1975-76 lectures.

This belief in "degeneracy" anchors Grant's thought: because Western philosophy has dethroned God, positing that human beings are free to make their own history, in obeisance to technology-empowered "will/ing," with only appeals to "law" and "morality" (detritus of the dead, Judeo-Christian religions) to guard "rights" and "equality," we may liberally exploit and degrade each other—to the point of genocide. In societies ignorant of eternity (God), and void of reverence (respect for human life as a divine "gift"), one may exercise "The Triumph of the Will" (the title of a 1988 article) and destroy fetuses, sack nations, and bully "others"—*via* brutal policing and/or subtler powers of persuasion (psychology, psychiatry, and advertising/propaganda). For Grant, the erection of this state, one that aspires to universality, denies our "nobility" and enacts a (benign) tyranny. (Is he wrong? Recall the "Coalition of the *Willing*" that raped Iraq in 2003.)

Grant pooh-poohs Freud, but psychoanalysis has its place. Arguably, Grant's Christianity stems from his loss, in 1941, to

the Blitz, of a married, English woman who had brought him "sexual peace" (Christian 76). Does Grant's recollection of her death by aerial bombardment underpin his opposition to the napalming of Vietnam, his adoration of Celine's "Trilogy" chronicling the saturation bombing of Germany, and his love for the French Jewish-Christian mystic and intellectual Simone Weil, who knew *two* wars' terrors and died in England in 1943? (Tantalizingly, Grant scribbles in a 1972-73 Notebook, "I fear that my turning away from homosexuality made me see God.")

Influenced by Weil (and German philosopher Martin Heidegger), Grant embraces a surprising heresy: in 1985, he endorses polytheism, deplores the early Christians who "wanted to destroy the vestiges of paganism," and rues the "bare monotheism" of Islam and Judaism. He turns full circle: from an implicit acceptance of the occultism of Spengler (cf. Surette 1993) to that of Weil. Apparently, "revelation" came to humanity, not only from Athens and Jerusalem: add Languedoc (and Benares).

The *Collected Works* prove Grant was one of our chief intellectuals, ranking easily with Northrop Frye, Marshall McLuhan (both of whom he lambastes), Harold Innis (whom he admires), and Linda Hutcheon. If Grant's aphorisms sound cranky, his critique of modernity rings true. In many texts—*Lament, Technology and Justice,* the Céline and Weil accounts, the *Globe & Mail* reviews—philosophy and poetry marry. (Sheila Grant's co-authorship, inking of some pieces, and her own editing are regularly superb).

Editors Davis and Roper serve Grant beautifully and justly. In 1110-plus pages of text, there are just two typos (71 and 1080). Moreover their introductions and endnotes are erudite, eloquent, and usually correct. However, the US did not "withdraw" placidly from Vietnam in 1975; no, its nationals *vamoosed,* they *scrammed,* in chaos and panic.

Sundry Tundra Fun

Nan Forler
Bird Child. Tundra $21.99

Jane Collins-Philippe
Sail Away With Me. Tundra $17.99

Linda Granfield
Out of Slavery: The Journey to Amazing Grace. Tundra $17.99

Sandro Natalini
What Came First? Tundra $17.99

Reviewed by Hilary Turner

Four picture books from Tundra include all the genres a young reader's heart could desire. The child's fictional and poetical needs are attended to by Nan Forler in *Bird Child* and Jane Collins-Philippe in *Sail Away with Me*. Linda Granfield looks after human history in *Out of Slavery*, and *What Came First?* by Sandro Natalini delivers a short course in the history of the planet. While Natalini illustrates his own text, the other three authors have been blessed with collaborators whose artistry enhances their subject and story.

The illustrations of François Thisdale in *Bird Child* make an already interesting narrative hypnotic and dreamlike. Young Eliza has the gift of seeing not only "what is" but also "what might be" thanks to her discerning mother. Small birdlike Eliza equates her gift with the ability to fly, echoing the connection between imagination and flight made by countless writers. It is precisely this connection that Thisdale's images convey so well. Known for his prowess in mixed media, in this book he makes use of childlike line-drawings, scene-establishing brushwork, and luminous, digitally-rendered faces. It is a combination that vividly demonstrates how reality and fantasy are constantly held in balance. However, Eliza's life is not always so evenly mixed. Sometimes, she comes home from school with "heavy feet" and never more so than when a classmate is tormented by a group of thuggish children (whose faces are

a study in smug self-assurance). But Eliza is imaginatively empowered to fly to the devastated Lainey and to share her remarkable gift. With sympathy and imagination, the two girls inaugurate a new playground order in which the bullies are shamed, and "what might be" is in the ascendancy. In the midst of beautifully rendered winter scenes, something new is born. This is a first book for Nan Forler, an elementary school teacher in Waterloo, Ontario. It is an impressive beginning to what one expects will be a fruitful literary career.

A partnership of author and illustrator that raises the text to a higher level can also be found in *Sail Away With Me*, a treasury of familiar poems combined with new works by Jane Collins-Philippe. The purposely naïve drawings of Laura Beingessner are the perfect complement to these whimsical verses. The poems are linked by their common theme of sailing, the sea, and the seaside, and Collins-Philippe has supplemented such old favourites as "I Saw A Ship-a-Sailing" and "Wynken, Blynken and Nod" with nautical ditties of her own. These are not perhaps quite evenly integrated with the more regal diction of the older selections, for Collins-Philippe's idiom is colloquial and contemporary (e.g. she rhymes "chocolate chip cookie" with "well, lookie, lookie") but the thematic unity of the collection is enough to override such irregularities. The pictures are a gentle accompaniment to the songs of the sea.

Intended for older children, *Out of Slavery: the Journey to Amazing Grace* is both a history of the Early Modern slave trade and a thoroughly researched biography of John Newton (1725-1807), a slave-trader who later saw the error of his ways. Newton, though enslaved himself as a teenager in Africa, became a captain of a slave ship; after a storm at sea, he experienced conversion, and went on to become a Methodist minister and one of the most persuasive voices in the Abolitionist movement. Granfield's book, subtitled "The Journey to Amazing Grace," is remarkable for its seamless integration of Newton's spiritual life with the concrete facts of the commerce and politics of the era. She does not put a foot wrong in assessing the importance of Christian egalitarianism as the force that put an end to the practice of trading in human lives. She also makes the link between the amazing grace of Newton's famous hymn and the abolitionist cause. She is to be commended as well for her recognition of the ethical variables of history. Acknowledging the triangle trade that "commerce fueled the entire operation," she sees that in his capacity as captain of a slave ship "Newton was simply taking care of British business." This does not mitigate the horrors of the middle passage which Granfield and artist-illustrator Janet Wilson depict in uncompromising detail; rather, it gives us history as it was understood by at least some of its protagonists.

In *What Came First?* Sandro Natalini takes on a vastly longer historical period, one to which the only testimonies are the calculations of scientists and the fossil remains of various prehistoric creatures. From the Big Bang to the beginnings of human life on planet Earth, he explains the geological and biological processes that have produced life as we know it. The science is solid here, particularly where evolution is concerned, yet the eccentric typography and the fanciful (if not comical) illustrations are strangely at odds with the subject. Where the drawings seemed designed to appeal to very young readers, the text is fairly hard going with many difficult concepts left unexplained. Admittedly, the early history of our planet is not an obvious subject for a picture book and Natalini is to be admired for a brave venture in scientific reading for children.

The Dynamics of Readerly Engagement in Three Poetic Texts

Louise H. Forsyth, ed.
Mobility of Light: The Poetry of Nicole Brossard. Wilfrid Laurier UP $18.95

Elana Wolff
Implicate Me: Short Essays on Reading Contemporary Poems. Guernica $20.00

Margaret Christakos
Welling. Your Scrivener P $17.00

Reviewed by Heather Milne

This review brings together three diverse texts: an edited collection of Nicole Brossard's poetry spanning four decades, a compilation of Elana Wolff's close readings of poems, and a recent volume of poetry by Margaret Christakos. What unites these books is their focus on poetry's demand for dynamic readerly engagement and attentiveness to the vitality of poetic language.

In *Mobility of Light*, editor Louise H. Forsyth compiles a comprehensive selection of Brossard's work from the 1960s to the present, a daunting task given Brossard's prolific output. *Mobility of Light* is framed by an informative introduction by Forsyth and an afterword by Brossard that offers insight into her creative process. For Brossard, this volume reflects her "biosemiology," and draws attention to how her engagements with poetic language traverse "personal and collective space"; Brossard's writing is remarkable in its simultaneous attentiveness to the introspective dimensions of poetry and the political dimensions of language, translation, sexuality and gender. Each poem is printed in French with its English translation on the facing page, allowing the reader to move between languages, and as Forsyth says, to take advantage of the opportunity to "imagine and create" that translation offers, or to ponder, as Brossard suggests in *Journal intime* (*Intimate Journal*), "the other [she] might be if [she] thought in English." Forsyth has done much of the translation herself, an impressive feat given the complexity of Brossard's language play. The poetry is arranged chronologically, allowing the reader to trace the evolution of her writing. Unfortunately, readers are not provided with the original publication information for each poem, making it difficult to trace the work back to its original publication context(s). Overall, however, *Mobility of Light* serves as an excellent introduction to Brossard's work.

Elana Wolff's *Implicate Me* is a compilation of newspaper columns that originally appeared in the Scarborough Arts Council newspaper between 2002 and 2007. In each of these short essays, Wolff provides her readers with a poem and a short analysis that demonstrates readerly engagement through the examination of features such as metaphor, cadence, language, and rhythm. Wolff's close readings offer a useful entry point but often fail to move beyond the surface; more context and greater depth of engagement would have strengthened her close readings considerably. The collection suffers from a lack of diversity; all of the poets included in the book are based in the GTA and with a few exceptions (notably, Wolff includes a poem by Margaret Christakos and a compelling close reading of that poem) most are lyric poets. Wolff makes some troubling generalizations about poetry, claiming that "reverence for and devotion to family and forebears" is "at the source and centre" of poetry and that poetry can contain "the chaos of everyday living." Such generalizations do not account for poetry's diverse aims.

Far more complex in its engagement with what poetry can achieve (and also what it fails to achieve) is Margaret Christakos' eighth collection of poems, *Welling*. In all of her writing, Christakos explores the affective chaos of everyday living, not by

containing it but by allowing it to proliferate. *Welling* marks a textual return to Sudbury, the site of Christakos' childhood and adolescence. These poems engage with temporality, memory, presence and absence, as the poet revisits her past while also foregrounding her present life in Toronto, her role as a parent of three children, and her conscious engagement with lyric voice. *Welling* is more closely aligned with lyric poetry than some of her other recent collections but rather than simply writing lyric poems, Christakos develops poems that invoke and interrogate lyric voice and poetic language. "The Problem of Confessionality" draws attention to the limitations of poetic expression: "Nobody sings what / these birds do. Poetry / tries and maybe cooperates / briefly (at a sort of brink)—desiring as we / do "pure sound" / separable from linguistic / code. I don't know about / this. I don't think any of / us, even the 'best' poets / among us, do more than signal a portal that would / open on a room full of / squirming words." In "Gulls," "every paragraph disembarks, / nearly dies" like a girl who is nearly killed disembarking a streetcar. "That's how paragraphs go, on the balls of their pink feet directly / into traffic." Christakos is attuned to the scene and process of writing, and to the expectations writers and readers bring to poetic language. *Welling* is somewhat more accessible than her other collections, and perhaps with this text, Christakos will find the wider audience her work deserves.

Les poupées russes

Marie-Noëlle Gagnon
L'Hiver retrouvé. Triptyque 18,00 $

Martine Delvaux
Rose amer. Héliotrope 21,95 $

Compte rendu par Nathalie Warren

Écartèlement, construction de soi à partir de pièces détachées et mélancolie, tels sont les chemins sur lesquels des miettes de pain sont semées . . .

Dans *L'Hiver retrouvé*, le narrateur souhaite tirer un trait sur son passé. Déçu de lui-même, incapable de tisser des liens profonds avec les autres et vivant dans la crainte qu'on fomente des attentes à son égard, il se complait dans un éloge de la fuite jusqu'à ce qu'un jour il se mette à rêvasser; allant jusqu'à réellement s'imaginer pouvoir, pour les habitants de Sili, retrouver la mer en allée.

Or, si tout dans la première partie gravite autour de ces êtres pour qui il faut en finir avec les souvenirs, que ce soit par le biais d'une singulière violence, et c'est le cas pour Betie, ou plus simplement par pleutrerie comme chez le narrateur; dans la seconde, entre ce dernier et son Ogresse il y a tentative du Nous, voire d'un amour fusionnel.

Mais comment parvenir au Nous quand le Je s'échappe de toute part; entre l'hier et le demain, entre ce que l'on est et ce que l'on souhaite donner à voir?

Si bien que, quand on se retrouve soudain face à deux solitudes dont les pensées se chevauchent, « Le nous [est] comme une île au milieu de notre océan de je; » un sol maigre et toujours à la limite d'être submergé.

Anjou, dans ce *no man's land culturel* où le Allô Police et le vedettariat américain agissent à titre de références, ce n'est pas tant le fait que des petites filles disparaissent qui choque, puisqu'on en parle comme s'il s'agissait de faits divers, mais plutôt les relations entre les femmes. Les pères sont quant à eux ces «princes charmants» qui brillent par leur absence.

Plutôt rudes, les mères et les tantes chez Delvaux n'ont que faire des deuils successifs et des déracinements de la fillette : perte du père, d'amies, de points de repères. N'ayant eu droit ni au bonheur ni à la reconnaissance, elles isolent l'enfant dans un recoin où, pour paraphraser l'auteure, la douleur est un caprice.

Gagnon et Delvaux épousent ici une trajectoire inversée, l'une s'en allant au centre, vers la plus petite des poupées, soit vers ce qui reste après tous les dépouillements; tandis que l'autre y retrouve la plus grande, comme « en Russie, on dit que dans chaque petite fille habite une femme . . . ».

Frye's Legacy

Glen Robert Gill, ed.
Northrop Frye on Twentieth-Century Literature: Vol. 29 U Toronto P $100.00

Review by Graham Forst

With this volume, the University of Toronto Press closes out its fifteen-year project of publishing the complete writings of Northrop Frye (the index will appear soon as Volume Thirty).

These twenty-nine volumes provide an astonishing record of Frye's prodigiousness as a writer: there are five to six million words in the set, which ranges from his early correspondence with his first wife Helen Kemp to his late books on the Bible.

The title of the present volume is as misleading as one would expect who knows Frye's interests and taste: it could as well be titled "Northrop Frye on Joyce, Eliot, and Yeats, and a Few Other 'Serious' Twentieth-Century Male European Authors." Not one Canadian or woman author is more than briefly considered, and Frye's criterion of "serious" writers excludes the Beats, the Black Mountain poets, Scott Fitzgerald, Faulkner, Carlos Williams, etc. No dramatists (other than Beckett and Eliot) are included, and the poets discussed present, hardly surprisingly, the most mythopoeic voices of twentieth century English-language literature.

Having said which, no lover of literature can afford to ignore Frye on Joyce, Yeats, Wallace Stevens and Eliot. His acid-tipped little 1963 "Introduction" to the latter is included here, and it is especially enjoyable to revisit it (Eliot hated the book: he was clearly used to being adulated and Frye would have none of it). Frye and Eliot were antipodes in many ways: Eliot was disdainful of Blake, and preferred Dante to Shakespeare, the Medieval to the Renaissance periods, and accepted Swinburne's low opinion of Milton. Perhaps this is why Frye chose to view Eliot's work through the scrim of his dirty laundry, presenting Eliot's toxic fascist and anti-Semitic ranting in *After Strange Gods* as central to his thought, already contaminating earlier poems such as *The Waste Land* and "Gerontion." Thus Frye saw his critical task in this little book at least partly as saving Eliot from himself: after all, as Frye said, "a poet can be any kind of damn fool and still be a poet."

Frye's analysis of the *Four Quartets* is as strong as anything found in our critical tradition, as are the brilliant essays on Joyce and Yeats. Frye actually makes at least partial sense out of Yeats' *A Vision* in the 1965 paper "The Rising of the Moon," and readers of his two essays on Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* included here will find here a welcome string to follow into Joyce's labyrinthine masterpiece.

Glen Gill offers an excellent Introduction (and meticulous footnotes) to this volume, although the grammar at times suggests it was written hurriedly (e.g., "As with most branches of Frye's oeuvre, the reader will discover . . ."). Also, Frye knew enough German not to have said "*als obs*" as Gill misquotes from Frye's diaries, and Frye's mistranslation of the Italian *pozzo* as "pool" is allowed to stand (the correct meaning, "mineshaft," would have suited Frye's

analysis of *Godot* much better). Also, there is a strangely anomalous and unfootnoted reference to the anthropologist Francis Huxley (Aldous' nephew) in Frye's 1973 CBC interview on Aldous Huxley.

Most of these essays are reprinted from earlier Frye collections, but it's wonderful to have in front of us such previously uncollected gems as Frye's thoughtful Foreword to a Canadian edition of Orwell's *1984*, and the richly suggestive "Religion and Modern Poetry" (1958-59), in which Frye speculates whether the "uninhibited imaginativeness" of poetry may not rescue religion from dogma, by "remind[ing] us most clearly that Scripture is poetic and not doctrinal, that Jesus taught in parables and not in syllogisms, and that our spiritual vision is in a riddle," an idea which Frye would explore at length three decades later in *The Great Code*.

This volume reprints (one wonders why) dozens of Frye's early *Canadian Forum* squibs on modern poetry. They are crankily judgmental and sassy; of a collection of T.F. Powys' short stories, for example, Frye says that they "should be read in a room full of Russian-ballet decor and orange dragons on black curtains, beside a drink served by a breastless maid in bangs," indicating that Frye had not yet hit stride as "the foremost living student of Western literature" as Harold Bloom was to call him.

How will Frye be remembered? We now know, thanks to these twenty-nine volumes, that he *will* be remembered; but *how* he will be remembered is clearly reflected in this collection: as a stubborn reaffirmer of the ripest seeds of Romanticism. Consider this, from "Religion and Modern Poetry": "Our experience of poetry begins . . . in a willing suspension of disbelief, and bears fruit in a willing suspension of intolerance."

That is the legacy of Northrop Frye, for which the world can, as least in part, thank Alvin Lee, Jean O'Grady and the other tireless editors of these *Collected Works*.

Vocations: First Nations Voices

Garry Gottfriedson
Skin Like Mine. Ronsdale $15.95

Dorothy Kennedy and Randy Bouchard
The Lil'wat World of Charlie Mack. Talonbooks $24.95

Sharron Proulx-Turner
she walks for days inside a thousand eyes: a two-spirit story. Turnstone P $17.95

Reviewed by Madelaine Jacobs

Appreciating First Nations literature often requires an aural engagement with the written word. In keeping with indigenous practices of telling stories with deeper meanings that must be unlocked as the recipients grow in understanding, Garry Gottfriedson's *Skin Like Mine,* Dorothy Kennedy and Randy Bouchard's *The Lil'wat World of Charlie Mack, and* Sharron Proulx-Turner's *she walks for days inside a thousand eyes: a two-spirit story* impart challenging wisdom that may take a lifetime to absorb. In their unabashed complexity, their works are testaments to the increasing recognition of First Nations voices within Canadian society.

Garry Gottfriedson roams through history and transverses scales from a University of Victoria classroom in British Columbia to the continent of Europe in his collection of poems, *Skin Like Mine*. Wherever his words journey, Gottfriedson's passages echo *Secwepemcu'lecw*, the land of the Shuswaps, as well as the sounds of contemporary Canadian urban life. *Skin Like Mine* is a mesmerizing cacophony of identity. By locating himself in both the particular and the global, Gottfriedson skewers the limitations of the English language with its own dualistic inventions. In his poetic precision, Gottfriedson avoids the overgeneralization that sometimes comes from such a wide scope. Instead, he demonstrates that a life of holistic integrity encompasses every razor-sharp edge of human existence.

Gottfriedson's "Cover-ups" criticizes celebratory perspectives of Canadian history that do not recognize Duncan Campbell Scott, one of the most famous poets in Canadian history, as the "poet and the despot / who fetishized Indian women / schemed to kill their men." Certainly, Scott's masterful poetic portrait of the "Onondaga Madonna" and her "paler" child is compelling confirmation of Gottfriedson's claim. *Skin Like Mine* is so finely crafted that it will fascinate new and experienced readers of First Nations literature.

Surely Charlie Mack Seymour, Nts'elásq'et, is also an author of the ethnographic tribute *The Lil'wat World of Charlie Mack*. While ably fulfilling the roles that English-language literature ascribes to authors, Kennedy and Bouchard act with subtlety as informative editors giving insight into their own development as ethnographers through the teachings of Charlie Mack. They respectfully avoid heavy-handed intervention in Charlie Mack's narratives and devote much of the book to his stories. Kennedy and Bouchard's humble approach make it possible to imagine that Seymour's lyrical voice can be heard on the pages of their book as it might in their audio recordings. By situating stories in place, *Charlie Mack* acts as a critical geography, using deep relationship with the land to correct the inaccuracies that British Columbia geographer Cole Harris explains occur when mapping is used to translate the real experiences of places into the Eurocentric language of measurement. Two streams of scholarship come together through stories such as when Kennedy and Bouchard stretched the research budget of their ethnographic project by travelling past Mount Currie to the town called Lillooet instead of disembarking at what they later discovered was known to First Nations as the home of the "Real Lillooet": the *Lil'wat7úl*. In his own words, Charlie Mack was a "sophisticated Indian" who mastered the "high language" of the *Lil'wat7úl* and manipulated English grammar more cleverly than Kennedy and Bouchard initially realized. Working with Kennedy and Bouchard until shortly before his death, Charlie Mack was the indigenous ethnographer of the *Lil'wat7úl*.

Sharron Proulx-Turner's poetic volume *she walks for days inside a thousand eyes* requires a great deal of thoughtful effort because it refuses to bend to the gender divisions embedded in the English language. Although Proulx-Turner touches on the term "lesbian," two-spiritedness is a state of multiplicity that can only be partially communicated in the English language as similar to what is commonly called transgendered or described as embracing the spectrum of sexual orientation and identity. Proulx-Turner's poetry twists and hammers words until a lesson at the heart of two-spiritedness emerges: the value of seeing from more than one distinct perspective lies in embracing apparent contradictions in order to become a conduit for reconciling divergent worlds. Proulx-Turner tells the mystical tale of a group of two-spirited women who concede to marriage out of respect for their parents and grandparents yet resist the attentions of their husbands by using onions to make themselves odious. Together, the women pray for a way to escape marriage and become powerfully aware that "the two-spirits / are meant to be together / to be singers, seers, interpreters of dreams / mediators, healers / to see / as she / as he / to be / as he / as she." While Proulx-Turner reveals the historical and cultural status of "these gifted ones" in indigenous communities, the pain of living as a two-spirited First Nations person in contemporary Canada is starkly evident in the crow's most optimistic promise that "better times are ahead."

Perhaps Proulx-Turner's bold declaration that "in indigenous cultures, we don't do things alone" is the key to these expressive

books. It is evident throughout *Skin Like Mine*, *The Lil'wat World of Charlie Mack*, and *she walks for days* that fostering forthrightness and inclusivity enables First Nations people to see multiple sides of issues and supersede barriers. In this way, First Nations across Canada foster the resilience and creativity that is essential to the endurance of their communities and the flourishing of poetic arts.

Actualité de Réjean Ducharme

Élisabeth Haghebaert
Réjean Ducharme : une marginalité paradoxale. Nota bene 26,05 $

Marie-Andrée Beaudet, Élisabeth Haghebaert, et Élisabeth Nardout-Lafarge (dir.)
Présences de Ducharme. Nota bene 29,95 $

Compte rendu par Jean Morency

Depuis la publication de *L'avalée des avalés* en 1966, l'œuvre de Réjean Ducharme a été abondamment commentée et analysée par la critique universitaire. En fait, il existe peu d'œuvres littéraires du Québec qui ont fait l'objet d'une telle attention, mises à part peut-être celles de Gabrielle Roy, d'Anne Hébert et de Michel Tremblay. Jusqu'à ce jour, on compte une vingtaine de livres consacrés, en tout ou en partie, à l'œuvre de Ducharme, et ce chiffre apparaît en soi significatif de l'importance et surtout de la cohérence de l'univers imaginaire mis en place, au fil des ans, par celui qu'on pourrait définir comme la figure emblématique, ou encore comme le romancier fantôme, de nos lettres. C'est donc dire la difficulté d'aborder de nos jours une œuvre qui, en dépit de sa richesse et de sa complexité, a donné lieu à autant d'interprétations par la critique. Pourtant, il y a encore beaucoup à dire sur Ducharme, comme nous le montrent avec éloquence les deux ouvrages qui font l'objet de ce compte rendu.

Élisabeth Haghebaert, dans son excellent essai intitulé *Réjean Ducharme : Une marginalité paradoxale*, s'avoue consciente des difficultés qui sont inhérentes à l'analyse d'une œuvre sur laquelle on a beaucoup écrit. C'est pourquoi elle choisit d'aborder cette dernière non pas en développant une nouvelle théorie susceptible d'en rendre compte, mais bien en suivant une démarche se réclamant de la critique d'accompagnement. Elle nous propose ainsi une « promenade littéraire personnelle » dans l'œuvre de Ducharme. Bien que sans prétention, cette promenade témoigne d'une érudition sans faille; en effet, Haghebaert nous montre qu'elle a lu et assimilé tout ce qui a été écrit sur Ducharme, mais qu'elle est parvenue à intégrer toute cette matière de façon naturelle, sans jargon ni pédanterie, ce qui confère à son essai une modestie et une simplicité qu'on ne saurait surtout pas confondre avec de la facilité. Une telle méthode ne déplairait pas à Ducharme en ceci qu'elle échappe à une approche disons institutionnelle, tendant à soumettre l'écrivain et son œuvre à une grille d'analyse donnée. Haghebaert choisit donc d'aborder l'œuvre de Ducharme sous l'angle de la présence d'un élément catalyseur, soit le thème de la marginalité, dont elle montre les diverses manifestations dans les romans étudiés. Cette marginalité, qui est d'abord celle de l'auteur lui-même, se manifeste à différents niveaux, que ce soit dans la constitution des personnages et des lieux, dans la cacophonie de la langue et son érotisation, dans le brouillage des idéologies, dans le « maghanage » et le recyclage des genres et des canons littéraires, ainsi que dans la redéfinition du rapport entre le littéraire et le monde par la mise en place d'une poétique de la sympathie. C'est en cela que la marginalité, chez Ducharme, s'avère paradoxale puisqu'elle marque moins une coupure qu'elle ne favorise l'établissement d'une nouvelle communauté. En intégrant ainsi les approches antérieures de l'œuvre de

Ducharme autour d'un principe fédérateur, l'essai d'Élisabeth Haghebaert en arrive à constituer non seulement une véritable synthèse, mais aussi une avancée remarquable, des études consacrées à celui qui est à la fois le plus connu et le plus insaisissable de nos écrivains.

Présences de Ducharme, ouvrage collectif publié sous la direction de Marie-Andrée Beaudet, Élisabeth Haghebaert et Élisabeth Nardout-Lafarge, représente lui aussi une étape importante dans la critique de l'œuvre de Ducharme, d'autant plus qu'il est directement issu du premier colloque consacré à celle-ci, ce qui peut sembler étonnant considérant son importance dans la littérature québécoise. Si l'œuvre de Ducharme semble se prêter tout naturellement à la critique individuelle, elle est ainsi restée en marge d'un certain discours institutionnel fondé sur le dialogue et l'échange des points de vue. Pourtant, force est de constater que cette approche croisée s'avère extrêmement féconde, comme en témoignent la diversité et la qualité des contributions publiées dans *Présences de Ducharme*. Il est hélas impossible de résumer ici chacun des textes, mais il convient de préciser que ces derniers visent essentiellement à explorer les diverses facettes de l'œuvre de Ducharme (romans, pièces de théâtre, chansons, scénarios de films, œuvres visuelles) et à esquisser du même coup une vision d'ensemble du parcours d'un homme qui apparaît plus comme un artiste que comme un simple écrivain. L'ouvrage est aussi très intéressant parce qu'il juxtapose des approches diverses, en allant des témoignages (Roger Grenier, Jean-Marie G. Le Clézio, Ivan Maffezzini, Martin Faucher, Lorraine Pintal, Robert Lévesque) aux contributions proprement scientifiques de plusieurs générations de chercheurs (de Gilles Marcotte à Stéphane Inkel), dont la plupart sont de très haute tenue (entre autres, celles de Gilles Lapointe, Kenneth Meadwell, Anne Éliane Cliche, Marilyn Randall, et Réjean Beaudoin, pour ne citer que celles-là).

Bref, nous sommes en présence de deux ouvrages importants, qui font le point sur l'œuvre de Réjean Ducharme tout en constituant une excellente introduction à celle-ci.

Regional to the Core

Mike Hoolbloom and Alex Mackenzie
loop, print, fade + flicker: David Rimmer's Moving Images. Anvil $15.00

David Church, ed.
Playing with Memories: Essays on Guy Maddin. U of Manitoba P $29.95

Reviewed by Mark Harris

If, as Teddy Roosevelt reportedly said, California is West of the West, then it stands to reason that BC is as well. By that same logic, Manitoba must lie a little bit to the East of it. Which means, I guess, that, contrary to popular belief, neither David Rimmer nor Guy Maddin are Western Canadian filmmakers . . . which, of course, is ridiculous.

Or is it? They're regional artists, all right, but perhaps their regionalism is something more rarefied than something so crude that a mere compass point can explain it. Indeed, they are both prime examples of that old Buddhist adage: the more personal you are, the more universal you are.

Let's start in BC before moving East. David Rimmer belongs to that group of BC artists in all fields who accept Canada's West Coast as the centre of their existence, not just as some sort of periphery upon the shores of which random chance happened to maroon them. In painting, one sees this in the tableaux of Laurie Papou, in poetry, in the books of Susan Musgrave and, to a much lesser extent, in the early photographs of Jeff Wall (lesser because, from the very beginning, Wall has been obsessed with the compositional tropes of Diego Velásquez). For all these artists, the

larger currents of creativity are/were useful only insofar as they help to make sense of their quotidian BC experience. Even their notorious taciturnity (has there even been a city like Vancouver, where so much talent has resulted in so little barroom garrulity?) is probably a reflection of this oddly puritanical self-sufficiency.

Within this crowd, David Rimmer fits in perfectly (not least because he makes so little effort to reach out beyond a narrow circle of kindred spirits). Two of those like-minded individuals are filmmaker Mike Hoolbloom and curator Alex Mackenzie, the two authors of *loop, print, fade + flicker*, the first in a series of monographs published by the Pacific Cinémathèque on the lives and careers of distinguished West Coast directors. In the field of experimental filmmaking, Rimmer shares the front Canadian rank with the likes of Michael Snow and the late Joyce Wieland. From the late 1960s until now, he has been a presence to reckon with, even if that reckoning hasn't always been easy to come by (the usual fate of non-commercial filmmakers).

Projection (in the psychological sense of the word) plays a major role in determining which Rimmer works one winds up championing. If I personally prefer "Canadian Pacific" (1974) and "Canadian Pacific II" (1975) to such better known shorts as "Waiting for the Queen" (1973) and "Variations on a Cellophane Wrapper" (1970), it is at least partially because those time lapse looks outside the artist's studio window remind me strongly of Hiroshige's *One Hundred Famous Views of Edo*, a private artistic touchstone. Even the documentaries (such as 1979's "Al Neill: A Portrait") and the celluloid diaries (such as *West Coast*, begun in 1967 and still ongoing) are subject to this sort of non-objective appreciation/resistance. Once "print" follows "action!", experiencing David Rimmer is more like listening to free form jazz than it is to going to the movies. This is the artist's greatest strength, as well as his most stringent commercial constraint.

To a large extent, *loop, print, fade + flicker* can most profitably be read that way as well. It is more a collection of minutely observed details and fleeting memories than it is a traditional movie monograph.

Formally, *Playing with Memories: Essays on Guy Maddin* is more traditional in structure . . . which is something that can *not* be said of the man chuckling away at the heart of this collection of mainly celebratory essays.

And why should they *not* be celebratory? Along with David Cronenberg and Atom Egoyan, Guy Maddin is one of English Canadian cinema's Three Great "Weirdos." If Cronenberg is best associated with "the horror that comes from within," that is to say, with the fantastical representation of the universal experience of decline and decay, and Egoyan with a perverse, anti-Soviet editing style that makes viewers jump to the wrong conclusion about everyone and everything, Maddin's idiosyncrasies are too protean for such succinct summations. They include an obsession with his home town of Winnipeg, a mock-antagonistic relationship with the Icelandic half of his heritage, an indestructible fondness for the tropes and techniques of silent cinema and—above all—a memory of the pre-pubertal, polymorphously perverse stage of male psychological development that has made him the acknowledged world master of "straight camp." Starting off as a "cult: midnight movie-maker" (*Tales from the Gimli Hospital*), some of Maddin's later work has enjoyed near-mainstream acceptance (*The Saddest Music in the World*), while a surprisingly large amount can be viewed mainly in small, artist-run galleries (*Cowards Bend the Knee*). It doesn't really matter where you see him, though. The same aesthetic influences and Oedipal obsessions (both real and imagined) can be encountered anywhere.

On one hand, because Maddin is such a good interview subject (funny, irreverent,

brimming with arcane information), it comes as no surprise to discover that all of the sixteen essays included in this book are highly readable. What's more, they cover virtually everything essential to the man's oeuvre (with the curious exception of his repeated borrowings from silent *Scandinavian* cinema). On the other hand, precisely because he *is* such a frank, seemingly open interview subject, if there was anything Maddin *did* feel like hiding from the world, he would be ideally situated to do just that.

Nevertheless, his economic survival is no more guaranteed than is David Rimmer's. Just because J. Hoberman thinks you're the greatest thing since that Latham Loop doesn't mean you're going to be boffo at the box office. For better or worse, both filmmakers now live in the Age of *Avatar*, and must deal with this reality as best they can.

Authors Contribute to South Asian Narratives

Sheila James
In the Wake of Loss: Short Stories. Ronsdale $18.95

Rana Bose
The Fourth Canvas. TSAR $20.95

Nurjehan Aziz, ed.
Her Mother's Ashes 3: Stories by South Asian Women in Canada and the United States. TSAR $24.95

Reviewed by Sharanpal Ruprai

Sheila James' debut collection of short stories, *In the Wake of Loss*, was a finalist for the Ottawa Book Awards 2010; it was also longlisted for the ReLit Awards and was given an Honourable Mention in the short fiction category in ForeWord Reviews' Book of the Year award. After reading the collection, I understand why James has received these honours. As a whole, the collection is rich with locations and characters that interact with their Canadian landscapes. For example, the collection begins with the story, "Ana's Mother," which is set in a wintery Nova Scotia. Ameena, Ana's mother, "is withstanding the winter" while her daughter enjoys playing hockey at the outdoor rink. Ameena recognizes that her foreign-looking daughter "could be the next Hayley Wickenheiser and . . . a new twist on the immigrant dream-come-true." Further, the story "Demure" also twists that narrative of the immigrant dream come true. The sisters in "Demure" are successful businesswomen who own an exotic lingerie store. We learn of the violence and the brutality that women face in Sri Lanka and in Canada. Sheila James writes of the strength, endurance, and love that are required for women to survive. James' characters are captivating and honest. I feel as though I could meet them on the streets of Toronto or Winnipeg or Halifax.

When reading Rana Bose's novel, *The Fourth Canvas*, I highly suggest that readers have a world map with pin flags in order to keep up with the geographic developments. The novel centres on a Canadian woman, Diana McLaren, who is in search of her family lineage in India. The readers learn of her connections through numerous contrived plot twists and turns. Diana McLaren's background and relationship are exciting and vibrant in the first forty pages, but her character lacks depth by the second half of the novel. Where McLaren's character fails, Bose focuses his attention on attempts to make up in the middle of novel with Claude and Clara, who are both connected to McLaren. By the middle of the novel, however, Claude fails to develop as a character and is simply used by the author as a tool for plot development. As a whole, the novel struggles with organization and cohesiveness. For example, each of the twenty-seven chapters begins with quotes that range from Malcolm X to Voltaire to Yoda (from *Star Wars*) to Bruce Springsteen. I could have done without all the quotes and direction from Bose, and would have enjoyed richer character development and mystery.

Having read the first two volumes of *Her Mother's Ashes,* I am puzzled as to why the editor and Nurjehan Aziz did not write a more substantial editorial on the collection as a whole. Rather, she refers to the first collection's introduction, written by Arun Prabha Mukherjee. This might be a publisher's trick to entice readers to buy the other two volumes; however, readers will quickly learn from the publisher's website that the first and second volumes are out of print. Nevertheless, I checked the public libraries and found the first two volumes. This third volume includes twenty-four short stories. A few of these stories touch upon the complexities of growing up in North America or in India. For example, in Tasleem Thawar's "The Price of a Secret," a grade five student, Zayb, is learning from her older sister how to use information as "leverage," but she still maintains the child-like quality of wanting to please her parents and succeed in school. In "Dora Ray" by Sharmila Mukherjee, Dora desires a visa to study in America and mimics the girls in her American magazine, *Perimeter*. Within the collection, there are stories of arranged marriages gone sour, but "Love, Long Distance" by Mahtab Narsimhan provides the reader with an updated version. Razia, a Canadian-raised girl, marries a man from Pakistan, whom she met over the Internet and then marries over the phone because her parents could not find her a match in Canada. Her low self-esteem about her weight, combined with the pressures from her mother's "gossipy group of women" causes Razia to forgo all good judgment. In Janice Goveas' story "Sunil," Meena learns a hard lesson about women's rights when she asks her lover, Sunil, what would happen if they get caught. Sunil explains, "Nothing will happen to me, Meena. It will all come down on you. . . . you have thousands of years against you." Towards the end of the collection, Billie Vasdev's short story "Shanti" highlights how mothers sometimes try to be the perfect daughter, wife, and in-law. Rekha agrees with her husband that it is not the right time for a baby, and six weeks after their daughter Shanti is born they send her to India to live with her mother-in-law. The narrative begins with Rekha expressing the lack of motherly connection she has with her four-year-old daughter: "We are two distant islands that are close enough to see but completely unconnected." Many of these short stories reveal the inner secrets of women's lives and engage with the multi-layered issues of women's rights.

Captivity and Race

Paulette Jiles
The Color of Lightning. HarperCollins Canada
$22.95

Reviewed by Heidi Darroch

Britt Johnson, a former slave, settles in Texas at the end of the Civil War with his family, seeking a new life as a free man and property owner. His hopes are dashed when his homestead and several neighbouring farms are attacked; his young son is murdered, and his wife Mary is brutally assaulted by Kiowa and Comanche raiders. When they depart, they take the surviving women and children captive, including the traumatized and brain-damaged Mary. Another captive, Elizabeth, is a formidable middle-aged white widow insistent on preserving the life of her young grandchild; the murder of Elizabeth's daughter is recounted in one of a number of unsettling passages in this novel, which offers readers a potent blend of lyricism and violence. Alongside Britt's, Mary's, and Elizabeth's stories, Jiles offers us a more panoramic view of a land racked by violence and desperation.

This third novel by the award-winning author, who is also an acclaimed poet, provides a thoughtful meditation on the American government's abortive effort to coax Indigenous nations into adopting

farming. Jiles does not side overtly with the settlers, and she clearly aims to produce a more even-handed treatment than many prior accounts of this contested history have achieved. Yet her dramatic and narrative skills offer readers far more insight into the quiet heroism of the homesteaders, like Britt Johnson, an obscure historical figure, than the desperation of the Indigenous leaders and their hungry people who are more glancingly portrayed.

A troubling aspect of the novel is that *The Color of Lightning* sets itself the challenging task of rehabilitating the racial and sexual politics of the captivity narrative. A visiting newspaper illustrator compares the captives to pawns in a chess game; in the American cultural imagination they also came to stand for the threatening possibility of turning "native." Jiles is too conscious and sensitive a writer to merely update the various racist stereotypes promulgated in the literature of captivity, both in biographical (or ostensibly biographical) accounts and in fictionalized portrayals. But her depiction of Aboriginal men's sexual violence and, more broadly, a culture of violence that she suggests is integral to the Comanche, seems less thoughtfully worked out than other aspects of this novel. While Jiles does make some effort to contextualize Comanche raiding activities within the broader historical attacks on Indigenous sovereignty, expressions of sympathy are voiced chiefly—and woodenly—by the Quaker characters in the novel, whose views are tempered by their naivety and idealism. Throughout the work, Aboriginal suffering is portrayed in abstract and generalized terms, while violence against white, African American, and Mexican captives of the Comanches is shown from the intimate point of view of the devastated victims themselves, mostly vulnerable women and children.

Jiles provides a potential political critique of settlement on traditional lands by juxtaposing Britt's determination to rescue his family (and, subsequently, other captives) with the more prosaic struggles of a Quaker Indian agent, Samuel Hammond, to establish order. In exchange for their land and their self-determination, the American government offers rations: "As if the issuing of calico and sugar would cause the Comanche and Kiowa to become content, delighted, grateful." The arrival of the newcomers has instigated a clash between cultures, and the way of life of the Indigenous nations is in peril. Torn between pity, guilt, and resentment toward his recalcitrant Indigenous charges, Hammond is grimly aware that the non-native interlopers "came to take the land and they meant to keep it. They would take it from the red men as they had taken land from the Shawnee and Cherokee in the Carolinas and before that the wild Irish in Ulster and before that whatever croft or patch of rocky land they could hold against the lairds in the lowlands. . . . " In the face of the flinty determination of the settlers, and what Jiles problematically portrays as the long-cultivated commitment to warfare by Indigenous nations, efforts to keep the peace are defeated. Both Britt and Samuel are increasingly drawn to more violent resolutions.

Part of what interests Jiles is the fate of the returned captives. She conveys the pathos of their sense of being caught between worlds, and points to the fate of several former captives who died pining for their native loved ones and children after being forcibly "rescued." In passages depicting the returned captives, and in her treatment of Britt's tender rebuilding of his relationship with his wife Mary, Jiles is at her most adept.

Beyond the Page

Theresa Kishkan
The Age of Water Lilies. Brindle & Glass $19.95

Alissa York
Fauna. Random House $21.00

Reviewed by Myrl Coulter

Theresa Kishkan's second novel is the story of a fallen woman who refuses to fall. When Flora Oakden fails to attract an appropriate suitor in England, her parents send her to British Columbia to live in the small town of Walhachin under the watchful eye of her older brother, George. Flora falls in love with Gus, becomes pregnant with his child, and is left behind as he goes off to fight in World War I. When both George and Gus leave for the war, Flora moves to Victoria where Gus' parents live, hoping that they will accept their son's future bride and his unborn child. Once there, Flora finds both rejection and acceptance.

The novel has a parallel structure: the story of old Flora, now in her seventies, and her youthful neighbour, Tessa, is intertwined with the story of young Flora. Spanning five decades between 1913 and 1963, the novel begins and ends with Tessa lying on her stomach in two different locations. In the beginning, Tessa listens to the sounds of Victoria's buried streams; in the end, Tessa is in a Winnipeg basement working from memory on a map of those streams. Although still a young girl at the end of the novel, Tessa now understands how individual lives are subject to the whims of both society and history.

The Age of Water Lilies touches on many social issues, including sexism, racism, and the far-too-high cost of war. Yet some of the most compelling moments in the novel happen when the pregnant young Flora goes bravely into her unaccepting world and survives. While seeking help at a local convent, Flora informs the nuns that she will be keeping her child rather than putting it up for adoption. The disapproving sisters refer Flora to a doctor who informs her that her only choice is "to take shelter in the home for unwed mothers, deliver herself of her child to the good work of the orphanage, and come to an agreement with God afterwards." In her depiction of this situation, Kishkan portrays a flawed human community with deft clarity.

The Age of Water Lilies contains extensive information about the several environments in which Flora lives throughout the story, information that must add to and blend in with the narrative. A novel with this much research behind it sometimes allows that research to show too much. However, Kishkan retains good control, allowing her solid grasp of the material to ensure a well-measured narrative pace that engages her audience even after the book is finished.

Alissa York also engages her audience beyond the last page of her third novel, *Fauna*, in which she explores an eclectic group of wounded souls drawn together by those very wounds. Set in present day downtown Toronto, York vividly etches her characters into their environment. As they struggle to survive each day and night, every member of this damaged ensemble cast also struggles with memories that come into the story as if from camera flashes. Teenage runaway Lily "flashes on the little tree frogs that used to cling to the siding under her bedroom window" and damaged war veteran Stephen "flashes on a pair of prints," two paintings from his childhood home.

Junkyard owner Guy Howell is not without his own memory struggles and deals with them by placing offerings of lug nuts on the graves of the aunt and uncle who raised him. Guy is a father figure to the menagerie of lost human souls who gather around to feed on his simple food and listen to him read from *The Jungle Book*. Books, like animals, play prominent roles in *Fauna*, as most characters either read or listen at some point. One covers the walls and windows

of her home with books, blocking out the world and her daughter at the same time.

Fauna demands its audience's attention. In the first chapter, the narrative perspective moves through four different characters several times, five if the raccoon living in the Don Valley counts. York's writing insists that *Fauna*'s urban wildlife definitely stand as characters, although some readers may have difficulty connecting to the inner musings of a raccoon, a fox, or a coyote.

As with her previous novels, York has done an extensive amount of research. The work is well used, as *Fauna*'s intricate narrative is nicely supported by her meticulous details of the geography and the wildlife of downtown Toronto's surprising wilderness.

With so many active characters, it would be easy for a novel like this to become unwieldy and difficult to navigate. But York devises a clever strategy to ensure readability. The real time of the novel is one week, the events revealed a day at a time, three chapters for each day. The repeated three-chapter structure—one long, two short—gives the novel an appealing rhythm, like a song with seven precisely measured verses.

Even with this unique structure and its solidly grounded research, *Fauna*'s strength still lies in its characters. From the teenage runaway with an undeniable instinct for survival, to the damaged boy who becomes the novel's anguished villain, to the veterinary technician who still mourns the loss of her lesbian partner, *Fauna*'s characters propel the novel's various storylines to the end of its week and beyond.

Diasporic Possessions

Lydia Kwa
Pulse: A Novel. Key Porter. $21.00

Reviewed by Christopher Lee

Lydia Kwa's third novel begins with these prescient words: "Becoming possessed happens when you aren't watching. Sneaks up on you. You know without knowing. You mustn't argue with the seduction, the pull of the trance. When the moment arrives, something in you understands it's pointless to resist." *Pulse* relentlessly explores the limits of knowability—cultural boundaries of knowledge, the seemingly impassable divide between one person and another, and the temporal gaps that render memory unstable yet ever-present.

Natalie Chia is an acupuncturist in her late forties who immigrated to Toronto from Singapore with her parents in 1979. She seems to have settled into a stable routine that revolves around her work, her family, and her girlfriend Michelle, but harbours deep losses that date back to her childhood and adolescence. Natalie is especially affected by memories of Faridah, a middle-school classmate with whom she had a passionate love affair. For reasons that only become evident at the end of the novel, Faridah abruptly ended their relationship and went on to marry and raise a family. As the novel opens, Faridah asks Natalie to return to Singapore for the funeral of her gay son Selim, who has just committed suicide. Unbeknownst to Faridah, Selim and Natalie had developed a close bond in prior years, brought together by their shared experience of being abused by their homophobic fathers. Natalie's journey to her homeland releases a wave of memories as she tries to sort through her troubled past. By the end, she decides to forgive her father and return to Canada.

Kwa slowly fills in the details of Natalie's life, rendering the experience of reading

Pulse akin to slowly watching a picture come into focus. Readers familiar with Kwa's first novel, *This Place Called Absence*, will quickly notice many thematic parallels: both feature professional, queer, Singaporean female protagonists, but unlike the multiple voices that mingle in *This Place Called Absence*, *Pulse* is entirely narrated by Natalie. In what is by turns heavy and gorgeous prose, Kwa/Natalie searches for ways to understand how human relations can be restored in the aftermath of trauma and violence. At the same time, *Pulse* is a meditation on the history of modern Singapore. Natalie was born the same year Singapore achieved independence from British rule, and her childhood was deeply affected by its simmering ethnic conflicts. Her return trips elicits rich descriptions of her homeland's transformation into a hyper-modern global city in the years since she left. These observations are those of an estranged daughter whose diasporic identity becomes, in Kwa's hands, the basis of a sustained queering of nationalism and its heteronormative structures. In this sense, *Pulse* is not only about being possessed by the familiar times, places, and people, but it is also about the inevitable realization that the familiar is always already marked by its absence.

Nouvelles du large

Luc LaRochelle
Hors du bleu. Triptyque 19,00 $

Jean-Marc Beausoleil
Le Souffle du dragon. Triptyque 19,00 $

Compte rendu par Michel Nareau

Depuis au moins 1980, la littérature québécoise fait de l'étranger un moteur narratif, identitaire, et politique. Au-delà de l'exotisme et des stéréotypes qui alimentent un récit de la confrontation, l'étrangeté, de l'autre déstabilise surtout les protagonistes, en révélant la pluralité des expériences. Une telle pratique instaure aussi une lecture du monde, fondée sur une prise en charge des représentations culturelles du lieu visité, qui remodèle la société de départ, dans un travail dynamique de métamorphose et de comparaison. Luc LaRochelle, dans *Hors du bleu*, et Jean-Marc Beausoleil, dans *Le Souffle du dragon*, usent de ces possibilités narratives dans des recueils inégaux où les Amériques se déclinent au pluriel.

Dans le riche recueil *Fugues en sol d'Amérique*, LaRochelle campait le destin de nomades sur les routes du nord-est du continent en liant le passé québécois et le présent états-unien. De tels éléments subsistent dans *Hors du bleu*, mais sur un mode moins satisfaisant, malgré une agréable ouverture de la représentation continentale au sud-est états-unien, au Mexique et au pourtour caribéen, ce qui décuple les références évoquées. Pourtant, les courtes nouvelles scindées en quatre parties, dont une en anglais, insistent sur les lieux de transit que sont les motels, les routes, les villages touristiques, créant une image déstabilisante du tourisme mondialisé, où la solitude est répercutée par l'étranger. Dans ce registre, LaRochelle est à son mieux, notamment dans la section « Les routes d'Amérique » et la nouvelle « Isla Mujeres ». Cependant, les autres nouvelles s'essoufflent rapidement, avec une récurrence mal maîtrisée de certains personnages, puisque ces retours ne sont pas intégrés à la solitude et à la rupture qui caractérisent le recueil. Si le jeu sur les références étrangères, sur la pluralité américaine est réussi, le recueil manque de fraicheur et de souffle, le style direct faiblissant avant les chutes.

Il en va de même dans *Le Souffle du dragon*, mais de manière encore plus prononcée. Les nouvelles de ce recueil s'organisent autour d'un narrateur unique évoluant dans le milieu journalistique. Les textes se construisent autour du témoignage, faisant du scripteur celui qui transmet un monde de fête, de pulsions

sexuelles, de drogue et d'expériences loufoques qui auraient davantage leur place dans une chronique de faits divers. Chaque nouvelle s'élabore autour d'une révélation faite au narrateur, ce qui lui permet de brosser le portrait du protagoniste, de recréer son passé, espace de confessions se substituant au présent. La nécessité de faire des récits de vie empêche le développement des nouvelles, en plus de créer une recette redondante, d'autant plus que les allusions politiques bâclées et l'actualité alourdissent le propos. Au moins, les univers décrits, tels que ceux du hockey, de la drogue, de la musique, de l'errance (Vancouver, Thaïlande, Haïti), acquièrent une importance narrative justifiée, devenant à l'occasion le moteur du récit. Dans le lot, « Voudou mademoiselle » brille, alors qu'une réflexion sur la beauté réinterprète les clichés sur la perle des Antilles autour d'une perspective féminine.

Ces deux recueils utilisent l'étranger pour brosser un portrait contemporain du Québec où l'ailleurs est un exutoire, une fuite, un espace de recommencement, à la suite d'erreurs, de ruptures, d'échecs. Dans ce traitement désabusé du monde, le témoignage a des dimensions lilliputiennes que les narrateurs peinent à reconnaître, ce qui explique l'ennui souvent sécrété.

Native Arc

Emma LaRocque
When the Other is Me: Native Resistance Discourse 1850-1990. U of Manitoba P $27.95

Valerie Alia
The New Media Nation: Indigenous Peoples and Global Communication. Berghahn $85.00

Reviewed by Beverley Haun

These two books, while both about the voices of Indigenous peoples, direct their studies in very different directions. *When the Other is Me: Native Resistance Discourse 1850-1990,* examines Canadian Aboriginal texts up to the last decade of the twentieth century. *The New Media Nation* considers contemporary Native voices in the explosion of Indigenous news media, information technology, film, music, and other artistic and cultural developments connected in a dynamic global network that moves from the particular and remote community to the gatherings at the urban centre and beyond. Taken together, these books transcribe an arc from the early textual voicing of anger at colonization and disenfranchisement to the current resuscitation of localized indigenous languages, connections, and vibrant cultural forms made possible by new media.

Emma LaRocque describes her book as her revisitation of selected historical and literary texts that have served to dehumanize Aboriginal peoples, and their inevitable contrapuntal reply to Canada's colonial constructs. LaRocque divides her analysis between colonial and Aboriginal texts. She begins with an examination of the dehumanizing rhetoric in historical Euro-Canadian texts, both political-historical and literary, and describes the social effects of that dehumanization on Indigenous groups through time. She categorizes the distorted textual invention of the "Indian," constructed to serve colonial purposes, as one of the most dehumanizing figures in North American history, literature, and popular culture. Its destructiveness continues in the savage/civilized binary that the "Indian" construct creates and maintains in public discourse. For Indigenous peoples, internalizing the negative stereotypes ascribed to them in texts leads to shame and self-rejection as well as rejection of their own groups.

LaRocque then considers the response of Native writers to the invasion of their land. She describes her goal as foregrounding Native responses to centuries of misrepresentation and, at the same time, respecting a fledgling Aboriginal-based criticism that needs to maintain cultural integrity without resorting to romanticism, fundamentalism, or nativism. Ultimately, LaRocque considers

the place of anger in Aboriginal writing as well as authors who work to celebrate their own cultural experiences. The book ends with a call for the colonizers to clean up their colonial debris, whether in popular culture, in historiography, or in literature. They are to de-imperialize scholarship and deconstruct colonial frameworks. In tandem with this dismantling, non-Native Canadians are urged to read with an awareness of the imperial values held within colonial texts and how those values are expressed. In response to criticism about the small number of Native Canadian writers, LaRocque points to "Native peoples in real life going about reconstructing our lives and communities and pushing paradigms long before we can write our novels and poems, or our dissertations." A snapshot of those real lives in action is the focus of *The New Media Nation*.

Valerie Alia gathers examples from across the planet of some of the world's least powerful Indigenous peoples who are now leading the way toward creative and ethical media citizenship, locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally. Her book outlines the key forms that the New Media Nation is taking as a "fourth world movement" using radio, television, print, and the internet to amplify their voices, extend their range of reception, and expand their collective power. As Marshall Sahlins said, "modernity is becoming indigenousized." Alia includes extensive appendices that chronicle key events and developments in Native news networks in Canada, Indigenous filmography, media organizations, and on- and off-line resources.

Radio is identified as the chosen and growing medium for local communication. It is well adapted to oral cultures and to nomadic and remote community life. Talk radio provides a forum for social and political dialogue, and phone-in shows can be lively extended family affairs. Radio and internet are simultaneously maintaining or restoring particular languages and cultures and enabling the promotion of common interests that are both renewing and reinforcing ethnic identities, while giving rise to new blends of traditions and elements of world culture in music, arts, clothing, and food. Alia points out that poverty and the distortion of mainstream news coverage have made it imperative for groups to develop their own Indigenous news outlets and to expand and globalize localized broadcasts. For example, Oka Mohawk broadcasters kept community, other First Nations, and international audiences apprised of and engaged in the power struggle over land misuse in Quebec.

Alia identifies the Internet, specifically websites, blogs, social networking, and chat rooms, as the second medium of choice. It is the primary outlet for broader interactive communication, and removes ethnic and national borders in a way that can place pan-indigeneity at the centre. Through Internet networking, Indigenous people disseminate knowledge and information, build relationships, and construct community symbolically. Alia describes how the "New Media Nation" makes creative use of strategic essentialism. The Inuit, for example, have played an important role in this cross-border global communications movement with effective and politically astute organizations, regular meetings, and shared ideas, disseminated at home and at Inuit circumpolar conferences. Canadian Inuit television, as elsewhere in Aboriginal communities, is also created at home; originating in remote arctic and sub-arctic communities, it is moving gradually towards the urban centres and toward global coverage.

In 1990, W. H. New cautioned that if Native writers are not recognized for the creativity of the differences they bring to bear on cultural perception, they will find a way of making the centre irrelevant and of speaking on their own. In *The New*

Media Nation we are seeing the increasing irrelevance of the centre as Indigenous communities around the globe abandon the colonizer's model of the world, and make the New Media Nation their Native Resistance Discourse.

Le pardon, cette histoire « qui nous concerne tous »

François Leblanc
Quinze secondes de célébrité. Triptyque 23,00 $

Jacques Savoie
Cinq secondes. Libre Expression 24,95 $

Mauricio Segura
Eucalyptus. Boréal 21,95 $

Compte rendu par Simona Emilia Pruteanu

Dans une entrevue suivant la publication de son plus récent roman *Le retour de Lorenzo Sanchez* (2008), Sergio Kokis, un des chefs de file de l'écriture migrante au Québec, proclamait son désir de se lancer dans l'écriture d'un roman policier. Alors qu'on attend toujours le livre de Kokis, la forme du polar a inspiré trois autres auteurs à mettre en page des sondages dans la conscience humaine à la recherche du pardon.

François Leblanc signe son premier roman d'un titre fort captivant—*Quinze secondes de célébrité*. Le lecteur peut remarquer tout de suite le rétrécissement temporel de l'archiconnue prédiction d'Andy Warhol sur le monde moderne. S'agirait-il d'un roman sur la vitesse vertigineuse de la vie moderne? Les 233 pages du roman concentrant une multitude d'histoires concernant neuf personnages principaux et un bon nombre d'autres figures qui ne font qu'une seule apparition, à un rythme qui invite à une deuxième lecture même le lecteur le plus attentif, ne donnent pas de réponses et c'est là que réside la force de ce roman qui semble vouloir à tout prix nous tenir en haleine. Chaque jour, Marjolaine Todorov, Patricia Mackenzie, et Jocelyn Leborgne reçoivent dans leurs bureaux des « invités », le nom que ces trois agents de probation ont choisi de donner aux personnes qu'ils sont censés évaluer et aider dans leur réintégration sociale. Ronald, condamné pour avoir frappé l'enfant de deux ans de sa copine, Sullivan, jeune d'origine haïtienne qui compose de la musique rap et qui s'associe aux gangs de rue, Sandrine, jeune droguée et filant la prostitution, Gaspard, pédophile sans remords, Vince, ancien revendeur de crack et Sylvain, détraqué et cleptomane sont six personnages qui n'ont presque rien en commun, sauf l'obligation de se présenter régulièrement au bureau de probation IV. *Quinze secondes de célébrité* pourrait signifier la période de grâce à laquelle tous les personnages ont droit dans ce roman, moment de répit on ne peut plus court, car chaque jour sème de nouveaux doutes et le pardon tarde à être accordé, par le système et par eux-mêmes.

Le pardon constitue le thème central du roman de Jacques Savoie, *Cinq secondes*, un roman construit selon tous les mécanismes d'un polar. L'enquêteur Jérôme Marceau s'acharne à découvrir ce qui a poussé la jeune et belle Brigitte Leclerc à commettre un quadruple meurtre avant de retourner l'arme contre elle-même. Mais sous la forme d'un roman policier l'auteur parvient à nous livrer un livre qui tourne autour des sujets fort actuels tels l'identité, le racisme, et la corruption dans le système judiciaire.

Les personnages principaux sont rapprochés par leur recherche d'une forme du pardon : Brigitte Leclerc essaie d'obtenir le pardon légal, la mère de l'enquêteur Marceau essaie de se pardonner à elle-même pour avoir pris de la thalidomide durant sa grossesse, un somnifère responsable du bras atrophié de son fils; quant à celui-ci, la fin surprenante du roman révèle que toute l'enquête qu'il a menée n'a été qu'un difficile examen de conscience, à la suite duquel il ne peut pas sortir tout à fait indemne. Dans ce roman ce n'est que le père absent de Jérôme, un immigrant haïtien qui

est retourné dans son pays quand Jérôme avait deux ans et qui porte ironiquement le prénom Justal, qui est sûr de son « innocence » : « Voilà comment ils parlent de Jérôme. Une erreur de jeunesse qu'ils ont fini par se pardonner . . . Je crois que nous avons fait le bon choix. »

Le pardon ou le rachat constituent aussi le leitmotiv du roman de Mauricio Segura, qui porte un titre aussi évocateur que métaphorique. *Eucalyptus* est un mot qui dans la langue grecque signifie « bien caché » et, comme va l'apprendre Alberto, le personnage qui rentre au Chili pour enterrer son père, il n'y a rien de mieux caché que la vérité; surtout quand tout le monde en possède une version. Le père d'Alberto a été un *retornado*, un immigrant au Canada qui est retourné finir ses jours dans son pays, et dont la personnalité complexe se construit post-mortem dans le récit grâce à des versions parfois incompatibles de la même histoire. Qui était Roberto? Le père et mari indigne qui laisse sa famille au Québec pour rentrer seul au Chili, ou l'homme qui traite les autochtones avec respect et voudrait même épouser une jeune Mapuche? Tout le long de l'enquête que mène Alberto pour apprendre les circonstances de la mort de son père le lecteur est confronté à différentes histoires qui parlent du passé du Chili, terre ancestrale des Indiens mapuches, aux préjugés raciaux et à la fin tragique de ceux qui essaient de réconcilier l'appartenance à plusieurs cultures.

Recovery and Revaluation

Paula C. Madden
African Nova Scotian-Mi'kmaw Relations. Fernwood $17.95

Maria Caridad Casas
Multimodality in Canadian Black Feminist Writing: Orality and the Body in the Work of Harris, Philip, Allen, and Brand. Rodopi €50.00

Reviewed by Veronica Austen

Paula C. Madden's *African Nova Scotian-Mi'kmaw Relations* and Maria Caridad Casas' *Multimodality in Canadian Black Feminist Writing* are projects of recovery and revaluation. As such, these projects seek to explore cultural situations and literary forms that traditionally have been undervalued in discussions of race within Canadian studies. While Madden's text seeks to correct a paucity of discussion regarding the Mi'kmaw community's exclusion from Nova Scotia's human rights discourses of the 1960s, Casas' argument asserts the socio-political significance of the representation of Caribbean Creoles in the poetry of Black Caribbean Canadian women. With both texts negotiating the erasures and/or devaluing of particular voices within Canada's idealization of its multicultural makeup, they both contribute to an important and ever-expanding discussion of minoritized groups in Canada.

Madden's main purpose is to challenge discourses that seek to indigenize blackness in Canada. Responding, in particular, to George Elliott Clarke's argument in *Odysseys Home: Mapping African Canadian Literature*, Madden acknowledges Clarke's discourse of indigenization as a means of establishing the right of Black Nova Scotians to claim "Canadian" as a category of identification. Madden also acknowledges Clarke's aim to thereby more firmly root the Black community within Canadian national spaces, a fraught territory which has traditionally erected borders of exclusion. Nevertheless,

while Madden concedes the good intentions of Clarke's project, she must also assert that such indigenization of blackness furthers a colonialist agenda by perpetuating the continued "exclusion" and "erasure" of First Nations communities, particularly the Mi'kmaw of Nova Scotia. As Madden outlines, the outcry regarding such treatment of the Black Nova Scotian community as the annexation and destruction of Africville may be quite justified, but such protest is predicated upon a continued denial of the theft of Mi'kmaw land; the land being disputed by White and Black Nova Scotian communities was, as Madden affirms, never either community's to claim in the first place.

In forming this argument, Madden's project assumes a cultural studies approach that first provides a brief historical sketch of the conditions faced by both communities. Focusing on such topics as the communities' occupation of particular areas of land, their housing conditions, and their employment and educational opportunities, Madden offers a comparison of the two communities that showcases their similar experiences of exclusion and prejudice. Asserting that advocacy for human rights tended to be viewed as an issue between Black and White Nova Scotians, excluding other cultural communities, Madden's discussion proceeds to trace the discourses surrounding the human rights movement in Nova Scotia. Culminating in a look at Dalhousie's Transitional Year Program and the Indigenous Black and Mi'kmaq Initiative, Madden's sketch of the relations between these minoritized communities is one that pictures forced and not always welcomed collaborations between these cultural groups. As Madden asserts, the trajectory of human rights legislation in Nova Scotia has often proven counterproductive with various governmental initiatives employing "a divide-and-conquer strategy."

Importantly, though Madden seeks to recover the lost voices of the Mi'kmaw community, her discussion in duration and depth tends to privilege the Black communities' experiences of racism. This tendency in Madden's work, no doubt, speaks to the historical erasure of Mi'kmaw voices from public discourses. In a project that offers wonderful archival research, uncovering interesting anecdotes and evidence from newspapers, minutes from meetings, transcripts of political speeches, and even promotional material for particular events, it is likely not surprising that the archive offered little representation of the Mi'kmaw experience. Madden seeks to correct some of this silence while also further rounding out her look at the Black Nova Scotian community by offering evidence based on interviews with three members from each community. While this approach is necessary and valuable, a clearer introduction to those interviewed that could establish the respondents as individuals rather than setting them up as anonymous, representative "informants" would ease this section's ethnographic overtone and more clearly establish the context for the information provided.

Maria Caridad Casas' project similarly seeks to garner appreciation for once-devalued voices, but in her case, the focus is literally upon voices and voicings. Exploring the significance of Creole expression in poetry by women within Canada's Caribbean diaspora, Casas' text significantly contributes to a recent heightening of interest in orality within various subsets of Canadian literature. Using the poetry of Lillian Allen, M. Nourbese Philip, Dionne Brand, and Claire Harris as sample texts, Casas argues that a writer's use of a continuum of Creole through Standard English is a choice with socio-political intentions and implications. According to Casas' argument, such a choice serves multiple purposes. For example, a use of Creole challenges the hegemony of Standard English by

deconstructing the dominance of standardization and asserting that what gets valued as the standard language is in fact also merely a dialect, changeable and evolving. Furthermore, this choice, by reinforcing the physicality of the production of speech, serves to (re)embody written texts and thereby promote their participation in the "discourses of race, gender, [and] sexuality."

Situating itself at the intersection between the fields of linguistics, semiotics, and literary studies, this text seeks to elucidate and interrogate what have been groundbreaking explorations of language and meaning-making, namely such works as Derrida's *Of Grammatology* and Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics*. Her exploration of such foundational concepts as signs, code-switching, and projection is accomplished through close readings of some of Allen's, Philip's, Brand's, and Harris' most notable texts, respectively including *Riddim and Hardtimes*, *She Tries her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks*, *No Language is Neutral*, and *She*. As such, this text is structured first to contextualize the poets and their works by describing key moments of advocacy for racial equality in Canada and outlining the writer's social and literary contributions. The middle chapters then take up various ideas of linguistics and semiotics, establishing, for instance, code-switching as a means of asserting the artificiality of dialect boundaries and hierarchies. Finally, the text concludes with a discussion of "embodied signs of identity," arguing that the embodiment of written text can serve to assert feminist values.

Since much of the originality of Casas' approach is in her application of linguistic and semiotic principles to her chosen literary texts, her project demonstrates that such an approach can be used to consider the significance of non-Standard languages in various other groupings of Canadian texts. Such an interdisciplinary approach could in fact benefit from heightened attention to the literary studies side of the approach. In particular, a teasing out of why poetry is Casas' site of inquiry could be quite valuable. What makes poetry a particularly important site for discussions of Creole languages and their representation in writing? As Casas acknowledges, in colonial/post-colonial environments, the use of Creole languages has traditionally been devalued—a sign of incorrectness and lack of ability. However, as Casas also notes in a brief reference to Gertrude Stein's work, demands for correctness are often dismantled by aspirations for innovation. Consequently, poetry, as a medium particularly concerned with the materiality of language, must offer something special to discussions of the representation of orality in writing. Perhaps J. Edward Chamberlin's *Come Back to Me My Language: Poetry and the West Indies* or even a consideration of Charles Olson's vision for the importance of Projective Verse could help tease out the special role poetry can play in discussions of Creole expression and its transformation of written text into embodied performance.

Heavy and Light Hearts

Andrew Moodie
Toronto the Good. Playwrights Canada $17.95

Don Hannah
While We're Young. Playwrights Canada $16.95

Ronnie Burkett
Billy Twinkle: Requiem for a Golden Boy. Playwrights Canada $16.95

Reviewed by Sarah Banting

Three newly published Canadian plays offer valuable traces of their conception, development, and original production.

Andrew Moodie's *Toronto the Good* features two lawyers battling over the case of a young Black man caught with a gun in his car. At stake is a question of racial profiling: did the White police officer search him and find the gun because she saw him already as

Black and guilty? The play catches its multiple characters in a thicket of contradictory allegiances, and generally their racial identifications are held in tension with other emotional and professional investments. The defence lawyer, presumably a White man, argues passionately that his client was racially profiled; he commits himself to the cause of the systematically oppressed except when forcing himself on a sex worker. The Crown attorney is Black. Representing the police officer, he successfully defeats the profiling charge but privately renounces his client: as he unhappily sees it practiced, "judging people, based on race, is essential to policing." Awaiting trial, the young man sings a rap ballad about his life and then is shot on the street.

The play's arguments are tempered with quotidian details from the lawyers' middle-class office and home lives. These realist details, slender but welcome in the script, are supplemented in the published text by Moodie's two sets of character notes (addressed to "you, the actor"). One set gives extensive character backgrounds and an account of how these were developed. They tell us which characters like, and which dislike, John Cusack movies, President's Choice Lasagna, and curried goat. The other set gives sources for the characters' names, which were drawn from the Bible and from histories of Black and female Canadian heroes. While some names are purposely incongruous with the roles, they give a slant political subtext even to the appearance of undeveloped minor characters.

Introductory notes for Don Hannah's *While We're Young* reveal he developed it, during a residency, for a company of twelve talented student actors. Accordingly, the character list consists almost solely of young men and women—taking advantage of mimetic casting possibilities in a way that directors of *Toronto the Good* might also be tempted to do (although Moodie presumably would not insist on race-matched casting).

While We're Young lines up a series of six vignettes, each of them set in a different time period at roughly twenty-year intervals: among them, contemporary Edmonton and Afghanistan, World War I Passchendaele, and 1870s rural Nova Scotia. Only gradually, as these scenes begin to layer visually over one another onstage and begin to let slip hints of the characters' inter-relationships, do we realize that these young people represent one another's future children and past grandparents. Each is given a defining conflict and a unique personality, so that although several of them in turn are described by their respective descendents as a crazy Grammy or a frustrating mother, the play is not about generational similarities of character. They inherit from each other only a chance to be twenty-one, happy or otherwise, to have choices but limited freedom, and to have complicated feelings for friends. The strongest thematic link between the six scenes is foregrounded in a concluding song, in which the generations blend aurally, singing, "Now is the time for it / While we are young, / Let's fall in love." This sounds cutesy, but falling in love is not in this play, thankfully. It is an uneasy and conflict-making activity, as often homosocial as hetero, and, on the battlefield, short-lived.

Ronnie Burkett's *Billy Twinkle* is about a lonely cruise-ship puppeteer's mid-life crisis. Contemplating suicide, he is visited by the ghost of his late mentor in puppet form, who compels Billy to orchestrate a marionette show featuring scenes from Billy's own life—charming eleven-year-old enthusiasm; precocious genius; sexual initiation; adult loves and tensions—and to showcase on the side his repertoire of classic cabaret-styled marionette acts. The script is an elegant, touching, mostly lighthearted sketch, stitching together scenes of puppet work that must be brilliant displays of Burkett's dexterity. Well-handled stage directions allow us to read, for instance,

about Billy being wrestled off a ship's deck by the puppet he is manipulating and who has commandeered his voice. There is some enjoyable meta-theatrical play, here, with who is voicing whom.

Moodie's and Hannah's plays are written to be re-mounted, and they call for minimal sets and instant scene changes, with one setting shifting into the next. By contrast, the notes and photographs included in *Billy Twinkle* offer a record of this play's singular original production. Twenty-four black and white photographs of the beautiful, elaborate set and extraordinary marionettes are generous but necessary inclusions: for anyone who unluckily has not seen a Burkett production, myself included, they make it possible to imagine this play taking shape. (It includes a languorous marionette strip-tease!)

Finding Hope, Finding Home

Michelle Mulder
After Peaches. Orca $7.95

Catherine Austen
Walking Backward. Orca $9.95

Anna Kerz
The Gnome's Eye. Orca $9.95

Holly Bennett
Shapeshifter. Orca $12.95

Reviewed by Sarika P. Bose

In these coming-of-age tales, we follow four protagonists as they respond to a central crisis in their lives and learn to adapt, accept, and modestly triumph in their new circumstances. The relocation to a foreign land necessitated by the initial trauma leads to a more profound trauma in the protagonists of Michelle Mulder's *After Peaches*, Anna Kerz's *The Gnome's Eye* and Holly Bennett's *Shapeshifter*. In Catherine Austen's *Walking Backwards,* Josh may not have to leave his home, but "home" itself becomes a strange place when his mother dies and his father's grief at the loss of his wife makes him incapable of comforting or caring for his children. In none of these books can the parents fully protect their children, and the children, therefore, must face the cruelty of the wider world to find independent solutions for survival.

Michelle Mulder's chapter book for young readers, *After Peaches*, examines Mexican immigrants' struggles through the eyes of ten-year-old Rosario Ramirez. The book doesn't avoid introducing its young readers to real-life issues, such as the traumatic reasons that often precipitate decisions to immigrate or seek refugee status. Rosario's brother has been murdered for political reasons, so her parents decide to seek sanctuary in Canada, even if it means they have to accept an itinerant and often exploited life as fruit pickers. Their inexperience with Canadian culture and limited understanding of English make them and their friends vulnerable to unscrupulous and racist employers. The immigrant's sense of isolation is highlighted in the child's experience of feeling an outsider at school, where no one speaks her language, eats her food, or shares her perspectives on life. This book attempts to address several types of issues in a slim volume, including the relation between language and power, the exploitive power relations in a capitalist society, immigration and isolation, school bullying, the effect of loss and grief within a family, and family solidarity in contrast to family division and neglect. However, the novel does generally maintain narrative unity and avoids sentimentality and self-righteousness in its depiction of the exploitation of immigrant workers.

Anna Kerz's *The Gnome's Eye* is also a novel about the refugee's plight. Theresa and her family immigrate to Canada in 1954 after living in an Austrian refugee camp for most of her life. Reluctant to leave the only home and friends she has known, Theresa is anxious about what awaits her across the sea in a strange city called Montreal. Her best friend Martin, an imaginative boy,

gives her a river stone—the gnome's eye of the title— to which he attaches a fanciful story about its protective power. In Canada, life is unexpected: the new quarters are no more comfortable than those in the refugee camp, and Theresa is deprived of the familiar language and manners of her fellow refugees. Her imperfect grasp of English isolates her and often proves a barrier in her own responses to others' overtures of friendship. Her anxieties about alien language, place, and behaviour are validated by her mother's mistrustful nature, which expects the worst from everyone. Theresa's maturity is linked with her increasing distance from her nickname of "Mouse." As she loses her timidity, speaking in class, making friends and helping a grieving old man, Theresa becomes more self-sufficient and begins to fit into her new community.

The children in both of these novels are able to face changes with their parents, but when the change occurs as a result of the loss of a parent, as it does in *Walking Backward,* the definition of home itself must change. Instead of being a safe and knowable place, with clearly delineated roles for parents and children, home becomes a place of disorder and unpredictability. Father and little brother are in strenuous denial about the mother's death, the brother literally walking backwards and the father metaphorically so, as he isolates himself in the basement trying to build a time machine that will return the mother to the family. With the absence of both parents, Josh struggles to parent not only his little brother but also his father. The novel avoids trite solutions involving any significant interventions by outsiders. There is no one on whom the boy can depend, and his independent solutions to daily problems as well as his approach to dealing with his own grief are unusual and unexpectedly humorous. Josh doggedly looks up mourning rituals of various religions, which he uses as a lens by which to interpret and accept the volatility of his own and his family's response to daily life without the mother. His other fixation, on the Darwin Awards for stupid ways to die, is one of his distraction techniques, and creates some of the novel's humour. When at the end of the novel the Darwin Awards office reassures him by letter that his mother does not qualify for their award, and the father is jolted out of his self-centred grief, Josh's life is clearly on the road to improvement. His mother's death is given some meaning by her disqualification from the Darwin Awards, and his father slowly begins to take responsibility for his family again. This novel's refusal to sentimentalize loss or to accept quick or predictable solutions in conjunction with its ability to create a realistic and complex protagonist allows for a refreshing perspective on the story of the loss of a parent.

Holly Bennett, author of the *Bonemender* series, retells the Irish folktale of Sive, of the fairy folk or Sidhe, in *Shapeshifter*, and gives the story a non-traditional, hopeful ending. Sive becomes a refugee from fairyland, spending a lifetime separated from her home and family as she flees the evil wizard, Far Diorche, in her shape as a deer. Her respite in the arms of legendary Irish hero, Finn MacCuhail, is temporary, and once captured by Far Diorche, she is tortured and used to trick other Sidhe. Escape from the wizard leads to more years of disguise as a deer and near loss of her identity as a woman, until her rescue by her half-mortal son, Oisin, and reunion with her formerly powerless though immortal family. Sive's shapeshifting represents the adjustments and discomfort of discovering oneself, and of learning to survive the dangers of the world outside the home.

Sive's story literalizes the metaphoric shapeshifting required by the life changes the children in all these novels experience. While the authors highlight the fundamental losses faced by the children, the novels' endings still offer some hope.

(Un)Satisfying Hunger

Lisa de Nikolits
The Hungry Mirror. Inanna $22.95

Eva Moran
Porny Stories. DC Books $18.95

Reviewed by Kim Snowden

Women's writing has always played an important role in shaping and influencing feminist politics. Contemporary feminism is even more fluid in its boundaries, shifting and changing with the times. *The Hungry Mirror* and *Porny Stories* reflect the need for new, engaging voices on topics that have long been at the centre of feminist debates.

Lisa de Nikolits' novel takes us into the lonely world of disordered eating. It's a violent book, outlining the punishment that the narrator inflicts on her body as she desperately tries to navigate her feelings about food in a world where beautiful equals thin. *The Hungry Mirror* challenges one of the myths about disordered eating—the absence of hunger, the desire to eat. This narrator has a hunger that food can never satisfy. At the heart of this novel is the narrator's questioning of her own motivations—the seemingly perfect life, good career, good friends, a loving marriage—so what is she so hungry for? There are the obvious explorations of low self-esteem and insecurities, but this novel pushes us to think beyond the psychological and to consider the physical—the way that disordered eating feels in the body and the embodiment of the shame that comes with it. *The Hungry Mirror* is written in short chapters, almost like journal entries that describe the daily issues of a woman living with disordered eating, how she manages work, friends, a relationship; everything is a negotiation. There are chapters that take us out of this world and discuss, in detail, a conversation with a friend or a day at work—these chapters can feel out of place as de Nikolits jumps into narrative threads that are left unexamined.

These disconnected moments, however, make us voyeurs, eager to return to the intimate world of secrets and shame. In this way, we are implicated in the larger discourses critiqued in the novel that keep her spiraling downwards.

The title of Eva Moran's collection of short stories, *Porny Stories*, suggests that the reader is going to be challenged, shocked, and titillated, even taken on an unconventional and voyeuristic journey. And there is shock, there's titillation, there are taboo subjects, frank discussions of sex, unconventional writing—and that's all in the first story. By the fourth story there is also boredom. These stories are punchy and some of them are witty riffs on dating and sex in contemporary Canada. Moran wants to comment on how we navigate relationships in the media-saturated world that now includes dating quizzes, social networking, and online dating sites. This is one of the book's strengths, especially her observations about media constructions of femininity and masculinity that exploit what we are not and make us feel less-than. These stories feel more suited to newspaper or magazine columns. Reading them all together gets tiring as each story seems the same. Perhaps that's the point, but with the characters' relentless and usually drunken pursuits of sex and love and more sex, all that's left for the reader is a hangover and regret.

On Gender, Genre, and Graphic Art

Reingard M. Nischik
Engendering Genre: The Works of Margaret Atwood. U of Ottawa P $34.95

Reviewed by Fiona Tolan

With *Engendering Genre*, Reingard Nischik presents an attractive, accessible, and useful addition to the ever-expanding body of critical works on Atwood. Following Nischik's 2000 edited collection, *Margaret Atwood: Works and Impact*—a celebratory overview of Atwood's status, at sixty, as "one of the most important literary chroniclers of our time"—*Engendering Genre* contains something of the same sense of appreciative reflection on the author's inarguably substantial contribution to Canadian literature. At times, assertions of Atwood's unique significance can perhaps slip into overstatement; in *Power Politics*, we are told, "Atwood's sharp diagnosis of the sexes is presented with a bluntness that is highly unusual, if not unique, in the long history of love poetry"—which is a long and varied history indeed. Such avowals, however, are tempered by a welcome note of circumspection when, for example, Atwood's role as a visionary pioneer of feminist writing is placed within a wider, contextualizing history of North American feminist women's writing. Throughout, the volume betrays and benefits from the author's evident and long-standing critical engagement with, and personal enjoyment of, Atwood's work.

Following an introduction that stresses Atwood's versatility as a writer—"one would be hard put to argue that she excels more in one literary genre than in the others"—and also describes her recurring preoccupation with gender, the subsequent seven chapters are structured by genre: poetry, short fiction, and prose poems, short stories, novels, film adaptations, criticism, and cartoons. The latter chapter supplies Nischik's most innovative contribution with the reproduction of strips from Atwood's "Kanadian Kultchur Komix." With this, *Engendering Genre* makes a definite contribution to Atwood scholarship and provides its readers with welcome access to this peripheral but occasionally intriguing material. The book concludes with a new interview with Atwood, conducted by Nischik. The tone of the interview is notably informal, with much parenthetical reference to "laughter" and a digression on squirrels and gardening, and while it touches on many topics, including the ubiquitous subject of Atwood's literary celebrity, its greatest use lies in the particular focus on Atwood's graphic art. This specificity moves the conversation beyond the more general Atwood interview, of which there are so many. Overall, the book's organizational structure provides a simple and logical approach to the discussion, which is then further broadly focused around the theme of gender.

The central premise of *Engendering Genre* is the proposition that gender and genre intersect and "constitute" one another in Atwood's writing. As Nischik explains: "genre and gender in Atwood's oeuvre intertwine in a combination of complicity and critique." What this ultimately means in terms of re-examining or re-evaluating Atwood's work is not always entirely clear, and Nischik concedes: "In a less rigorous manner, 'engendering genre' may simply refer to a foregrounding of gender in a specific generic format." This more simple formulation may not be particularly revolutionary, but it provides a perfectly reasonable and engaging route into discussing the evolution of a wide variety of textual genres by an important writer, and their common engagement with gender politics across a significant period of time.

In determinedly positioning gender at the heart of her discussion, Nischik takes a stand against the recent general turn away from feminist or gendered analyses

of Atwood's writing. With her preoccupation in recent years with science fiction and environmentalism, globalization and economics, some critics seem to assume that Atwood has "outgrown" her feminist-inflected beginnings. As such, a text that provides its reader with a broad overview of Atwood's developing and sustained concern with the power politics of gender, and which makes a clear statement for its continuing relevance in understanding her work, is valuable and indeed heartening. At the same time, it is worth mentioning that Nischik does repeat the common—and, I would argue, mistaken—statement that gender does not play a "crucial role" in *Oryx and Crake*. While the 2003 novel certainly does not incorporate the more readily feminist rhetoric of earlier texts, in its depictions of child sex tourism, pornography, human trafficking, and prostitution, gender politics are embedded in *Oryx and Crake*, touching as it does on some of the most pressing concerns of contemporary global feminism. Here, Nischik, like others, seems to have assumed that a male narrative voice indicates a turn away from gender as an informing theme. Elsewhere, however, the analysis of the complexities and multiplicities of gendered concern in Atwood's work is thoughtful and precise.

Ultimately, *Engendering Genre* seems to encompass two distinct purposes. In its broad overview of significant texts, and frequently in the tone of its introduction and subsequent explanations of key ideas, it proves a readily accessible and useful tool for students of Atwood's work. Nischik charts a clear path through the development of Atwood's career, noting examples of increasing narrative sophistication or experimentation, and providing a retrospective commentary on past concerns or developments, confidently guiding its reader through an established canon. Set against this generalist approach, however, is the specific interest in visual art that threads its way through the various analyses. The theme recurs both prominently, in the chapters on film and comic art, and tangentially, for example in the brief but interesting digression on the cover art of *Power Politics*—a topic later echoed in Atwood's comments on choosing the cover design for *Moral Disorder*. Surprisingly, this valuable and distinctive feature of Nischik's study is entirely absent from the book's title. Despite this seeming anomaly, however, *Engendering Genre* certainly deserves a place on the bookshelf of any Atwood scholar.

Lost and Last Prayers

Alden Nowlan
The Wanton Troopers Reader's Guide Edition. Goose Lane $19.99

Raymond Fraser
In Another Life. Lion's Head $24.95

Lesley Choyce
Seven Ravens: Two Summers in a Life by the Sea. Wolsak & Wynn $19.00

Reviewed by Susie DeCoste

Lesley Choyce and Raymond Fraser are well-established writers, but their work will never take up the position in the Maritime Canadian canon that Alden Nowlan's does. Nowlan was a well-loved writer of the twentieth century whose works helped to establish many dominant themes in Maritime literature; as his first novel, *The Wanton Troopers* is significant for reading his oeuvre as well as the established literature of the region. The prominence of this edition's recovered final page of the manuscript—the prayer that readers of previous versions only saw the beginning phrase of—leads this omnibus review to see the group of texts in its light.

In the first section of Fraser's novel *In Another Life*, two young men set out to make their fortunes and instead make a series of bad decisions including non-stop drinking and burning bridges in every new

relationship. Their motivations for this six-week renegade lifestyle are as unclear to the reader as they are to the characters, making them largely unsympathetic at this point. The most successful and compelling section of the novel concerns the coming-of-age of the protagonist and narrator, Walt "Sam" Macbride. Here, the frankness of the narrating voice about the awkwardness of navigating through teenage years and a first love is skillfully done. When Walt loses his high-school sweetheart through his own fault, he proclaims, "There was a God alright. . . . Nothing less could have pulled off a trick of this magnitude." He sends up a prayer that echoes the one in *Troopers*, pleading, "Please, God . . . I'll quit drinking . . . I promise!" Walt's prayer lacks earnestness, though, and does not redeem him as a character; he fails to take responsibility for his life, even as he enters middle age, making him heartbreaking. The falseness of Walt's plea stands out the most when it is read in context with that noteworthy prayer in Nowlan's novel.

Nowlan's *The Wanton Troopers*, first written in 1960 and first posthumously published in 1988, introduces readers to the young and sensitive child Kevin O'Brien—perhaps better known as the protagonist of Nowlan's novel *Various Persons Named Kevin O'Brien* (1973). The reader witnesses Kevin deal with the violence, alcoholism, and poverty of his family and community; Nowlan trusts his readers to see the helplessness of Kevin's parents even as they behave in despicable ways. Kevin is the voice of morality in the text, and because he is a child no one hears him. Just as his parents have succumbed to the immoral lifestyles that poverty brings with it, the narrative suggests that so too will Kevin. The novel formerly ended with "Please God," whereas the restored version ends with a continuation of the prayer, sincerely and solemnly naming elements of Kevin's past, family, community, and hopeful future. In this world of devastating poverty witnessed by a child, the only appropriate way to respond to the complexities of the parents' actions—the simultaneous despicable behaviour coupled with the helplessness of their condition—is to make such a grand appeal; the newly recovered final page exemplifies and highlights Nowlan's incredible compassion.

As a memoir written in episodic journal entries over two subsequent summers, Lesley Choyce's memoir *Seven Ravens: Two Summers in a Life by the Sea* surely stands out here in genre and form. Choyce meanders through the memoir attendant to various spiritual and religious traditions including Shamanism, Buddhism, and new age thought. Some entries read as compendiums of quotable sentiment from thinkers and spiritual gurus, all with the intent of helping the narrator come to terms with life. In one memorable section, Choyce's dog becomes deathly ill, and he is afraid she will not make it through the night. Desperate for comfort, he places a picture of the Pope in front of her, feeling silly enough about the gesture to precede it with "I should not tell you this . . . " But I can think of many other controversial details he should not have told readers that take precedence over the use of a Catholic figure's picture for comfort—that he doesn't believe in teaching the history of World War I is a prime example. Choyce's voice is thus quite brave; and the text is genuinely spontaneous, studious, and honest about the trials of being in the world, which makes for a satisfying reading experience.

All Thought Up and Nowhere to Go

Keith Oatley
Therefore Choose. Goose Lane $22.95

Thomas Trofimuk
Waiting For Columbus. McClelland and Stewart $32.99

Reviewed by Greg Doran

Chekhov's detractors often complain that nothing happens in his plays: people simply talk about what happens. The same comment can be made about Keith Oatley's *Therefore Choose* and Thomas Trofimuk's *Waiting for Columbus*. In both works, the authors explore large ideas, often to the detriment of other aspects of the work. This approach has produced novels that are more intellectual explorations than works of fiction. In the end, while both are interesting, neither is engaging enough to recommend.

In *Therefore Choose*, Oatley has chosen the cusp of World War II for the setting. The novel focuses on a trio of friends and how each of their lives changes with the outbreak of war. The main character, George, is a medical student at Cambridge, where he meets Werner, a student from Germany. While at school, their friendship grows and leads to a shared trip to Germany. On that trip, Werner introduces George to Anna, and a new relationship begins. Through these relationships Oatley explores the consequences of George's choice to return to England at the first stirrings of the Nazi movement. The bulk of the novel, from that point onward, follows George as he debates whether he was right or wrong to leave Anna in Germany, thereby severing their romance. Unfortunately, this focus takes away from several other elements in the work. For example, the characters, with the exception of George, are flatly drawn. The reader never learns why Werner joins the Nazis or what he did during the war. Also, Oatley introduces as George's lover Bernadette, a former classmate of George's at medical school into the novel; she voices a feminist perspective on the social situation in Britain at the time. It is unfortunate that Oatley chose to focus on the idea of choice, which is frequently mentioned throughout the novel, for George is an interesting character set in a less-than-engaging novel.

Where Oatley's approach leads to flat characters, Trofimuk's intellectual approach leads to a novel without a focused plot. Trofimuk's work begins well, with the introduction of Columbus, a contemporary man who believes himself to be Christopher Columbus. In the mental institution where he is a resident, Columbus tells his story to Consuela, his nurse. Through the stories, Trofimuk introduces the central idea to be explored: the construction of identity. Similar to Oatley, Trofimuk uses the past as part of his setting, but he brings it to the present by littering it with anachronistic elements, such as Columbus using the telephone prior to its invention. In spite of these jarring moments, Columbus' stories are the most interesting parts of the novel, as he explains the lengths he went to organize the trip that would lead him to the "new world." In the telling of these stories, the novel's strength resides in its two central characters. Both Columbus and Consuela are fully rounded, and their relationship helps both of them reclaim lost identities. Unfortunately, Trofimuk also includes a series of superfluous nurses and doctors at the institute, as well as a completely unnecessary subplot about an Interpol agent who is overcoming his demons to track down the man who claims to be Columbus. As a result, the novel's plot is diluted and unfocused, so it takes too long to reach its conclusion, which arrives in a contrived fashion. Unable to sustain all of the plot threads, the novel sheds most of them to concentrate on the truth of Columbus' identity. As well, the novel's coda feels

tacked on and adds nothing to a reader's understanding of Columbus. In the end, the strength of the two central characters is not enough to overcome the deficiencies in the plot.

Recently, in a CBC radio interview, Camilla Gibb described a discarded novel of hers as having too much head and not enough heart. Her comment sums up Oatley's and Trofimuk's novels well. In the end, it is hard to recommend either book, for both sacrifice too many elements of fiction to be labelled successful. If you are looking for interesting intellectual explorations, then the novels will satisfy. If not, you will wish that the authors had paid more attention to the elements of fiction. In the end, neither work is a fully realized work of fiction.

Gauging Young Readers

Shane Peacock
The Secret Fiend. Tundra $21.99

Linda Smith
The Broken Thread. Coteau $12.95

Alison Acheson
Molly's Cue. Coteau $12.95

Reviewed by Rick Gooding

Pity adolescent fiction's fourteen-year-old protagonists, with their angsty self-consciousness and inability to recognize romantic attractions in themselves and others. Readers who are sixteen likely feel too sophisticated to sympathize with their childish concerns, while their eleven-year-old brothers and sisters may wonder what all the fuss is about. The authors of adolescent fiction have it hard, too, as they try to connect with young teens in prose that challenges without overwhelming. Shane Peacock, Linda Smith, and Alison Acheson have written novels featuring protagonists who are fourteen or fifteen, and they all strive to establish that elusive state where young readers both get what's going on and still care. In one sense, all three play it safe, steering clear of the kind of controversial territory that has occasionally landed such writers as Deborah Ellis in trouble, yet to varying degrees each of their novels risks alienating young readers by asking too much or too little.

The Secret Fiend, the fourth instalment of Shane Peacock's well-received *Boy Sherlock Holmes* series, demands much of its young reader. The novel opens late one night in 1868 when Sherlock's childhood friend, Beatrice Leckie, appears, claiming she has been attacked by Spring-Heeled Jack, an enigmatic figure who appears in penny dreadfuls and Victorian crime reports. At first skeptical, Sherlock eventually concedes that attacks are indeed occurring, though he steadfastly refuses to accept supernatural explanations for events. As he works to uncover the criminal's identity—reasoning, like Harry Potter, mostly in error—Sherlock overcomes a myriad of obstacles, both social and personal: the violence and poverty of London's East End, the pervasive anti-Semitism (in Peacock's novels Holmes is Jewish), his rivalry with the criminal youth Malefactor, and a growing—mostly unwelcome—awareness of his own burgeoning sexuality.

The main threats to the young reader's engagement stem from Peacock's richly detailed reconstruction of the social and political landscape of mid-Victorian London: the novel entails so many characters, historical figures, and events that readers may find themselves flipping pages to locate earlier passages that will make sense of some half-remembered character or reference. That said, *The Secret Fiend* is a very pleasurable read, and Peacock handles exposition deftly enough that new readers can enter the series here without feeling either lost or barred from returning to the earlier titles. And for perceptive older readers, *The Secret Fiend* may seem as pertinent to post-9/11 America as to Disraeli's England. In a nation run by an outsider ("It is almost as if a Negro had

become president of the United States"), there is social unrest, xenophobia, and the constant threat of terrorism. Readers familiar with Victorian literature will also enjoy how Peacock's novel not only constructs a plausible back-story to Conan Doyle's work but hints at historical origins for various nineteenth-century classics.

In Linda Smith's posthumous *The Broken Thread*, an apprentice to a group of wise women who weave the fates of humanity into tapestries accidentally cuts short thousands of lives when she mends the broken life-thread of the despotic Prince Ranjan. To rectify her mistake, the weavers magically transport the young woman, Alina, to the distant kingdom of Kazia, ostensibly to kill Ranjan, who is still a child. The broad trajectory of the narrative is predictable (my twelve-year-old immediately saw where the tale was headed) as Alina first defies the spoiled prince and then nurtures the positive qualities he will need to rule justly. In greater doubt is the question of who has been trying to assassinate Ranjan, and Alina's investigations give the plot a measure of mystery and suspense.

The Broken Thread will likely appeal to younger readers than *The Secret Friend*. Less detailed and narratively complex than Peacock's novel, Smith's tale succeeds because of its handling of personal interactions, which are informed by a Romantic sensibility. As Alina moves from a matriarchal culture that respects nature to the militaristic and patriarchal kingdom of Kazia, she must quell her instinctive assertiveness, though her only partial success is what makes it possible for her to tame the prince. Her task is complicated by her growing affection for Ranjan's bodyguard, Daris, whose attentions Alina struggles to understand. The gradual softening of Ranjan's character is also noteworthy, for his development is as much about his need to recover a childhood that has been trammelled by fear of assassination as it is about acquiring the qualities of a just ruler.

The novel that gauges its readers least well is *Molly's Cue.* Alison Acheson's narrator, like Sherlock, is fourteen, but the novel seems to address much younger readers. As Molly Gumley begins grade nine, a chance discovery about her grandmother, whom she has always admired as an accomplished actress, precipitates a debilitating stage fright that threatens the acting career Molly has imagined for herself. The story centers on Molly's attempts at returning to the stage, and secondarily on her dealings with her uncle Early, an aging hippie who has yet to commit to a course of life, and Candace, Molly's moody, artistic friend whose mother is expecting a baby. There is mild romantic interest, but it is more peripheral than in the novels of Smith or Peacock. The plot is linear and uncomplicated, the style undemanding, and the chapters very short, typically subdivided and averaging only about eight pages. *Molly's Cue* may appeal to readers for whom high-school is a distant prospect, but anyone entering those doors for the first time would likely have long outgrown the text intellectually, if not emotionally.

L'Art, le temps, la mort

Yvon Rivard
Une idée simple. Boréal 25,95 $

Compte rendu par Nathalie Roy

Yvon Rivard, romancier et essayiste, rassemble dans ce recueil des essais dont le fil conducteur est cette *idée simple* selon laquelle, suivant Hermann Broch, le « premier devoir de l'intellectuel, dans l'exercice de son métier, est de porter assistance à autrui ». Passant systématiquement de l'esthétique à l'éthique, Rivard réfléchit sur les manières dont la pensée, par l'intermédiaire de l'art, peut mener à un élargissement de la conscience qui serait dictée par le souci de l'autre. Comment l'intellectuel et

l'artiste peuvent-ils s'investir dans le monde, aider autrui à apprivoiser la mort, voire à la dépasser par l'abandon à ce qui nous dépasse, afin d'aboutir ainsi à une véritable connaissance du réel, qui serait opérante non pas sur un plan politique proprement dit, mais davantage spirituel? Comment se représenter une vie qui vaut la peine d'être vécue, en dépit de l'ignorance, du malheur et de la mort qui sont notre lot? Si les intellectuels et les artistes sont créateurs de formes, en quoi ces formes peuvent-elles êtres salvatrices? L'art, dont l'essence—suivant Broch, toujours—est une exigence d'infini, permettrait de rendre la mort indifférente, de transformer notre conception et notre expérience du temps, en portant le témoignage de ces instants où nous entrevoyons un temps plus grand, un présent qui échappe à la linéarité des causes et des effets, de l'avant et de l'après, et dans lequel le monde ne cesse de surgir.

Dans chacun des essais, l'auteur illustre sa pensée par l'entremise de lectures d'œuvres littéraires et cinématographiques d'auteurs variés, de Rainer Maria Rilke à Gabrielle Roy, en passant notamment par Virginia Woolf, Marcel Proust, Bernard Émond, Peter Handke et Marek Bienczyk. Le livre comporte trois parties. Dans la première, « Le retour de l'enfant prodigue », la réflexion porte sur l'éloignement nécessaire de l'intellectuel dont la pensée doit s'abstraire de ce qu'elle cherche à comprendre; éloignement qui, grâce au détour par les choses essentielles, amène le penseur à entrevoir cela qui nous relie aux autres et à l'univers, de manière à ce que ce soit cette même pensée qui conduise au retour vers le monde. La deuxième partie se réclame des présocratiques pour faire le pari que la connaissance véritable est de l'ordre du désir, qui ne peut se contenter de maîtriser des objets finis, mais vise plutôt la totalité de l'être, qui est toujours un désir d'infini. Suivant Jean Bédard, « nouveau présocratique », Rivard part du principe qu'on ne peut comprendre ce qui nous dépasse qu'en s'y abandonnant. La troisième partie développe « l'hypothèse de l'âme », mais pas dans un sens religieux ou dogmatique. Il s'agit plutôt d'appeler « âme » cette intuition d'une relation entre le monde et nous, cela qui, en chacun de nous, aspire à l'unité.

Rivard pose des enjeux importants, mais juge de la beauté dans l'art et, par conséquent, des voies par lesquelles on peut atteindre à l'intuition des choses essentielles selon des critères trop étroits. Quand il déplore, par exemple, le détournement du cinéma vers le spectacle en évoquant un cinéma qui serait « une entreprise d'abstraction », dans laquelle « aucun pas de côté, aucun regard oblique n'est possible », il oublie que le regard oblique est *aussi* celui que porte le spectateur ou le lecteur sur l'œuvre.

Tropes of Time and Place

Matt Robinson
Against the Hard Angle. ECW $16.95

Zachariah Wells
Track & Trace. Biblioasis $17.95

Soraya Peerbaye
Poems for the Advisory Committee on Antarctic Names. Goose Lane $18.95

Lisa Robertson
R's Boat. U of California P $22.95

Reviewed by Crystal Hurdle

Exploring time and place, four poets regard language's connection. Does it "cleave" (Robinson), "[ruddle], [riddle]" (Wells), "[unfurl]" (Peerbaye), "enter" (Robertson), or some combination thereof?

The lovely poems of Matt Robinson's *Against the Hard Angle* feature patience, waiting, exploration of the motive for metaphor, including architecture and the body as a house. Love of all things Haligonian imbues the second part, "Toeing the Slackroped Narrows." One poem is, according to the Acknowledgements, "exhibited on a traffic control box . . . as the inaugural

instance of the inclusion of poetry in the HRM's Art in Public Places Program." Clever spacing, a feature of many of his poems, echoes the discordant rhythm of stop and start traffic in "Study: Willow Tree, Traffic," brilliantly described as a "caesura" that's also "tachycardiac."

Love poems, including "Against the Hard Angle," winner of *The Malahat Review*'s long poem prize in 2009, comprise the book's first section, "What the Rest of Us Would Call Falling." The dailiness of "ii. work bench" propelling its reality of lost love juxtaposes with "iii. (flashback: kitchen sink)" and its fierce imperatives to leave off the domesticity for something else.

Punctuation takes on a semantic role. The colon, sometimes ending poems, reveals the thresholds stated and implied—what will happen if one takes up the offer to slip into thin air: "an eyelid spills just then. gist; then. just:" is a complete poem that ends the sequence "*It's Now*, He Thinks, *We Lie In It*."

The metaphoric language is less subtle in Zacahariah Wells' *Track & Trace*. Lists of synonyms (why not choose the best word?) and ineffective rhymes mar the volume though it's often emotionally striking. In "Slugs," all manner of such creatures are beguilingly presented, as only a connoisseur would be able to do (Sharon Olds would be proud . . .). Self as poet is too frequently used, overtly in "At the Rebecca Cohn Auditorium" with a play on Purdy's "At the Quinte Hotel." Amidst the prettiness of nostalgia (the book's dedication is "for my mother and for my father") are references to Li Po, Munch, Rilke, Heraclitus, Jean-Baptiste Chassignet, hinting at the book's wide range and overall audience appeal.

Birds abound: "seabirds shrieking their raucous diphthongs," crows, a cormorant, a heron, "like a Singer's / stainless needle," in one of two splendid poems about Vancouver.

Of three incantantory pieces, "A Winter," with sixteen lines beginning "It was a winter," pays off with the final statement, "you quickened and kicked"—the nostalgia of a childhood past coming full circle with the creation of a son. A long sonnet sequence "After the Blizzard" contains clear images of a Maritime whiteout, but the device of the last line of one sonnet beginning the next is sometimes forced.

Poems about birds and rutting animals aside, Wells and Peerbaye share something greater with Robinson: emotional resonance. Soraya Peerbaye's first collection of poems, on the Lambert 2010 short list, *Poems for the Advisory Committee on Antarctic Names,* captures the immigrant experience and the power of and duplicity of language. Several poems have titles in Creole (with a convenient though not necessary glossary, as the terms, so beautifully contextualized, are clear). Only one poem, "Girl, rabbit," is less than successful in its exploration of prepubescent animal love. Poems about the speaker's father are especially touching. In "Field of vision," the father suffers from glaucoma: "Small yellow pear kisses cornea; pupil beguiled." When he plays Scrabble, "letters soft-shoe, scuffle into place." For Peerbaye, words could be creatures, carefully chosen and tended.

In "Mangue," "fragrance [is] like a vanished language," an underpinning throughout the book, whose titular selection explores, in part, the loss of the Yaghan language; in fact, a separate poem that concludes the book is "Reading the Yamana-English Dictionary." It explores, implores: "failed promise of the infinitive, gesture // severed from the body that signs it." She is an acolyte of the power of language, in Antarctica and elsewhere—"my favourite word: *To convert oneself*, / *or be converted*, *into a bird*." Peerbaye writes, "How necessary / these words are. . . ."

Lisa Robertson's *R's Boat,* not to be confused with her previous *Rousseau's Boat*, explores this perceived necessity of words, interlacing theory with poetry. The title hints at the reduction, the shortening

of text. The time markers in "Utopia"—"Spring of 1979," "At about midnight in Autumn," "By early June," "August," "April," "Spring," "It was 1993," even the specificity of "On this second Monday of October at ten minutes past eleven"—give a framework for what one might expect will be narrative, but such is not the case, as the speaker claims, "I wanted narrative to be a picture of distances ringed in purple." Pretty, but? The vertical wall of text ("It receives us like a surly host" ["A Cuff"]), an upended, unsafe trampoline, bounces the reader back.

Like Wells, Robertson tracks and traces but, maddeningly, to no conclusion. If she wishes "once more [to] go screaming into sheer manifesto," her audience becomes increasingly select: barred from admission are those who might *like* narrative to be "an authorizing system." The long poems with their succession of minimally connected lines are relentless and uncomfortable. The final poem begins, "And if I become unintelligible to myself," suggesting that Robertson is well aware of how far she is going. The author's claim of "Having refused to need" allows her to "occupy the design." But where does that place the reader? "I am no longer aesthetical trope" and "*I have been like lyric*" offer answers . . . of a sort. Aesthetics is privileged over meaning. Perhaps rudderlessness offers both answer and question and marks the way for her next experimental text.

By cleaving to narrative, using place and time in more conventional but still intriguing ways (witness Robinson's flashbacks and flashforwards; Peerbaye's movement from Mauritius to Antarctica; Wells' affection for Maritime homes past and present), Wells, Robinson, and Peerbaye make for more rewarding reads.

Images vives de la mort

Diane-Ischa Ross
noir blanc nabis. Tryptique 15,00 $

Nancy Vickers
Aeterna. Le Jardin des immortelles. David 29,95 $

Compte rendu par Ghislaine Boulanger

Malgré des itinéraires distincts, les livres de Diane-Ischa Ross et de Nancy Vickers nous convient tous deux à une incursion poétique du côté des arts visuels.

Avec *noir blanc nabis*, Diane-Ischa Ross aborde la maladie, la mémoire, et la mort sous les signes du nabisme, un mouvement artistique de la fin du dix-neuvième siècle qui aspirait à renouveler la peinture comme l'auraient fait des prophètes. À l'instar des peintres nabis, la poète explore des procédés variés, tels que l'aquatinte et le dessin, même lorsqu'il faut « parler à côté de l'estampe / pâlir sur image / nous effacer vers le deuil ». Se succèdent ainsi des tableaux animés par une oscillation prévisible entre le clair et l'obscur, ou, encore, par des couleurs symboliques, voire personnifiées, comme en témoigne ce passage dépeignant un refus des dernières phases de la vie :

> L'indigo ne veut pas mourir
> dans la chambre blanc chaux vive et fraîche
> le vert moqueur de l'arrosoir
> le citron-gris en jarre en peluche de fruit
> ne veut pas mourir
> ni la vieille dame
> peut-être un reflet dans un ancien miroir
> nul ne veut mourir
> plutôt dormir dans l'autre lit des choses

Inspirés par Paul Gauguin, les Nabis privilégiaient également « la couleur profonde sur le corps », « la lumière architecte ». Ces affinités tacites ne sont toutefois pas les seules à sous-tendre la poésie de Ross, car cette dernière imagine aussi « [qu']on écrirait du Rembrandt près de la fenêtre blonde ». Son écriture, tantôt imprégnée d'assonances et d'allitérations, tantôt rythmée par des anaphores et des accumulations, possède, de

surcroît, la musicalité d'un « monde rêvé », où les images s'apprécient « à haute et intelligible voix ».

Nancy Vickers a pour sa part photographié une centaine de statues funèbres afin de concevoir sa propre nécropole. Bien qu'*Aeterna* ait « voulu rendre hommage aux sculpteurs » canadiens, à « notre patrimoine funéraire pratiquement inconnu », ces créateurs demeurent anonymes dans la table des illustrations qui n'en nomme aucun. Nulle mention, par exemple, des artistes Alfred Laliberté et Marc-Aurèle de Foy Suzor-Côté, qui honorèrent l'œuvre politique de Wilfrid Laurier avec un mausolée constitué de « neuf muses aux lèvres closes », et dont le nombre correspondait aux emblèmes provinciaux ornant « le sarcophage du géant ». Puisque Vickers dissocie les sculptures des véritables « dormeurs éternels qui gisent sous les monuments », elle consacre dix chapitres à des figures pour la plupart mythiques ou symboliques, telles « Les Divines », « Les Pleureuses », et « Les Intemporelles », qui « raconteraient leur histoire, ou exprimeraient une réflexion sur la mort, le deuil ou l'après-vie ». Afin de justifier des thèmes et un style plus anciens, l'auteure précise que ses personnages « parlent d'une voix d'autrefois, car [ils] datent presque [tous] d'une époque révolue ». Rehaussées par de magnifiques photos, ces voix lyriques sauront certes émouvoir un public diversifié, comme les lectrices qui m'ont avoué avoir versé des larmes en découvrant ce recueil. Néanmoins, le recours perceptible et récurrent à un schéma journalistique (qui? quand? où? etc.), de même que la répétition constante de certaines structures syntaxiques et stylistiques, comme d'innombrables vers débutant par la préposition « dans », affaiblissent l'originalité de l'album.

Une résurrection pour le christianisme?

Paul-Émile Roy

Le Christianisme à un tournant. Bellarmin 24,95 $

Compte rendu par Patricia Nourry

Le christianisme est bel et bien à un tournant, affirme Paul-Émile Roy, dans son dernier essai qui pourrait bien être son testament spirituel. Si la chrétienté se meurt, nous dit l'auteur, la foi au Christ peut quant à elle se dégager de l'ancienne cosse dans laquelle elle se trouvait maintenant enclose et engendrer désormais de nouvelles formes culturelles. Mais qu'est-ce qui assurera la pérennité du christianisme malgré les mutations culturelles et institutionnelles profondes que l'Occident a connues depuis 2000 ans? C'est, soutient-il, ce qui en constitue le fondement irréductible : la foi des croyants nourrie par la lecture de la Bible (un livre à la fois humain et inspiré, d'où la nécessité de faire le départ entre le message profond qu'il véhicule et les formes temporelles profanes par lesquelles il s'est livré), ainsi que la spiritualité qui en découle.

Essentielle à l'homme, la foi permettrait de donner sens et « d'assumer la réalité », en orientant l'existence à partir d'une Révélation qui transcende les conjonctures historiques. L'essayiste argue qu'il faut éviter les pièges du scientisme, du rationalisme réducteur et du scepticisme à outrance qui voudraient limiter le réel à ce que l'homme peut expliquer. Il importe de rester critique face à ces courants de pensée niant a priori la présence de l'Être, de l'Inconnu. La foi en Dieu ne se conceptualise pas, elle se vit dans l'amour, rappelle-t-il, c'est-à-dire dans une expérience qui échappe aux règles de la simple logique. Ce qui n'empêche pas de se servir de sa raison pour établir les nuances qui s'imposent : la foi n'est réductible ni à la religion chrétienne (qui a sans cesse besoin d'être évangélisée), ni à l'expression de cette foi dans une culture donnée. La

crise religieuse et culturelle que traverse présentement le Québec reposerait en partie sur pareille confusion puisque la Révolution tranquille, qui nous a permis de rompre avec une tradition devenue surannée, nous aurait aussi coupés de notre identité profonde. Reconnaître les assises chrétiennes sur lesquelles repose notre culture et notre histoire, assure Paul-Émile Roy, s'avèrera nécessaire pour mieux savoir qui nous sommes et ainsi ouvrir quantité de passages vers l'avenir . . .

Mapping and Way-making

Leslie C. Sanders, ed.
Fierce Departures: The Poetry of Dionne Brand. Wilfrid Laurier UP $14.95

George Elliott Clarke
Blues and Bliss: The Poetry of George Elliott Clarke. Wilfrid Laurier UP $14.95

Laisha Rosnau
lousy explorers. Nightwood $17.95

Reviewed by Erin Wunker

Each of the slim editions published by the Laurier Poetry Series open with a foreword from General Editor Neil Besner. "At the beginning of the twenty-first century," he says, "poetry in Canada . . . finds itself in a strangely conflicted place." On the one hand there is still a vibrant—if small—listening and reading audience. On the other hand, poetry is "becoming a vulnerable art for reasons that don't need to be rehearsed." The aim of the Laurier Poetry Series is both admirable and exciting. As Besner outlines, the Series hopes to facilitate an interface between reader and poet. The selections themselves are meant to make the work of the poets more accessible for a broad variety of readers: students in the classroom, readers in the public sector, the media. The selections in these lovely volumes are made by a scholar who is engaged with the poet's work. The poet then chooses a piece from his or her oeuvre to serve as an afterword for the volume. The result is a surprisingly thorough sampling of an established Canadian poet's work.

Every volume in the series opens with a short biographical note. The introduction follows. In *Fierce Departures: The Poetry of Dionne Brand,* York Professor Leslie C. Sanders focuses on the "ethics of witness . . . occasional hopefulness wedded to deep despair" that is endemic of Brand's writing. Sanders notes "the long poem is Dionne Brand's form." Her selections span almost two decades of Brand's prolific poetic production. There are substantial excerpts from *No Language is Neutral* (1990, 1998), *Land to Light On* (1997), *thirsty* (2002), and *Inventory* (2006). Sanders takes care to familiarize the reader with Brand's politics of location. She notes that Brand's "voice always locates itself in particular places, histories, and social relations and is never abstract." Brand's own negotiations of "home and 'not-home'" are figured in a discursive relationship with what Sanders terms "a distinctly Canadian question: Where is here?" This poet deeply engages with the tense relationships between roots and rootlessness, location and dislocation, longing and belonging.

Brand selected an excerpt from *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging* to serve as the afterword. The portion here functions as a notanda. "An oral ruttier is a long poem containing navigational instructions," she tells the reader. These long poems, which were locative rubrics, were "learned by sailors and recited by heart." Like the oral ruttier, the afterword contains internalized directions for finding one's way home. Unlike the navigational poems, Brand's ruttier is for "the marooned in the diaspora," for the spirits whose "coherence is incoherence."

Blues and Bliss: The Poetry of George Elliott Clarke was selected and is introduced by writer, editor, and teacher John Paul Fiorentino. As Fiorentino notes, Clarke is

a veritable polyphony of voices: "the blues singer, the preacher, the cultural critic, the exile, the Africadian, the high modernist, the spoken word artist; the Canadian poet." In his selections Fiorentio provides the reader with Clarke's sweeping and mellifluous poetry; sweeping in its voices, perspectives, and genealogies, mellifluous in its cadence and inherent musicality. Clarke, like David Walcott, "engage[s] the canon, and . . . mythologizes 'non-literary territory'" (Fiorentino). Selections from *Whylah Falls* (itself based on Weymouth Falls, Nova Scotia) underscore what Fiorentino, via Anne Compton, understands to be a reimagining of people and history in mythical terms.

I've been looking for new work by Laisha Rosnau since I stumbled upon her first novel *The Sudden Weight of Snow* (M&S). That novel, whose narrative structure is so familiar (a coming of age story, first love, and first heartbreak) left me feeling bereft. It was simply a beautiful and compelling read, one that sneaks up on the reader and leaves her breathless with the weight of memory. *lousy explorers* is Rosnau's most recent collection of poetry, and it carries with it the same understated power. The explorations undertaken here are many and various: a new mother seeks to locate herself in a new city and in her new life. A newly married couple grapples with the inevitable shift into normalcy after the intensity of early love. Each attempt at navigation leads not to a sense of locatedness, but to a new need to map again. Finally, but jubilantly, the speaker says, "You and I shuck off the idea of place, / become something larger— / each of us is a planet, sun or moon / to each other, circling, / kept on track by an invisible tether / that tells us how far, how long, / how much, when" ("Epidemic").

Breathing Lessons

Robyn Sarah
Pause for Breath. Biblioasis $17.95

Rob Budde
declining america. Bookthug $18.00

George Whipple
Swim Class and Other Poems. St. Thomas Poetry Series n.p.

Reviewed by Andre Furlani

The title of Robyn Sarah's ninth volume of poetry announces a breather before fresh exertions, but *Pause for Breath* also indicates any interval long enough to take in and take down a poem. These ones are like brief truces in a war of entropic attrition. "God! I am empty. / Pour me full again." She yearns to be "taut gut" to pluck, not however to sing a new song for the Lord but "a psalm: Forsake me not, / God! I am dead empty." Sarah wants her exhaustion to hum. And it does.

She next calls herself a "Dry Spring": "No words, no will to words. / April days are bright. / My hope's in hiding." Some of the words recall Hopkins' ("My heart in hiding"), but she cannot summon his fervour. "Our well is dry," she later reports, along with instructions to dig deeper because "Strength will be given."

This is satisfying, but it is the strength of the Talmudic syntax only. The passive construction omits Providence and admits a facetious overtone. The eponymous poem that follows further effaces the traces of theophany: "It's the digging that saves." It is an existential formula and, in literary terms, an oblique reply to Paul Celan's "Death Fugue," in which Jewish inmates of the death camps dig their own graves. (Sarah's earlier poem "Fugue" draws on it.)

Celan later put the breath into a book title, *Atemwende* ("breath-turn"): the hope that the poet's inspiration might wend the culture towards new sources of renewal. In a series of poems prompted by the terrors

launched from Afghan caves and the Oval Office, Sarah cannot breathe hope into falling things: "Something fell. / was it our face? / the towers? / an empire?" In "Wake" the strict ricorso repetitions of the villanelle structure cultural inertia. Not breath-turn but wrong turn gets into "A.D. 2007," an update to Hardy's own New Year's dirge, "The Darkling Thrush": "We would have to backtrack / through so much claptrap / to get to where things took a / wrong turn. And wouldn't it be / too late? Where, anyway, / do we think we're going? Where are we going? / *Nowhere very fast*."

Political cynicism coincides with private disappointment and the ills of aging. "Heat of the immediate / is leaving me now," goes "Flash." An echo of Leonard Cohen's "If It Be Your Will" briefly resonates before the second law of thermodynamics extinguishes all faerie:

> Cooled will I abide then
> in the world then,
> till breath no longer clouds the mirror –
> till one day, also briefly, my decay
> will warm an inch or two
> of the encompassing clay.

The breath is more vigorous in a sonnet on the moral dividends of nature, the gift of a sprig whose seeming fluff reveals, in the closing couplet, "tiny, perfect flowers underneath." Several other poems rely on worms, leaves, and storm-lopped trees to replenish the stock of tropes and hopes. At times it takes George Whipple, whose *Swim Class and Other Poems* earnestly ties threadbare Romantic tropes onto metronome metres worthy of his abundant store of cliché, to remember what an achievement Sarah's technical assurance represents. It is Sarah's poetry class Whipple should attend.

Sarah's "Span" culminates in an affirming pentametre couplet:

> What then can our intrepid cursive prove?
> –Still, let us make our rhyme a rhyme of
> love.

A slant-rhyme only, and a faint reverberation of Donne's couplet in "The Canonization": "Wee dye and rise the same, and prove / Mysterious by this love." More convincing are poems about sneezing, blinking, and yawning. The vigour gets into Sarah's rhythms and rhymes, as always, but they play here against a melancholic sense, as in blues music. "We were dead and could breathe," Celan writes, and Sarah too knows how to tap tombstone eloquence.

The best known huffing and puffing in modern English poetry comes from the cetacean lungs of Charles Olson, whose open field poetics is hot air to Sarah. "And the line comes (I swear it) from the breath, from the breathing of the man who writes, at the moment that he writes," Olson declares. Sarah is wary of his equation in "Projective Verse": "the HEART, by way of the BREATH, to the LINE."

One American thing Rob Budde, like Sarah a Canadian poet born in the U.S., does not decline in *Declining America* is the thoracic dilation of Olson's aesthetic. The HEART, however, here enters the LINE by way of the SOFTWARE. Found poems are collaged out of declassified C.I.A. documents ("Kubark") and Dubya speeches ("A Reiteration"), phrases juxtaposed from Jean Baudrillard ("My American Movie"), computer generated imagism ("Software Tracks"), sardonic conjunctions of an economics textbook and a LANGUAGE poetry manifesto ("Indices"), and Steinian logographs where the words do the thinking ("Assuming Depth"). Although probably little of this poetry issues from a computer algorithm, much of it mimics the conventions of digital information genres. In contrast to the entropic chills, dry wells, "breakable fathers," romantic "comedown," and Weltschmerz of *Pause for Breath*, Budde offers a bracing outward orientation remote from "the weariness, the fever, and the fret" of the Keatsian lyric ego.

In *Declining America* political events are not the occasion for existential reflection

but for attention to the discourses by which they are manipulated. The poetry often rings off of a corporate cliché, government euphemism, malapropism, comic substitution, or arbitrary association. Like Sarah, he directs contempt at the laissez-faire et laissez-guerre paternalism of the Enron White House, its politics of free markets, closed borders, and open season militarism.

Budde's satirically ruptured syntax, patched together from the media-saturated speech of public culture, can make a more reliable seismograph than can Sarah, whose intricate lyric instruments are overtaxed by the tremors they would register. For good or ill, the aphasic cacophony Budde orchestrates captures well our political actualities. The lyric poet of *Pause for Breath* commands a breathtaking technical repertoire, but the painstaking descant muffles Sarah's vehemence. "Pent" is the title, subject, and closely confined structure of one of the book's best poems, eloquently pent up with a rage the book refuses to vent.

Unsettling History and Text

Cynthia Sugars and Gerry Turcotte, eds.
Unsettled Remains: Canadian Literature and the Postcolonial Gothic. Wilfrid Laurier UP $42.95

Kenneth Sherman
What the Furies Bring. Porcupine's Quill $19.95

Reviewed by Heather Latimer

Unsettled Remains: Canadian Literature and the Postcolonial Gothic, edited by Cynthia Sugars and Gerry Turcotte, and *What the Furies Bring,* by Kenneth Sherman, tackle diverse representations of ghostly, haunting images and events in literature from Canada and abroad, over the last one hundred and fifty years. Different in subject matter, format, and style, each collection shares the goal of exploring the ways that literature and literary studies have been troubled by the spectral legacies of various forms of trauma and invasion, including colonialism, war, imperialism, and terrorism, and the role that literature plays in coming to terms with these legacies and their ghosts.

Unsettled Remains takes the Gothic elements of Canadian postcolonial literature as its subject, looking at how supernatural manifestations of the uncanny connect to Canada's settler-invader past and present. Freud famously theorized the uncanny as something both strange and familiar, a sensation stemming from the moment when something that should strike us as familiar or comforting is also *unheimlich* (unhomely) and unsettling. This sense of foreignness is most acutely felt within ourselves, as the uncanny represents a moment of estrangement, where we are unsure of actual or spectral, interior or exterior, reality or imagination—a sensation that Freud also describes as the return of the repressed. The essays in *Unsettled Remains* reveal this return, focusing on how subjective and national identities in Canadian literature have been formed through notions of interiority and unsettlement, and through the haunting necessarily inherent in a postcolonial context: through what Sugars and Turcotte name as Gothic "experiences of spectrality and the uncanny." Monsters, ghosts, tricksters, and other supernatural characters figure prominently in all of the volume's essays, therefore, as metaphors of the many repressed histories brought on by our colonial past, and as representations of the ability for "monstrous" others to "talk back" to dominant narratives. While some of the essays connect a specific Canadianness to the Gothic tradition, others revisit the Canadian postcolonial canon seeking the uncanny, and others struggle to define the terms of this subgenre itself, asking questions about whether or not there can or should be an "Aboriginal Gothic," or how to define a "Ukrainian-Canadian" or "feminist postcolonial" Gothic. The former are most effective at addressing the stakes in using terms like

"Gothic" or "uncanny" to understand Canada's ongoing colonial heritage, and question whose voices should be included in and excluded from this genre. Taken together, the essays in the collection work to articulate how and why focusing on the Gothic in Canadian postcolonial literature is not only a strategy for reading the uncanny in our settler-invader narratives, but also a way to challenge these very narratives, and to better understand how being haunted is always already, and necessarily, connected to haunting.

Freud also theorized the uncanny as connected to aesthetics, and privileged storytelling is an exemplary model of how the uncanny sensation of being beside oneself is understood and produced. *What the Furies Bring* focuses on this role, examining how storytelling has addressed the uncanny terrors that have structured our public consciousness in the last century, from the Holocaust to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. In nineteen essays, Sherman uses his own family stories, those of more famous writers such as Anne Frank, H.G. Wells, Primo Levi, and John Updike, and those of lesser-known authors such as Varlam Shalamov, to address what he calls "the terrors of history," and how and why writers have sought to convey the reality of these terrors upon the psyche. In elegant and often understated prose, Sherman muses on literary representations of, and responses to, the Soviet Gulag, the Holocaust, Judaism, other religions, illness, and terrorism, maintaining his own narrative thread and voice throughout. He begins with the most personal, and perhaps most affecting, essay in the collection, and shares the story of his own Jewish grandfather's move to Canada from Poland. Their relationship structures the entire collection, as Sherman repeatedly seeks answers to the question he imagines his grandfather asking him in this first essay: "what can you really know about the hard knocks of life?" Their relationship also influences his choice of writers and topics, as his essays focus on masculine, paternal voices reminiscent of his grandfather's, largely leaving female writers, besides Frank, out of the picture. As opposed to *Unsettled Remains,* which use academic language and seeks to assert the place of a new sub-genre in Canadian literature, Sherman's style is reflective and personal; his essays read as though we are eavesdropping on his conversations with writers he loves and admires. It is perhaps because of this personal aspect to his style that Sherman is able to make the claims and ask the questions he does, such as what the value is of poetic work, whether or not the achievements of Old World writers can ever be duplicated by modern ones, and why some "contemporary American poets lack the historical sensibility to write powerfully about 9/11." Sherman warns us in the preface that his "is not a systematic study," and it is not. Rather, it is a collection of the reflections and thoughts of a poet, an intellectual, and an essayist who sincerely wants to know what motivates a writer to try and capture horror, fear, and trauma, and the role the reader has in sharing these horrors. Taking on the boundaries between remembering and forgetting, New and Old Worlds, hope and shame, Sherman's essays flesh out the connections between the literary imagination and the status of humanity.

He Married a Buddhist

Alan Twigg
Tibetans in Exile: the Dalai Lama & the Woodcocks. Ronsdale $21.95

Reviewed by Matt Hiebert

There's their Endowment Fund for writers, George's eighteen years as the first editor of this journal, and the countless books. But the two charitable organizations George and Ingeborg Woodcock established—the Tibetan Refugee Aid Society (TRAS) and

Canadian India Village Aid (CIVA)—might be their greatest legacy. The Woodcocks' NGOs, both still very much active, have remarkable histories. In telling them, Alan Twigg casts new light on their enigmatic founders.

In form, *Tibetans in Exile* is eclectic. The first chapter begins with a synopsis of TRAS and its formation in 1963, and ends recounting the harrowing escape of a girl from Tibet who today, as Ingeborg once did, sells handicrafts in Vancouver for refugee projects. Twigg consistently seeks out voices within the facts, figures, and dates of organizational history. Vignettes of those involved with or affected by TRAS pepper the book.

A long excerpt from the Woodcocks' travelogue *Faces of India* describes their journey to Dharamsala in 1962 and their serendipitous meeting with the Dalai Lama. George's assessment of the liberal Dalai Lama and their conversation about religion, the future of Tibet, and its culture is all the more fascinating for having taken place nearly fifty years ago.

Two chapters focus on Order of Canada recipient Judy Tethong, who spent most of the 'sixties as a volunteer teacher in squalid Tibetan refugee settlements. We learn of her battles with illness and rats, also of the frequent deaths of Tibetan children she becomes attached to. McGraw-Hill would have done well to publish her memoirs, even if they did insist on calling them "I Married a Tibetan" (a "hopeless" title, counsels George in one of the included letters to Tethong).

In a section of interviews, Twigg is able to elicit the contrast between the Woodcocks' anarchist, interpersonal approach to running an NGO, and the institutional model of TRAS director John Conway, Woodcock's successor from 1971. The Woodcocks founded CIVA in 1981 after TRAS refused their request to purchase a generator for an Indian hospital. With a mandate to foster self-reliance through sustainable development and women's empowerment, CIVA has often used creative fundraising involving Canadian artists to support its projects in rural India.

Tibetans in Exile pulls "radically reclusive" Ingeborg out from the shadows. Chain-smoking, tenacious, severe, and compassionate, she managed the fundraising for TRAS, and anything else, with an iron hand. With an interest in Tibet and Buddhism since her childhood in Germany, she studied Tibetan in the fifties, and that first meeting with the Dalai Lama was on her initiative. It is surprising the organizational work and writing she did during the forties in London for *Now* and for the Freedom Defence Committee go unmentioned.

We learn more about George in George Fetherling's biography *The Gentle Anarchist*, but reminiscences of friends collected by Twigg in the final section present not a gentle man but a defiant one. Both George and Ingeborg hated pomposity and both maintained a dangerous reputation for spotting people who could be exploited for good ends.

Positioning Globality

Eleanor Ty
Unfastened: Globality and Asian North American Narratives. U of Minnesota P $22.50

Kit Dobson
Transnational Canadas: Anglo-Canadian Literature and Globalization. Wilfrid Laurier UP $36.95

Reviewed by Meagan Dallimore

In her preface to *Trans.Can.Lit*, Smaro Kamboureli describes Canadian literature as "a troubled and troubling sign" that is "never fully released from the various ways it is anchored" and, yet, possesses the potential to "disturb and alter the conditions that affect it" and thereby "point . . . to an elsewhereness that is not yet legible." Eleanor Ty and Kit Dobson explore this

tension in their respective projects as they productively complicate and expand the idea of an "anchored" Canadian literature, and bring important attention to what Ty describes as the everyday "social dimensions of globalization." Both authors advocate a critical approach to movement in order to foreground a diversity of affiliations, subjectivities, and forms of agency and belonging that are often elided by fixed points of reference.

In *Unfastened*, Eleanor Ty makes a compelling argument for the need to rework the terms "Asian Canadian" and "Asian American" in relation to millennial literature. She suggests that such descriptors, which locate the nation at the centre, do not speak to the heterogeneity or multiple available identifications within communities marked "Asian" in the global era. For Ty, the 1990s marked a shift from autoethnography and "realist narratives" to what she terms "Asian North American narratives"—or, writing that multiplies the relations and diversifies the concerns and potential responses of Asian subjects through the use of postmodern techniques, elements of the fantastic, and alternate forms of expression and mobility.

The six chapters, grouped thematically into three sections, explore the interplay of desire and cultural expectation, feelings of inadequacy, and concrete barriers to inclusion, as well as the violent, evasive, complicit, and "playful" responses of Asian diasporic characters to the interconnected, and often limiting, structures of nation-state and global capitalism. Refusing to position Asian diasporic subjects as "fatalities of globalization," Ty has chosen cultural texts that feature displaced characters who are affected by the unequal power structures of globalization yet have "handled, negotiated with, manipulated, and even enjoyed their mobility in a globalized world." Writers such as Brian Oley, Lydia Kwa, and Ruth Ozeki are foregrounded, as are representations of global sex trade workers, children of migrant workers, and men and women living with disabilities. While Ty effectively demonstrates how physical, psychic, and social mobilities have multiplied the spaces, relations, and concerns addressed in Asian North American literature, some of her most compelling examples reflect a continued tradition of anti-racist work. The writers, their characters, and the critic, herself, challenge reflexive associations of certain characteristics, traditions, spaces of belonging, and even "tactics of subversion" with gendered, racialized, and ethnic subjects by defamiliarizing these very aspects. That this work of "unfastening" interpretive categories is an ongoing, mobile project is suggested by her coda, where Ty proposes the term "Asian global" to describe narratives that do not easily fit within existing paradigms, thus opening up space for further mobilization.

Albeit with a different emphasis, Kit Dobson similarly seeks to "rescale" and multiply the possibilities of Canadian literature in *Transnational Canadas*. Divided into three parts, each with its own introduction and conclusion, Dobson creates a genealogy for the emergence of transnational writing in Canada—one that unfolds chronologically based on how "discourses of nationalism shift." Drawing together Marxist thought, poststructuralism, Indigenous, and transnational feminist theory, Dobson suggestively argues that it is not possible to think about "literature or culture . . . outside of the system of economic exchange"; a transnational approach to writing in Canada must instead "think *through* capitalism" in order to consider whether and how difference can be articulated amidst forces of deterritorialization and reterritorialization.

Citing the 1951 Massey Commission's position on the paucity of a national literature as a jumping-off point for discussion, Dobson retraces and deepens key

debates surrounding the intersection of the nation-state, capital, and global flows in the production of literary culture and subjectivity. Part One takes up Derrida's *Spectres of Marx* and its criticism to contemplate the possibility of a "deconstructive politics of responsibility" that remains open to alterity and sees transformative potential in nonreductive alliance. Dobson maintains that, while writers of the centennial period imagined forms of national cohesion in opposition to the forces of global capital—namely, American imperialism—their work also demonstrates a concern for the failure of a fixed national identity to open up a space of belonging for its citizens. Part Two traces how the 1980s inaugurated the increased publication of "racially marked writing"—especially when such writing affirms how the nation imagines itself. Novels like *Obasan* and *In the Skin of a Lion,* once considered "radical" for bringing recognition to elisions of race, ethnicity, and class, are now often faulted for not contesting the basis for the "imagined nation" in the same way that texts such as Jeanette Armstrong's *Slash* do. Although collusion with dominant culture is a risk of gaining visibility and voice within the public sphere, postcolonial writers continue to enact their difference. The "flexible subjectivity" of Roy Miki's poetic practice in *Surrender* and examples of "critically considered movement" present in Dionne Brand's *What We All Long For* represent acts of resistance to forces that seek to stabilize identities within the nation. Dobson argues that it is through various forms of situated mobility that the potential for a "politics of alliance that remains open to difference" might be found.

While the expansiveness of the terms "Asian global" and "Transnational Canadas" risks turning openness to alternative meanings into a greater obfuscation of meaning, Ty and Dobson's use of these terms provocatively challenges scholars, teachers, and students to consider the implications of "unfastening" our own reliance on terms for interpretive certainties and to remain open to the relations that live within and just beyond our critical scope.

Adventure-Packed Historical YA Fiction

Irene N. Watts
Clay Man: The Golem of Prague. Tundra $21.99

Andrew H. Vanderwal
The Battle for Duncragglin. Tundra $21.99

Trilby Kent
Medina Hill. Tundra $21.99

Eric Walters
Wounded. Puffin $12.99

Reviewed by Lynn (J.R.) Wytenbroek

Three of the four books reviewed here are historical fiction for young adults, a difficult genre as it has to be informative to be worthwhile, but exciting enough to keep the attention of young readers. These novels achieve just that.

Although short, *Clay Man* has wonderfully descriptive pencil drawings throughout that will intrigue pre-teen readers. Set in 1595, it tells the story of a devout rabbi who creates a gigantic clay man who comes to life to protect the people in the Jewish ghetto of Prague from the violent anti-Semitism of their time. The tale is told from the first-person perspective of Jacob, the rabbi's young son. He tries to befriend the golem, and even tries to get it to help him personally, with predictably and humorously disastrous consequences.

Though this story is told in the voice of an innocent child, the horrors and dangers of life for Jewish people in that time, and by extension, throughout history, are revealed as a subtle subtext. The story is quite well told, although occasionally it gets a little repetitive or disjointed. Jacob's character is likeable and easy to relate to, and readers will understand his fascination with the

golem, as well as his dislike of studies. The author makes both the characters and the setting utterly real, thereby bringing the time and place to life.

The Battle for Duncragglin is a longer book than *Clay Man*, but it, too, would most likely appeal to pre-teens. It begins in our time, with Scottish-born Canadian Alex arriving in Scotland to spend the summer. He normally lives with his uncle following the disappearance of his parents when he was very young. In fact, they disappeared close to where he ends up staying with a family with three children around his age whose mother has also disappeared. In exploring the caves under a nearby ruined castle, the children are caught in a time warp and transported back to the thirteenth century, where they join William Wallace's battle for control of Scotland against the English. The tale is full of adventure, battles and bloodshed, intrigue, and suspense. It is a rollicking yarn that brings the time and place vividly to life. The three other children find their missing mother. To Alex's great disappointment, he does not find his parents, but he does learn that the time warp can transport people to different times, so, when the others find their way back to the present, he chooses to stay in the past with a kindly knight and his wife who take a liking to him, hoping to encounter his parents in another adventure.

The book is well-written, the story-line believable despite its almost hectic pace at times, and the characters realistic. In fact it is the realistic characters to whom readers can relate that make the story believable. The only problem with the story is typical of most historical fiction—how do the modern characters manage to understand the much-changed language of the characters in the time to which they have been transported and vice-versa? However, that concern is for the purists to worry about. As it stands, the novel is a great adventure while it cleverly teaches children about one of the bloodiest periods of Scotland's frequently bloody history, and one of its most endearing heroes, William Wallace.

While set in a much more recent past than the previous two novels, *Medina Hill* is a good adventure yarn for most of the novel. However, Kent is unable to maintain the excitement and suspense. Her main character, Dominic, has fallen silent from the stress of an ill mother, a distant father recently returned home from the First World War, and the difficulties he experiences at school. A summer in Cornwall with a much-loved aunt and uncle provides the company of their three off-beat lodgers plus a one-legged gypsy girl whom Dominic first befriends then defends as the locals turn against the "dirty, thieving" gypsies.

While the story is intriguing for the most part and the characters are delightful, there are two real problems with this novel for pre-teens. First is the problem of voice. Dominique is a boy from the lower classes who has rarely been out of his slum neighbourhood and who has only ever read two books in his life. Consequently, many phrases in the first-person voice of the boy ring false, such as "slate and granite boulders were scattered in desolate clusters across the windswept fields, their brooding forms brushed by yellow grass that seemed to bow in hushed reverence. . . . " This is not the voice of the average eleven-year-old, let alone an unread, "disadvantaged" child. The novel continues in that manner with diction that belongs to a much older and more educated voice.

The second problem with the book is its completely anti-climatic ending. After having saved the local Commons for the gypsies, Dominic and Sancha, his gypsy friend, discover that her people plan to leave there forever anyway. There doesn't seem to be much point to the effort they put in to help the townsfolk accept the gypsies. Then there is the treasure of Lawrence of Arabia, revealed to Dominic by the dying

Reverend Cleary. When he does find it, after true treasure-seeking adventures, it turns out to be a small horse figurine from Arabia. Why Lawrence had hidden it, or what it meant to him, is never revealed. What Dominic does with it is simply give it as a parting present to his friend Sancha, who may or may not really understand its significance.

Eric Walters is a prolific and popular author who often tackles thought-provoking issues. The only book here which is not historical, *Wounded,* deals with a soldier's return home from Afghanistan. The book is told through the first person voice of Marcus, the son, and chronicles his feelings, first waiting every day to see if his father has been killed, through to dealing with a returned father who has been deeply emotionally wounded by his experiences.

The premise of the book is good and, indeed, thought-provoking. There are two problems with the book, however. The first is that the age of the boy, Marcus, is never established. He is not old enough to drive a car, but he is old enough for the counsellor at school to give him information about attending military college. Sometimes he sounds like a small boy, trying to be grown up but basically lost and confused. At other times, he sounds mature enough to be mid-teens. While teenagers often do oscillate between adulthood and childhood, his voice here is too inconsistent for the reader to be convinced by the character. His father's abrupt swings between anger, even violence, to joy at being back with his family are, however, very convincing. As these two characters are in the forefront of the novel throughout, the fact that one character is so inconsistent is a major problem in the book.

The other problem is Walters' approach to the main theme. Since the story is set primarily on a military compound, support of the military is to be expected. However, his strong support for the pre-emptive strike doctrine and the repeated assurances that the military only ever kills civilians by accident wears thin really fast, especially for anyone who follows the news. However, his main theme that there are many kinds of wounds received in war, some of which are unseen but just as damaging as those that are visible, is well-portrayed by the father in this story.

Articles

Douglas **Ivison** is Associate Professor of English at Lakehead University. He is the editor of *Canadian Fantasy and Science-Fiction Writers* (Gale, 2002) and co-editor of *Downtown Canada: Writing Canadian Cities* (U of Toronto P, 2005), and has published articles on Canadian literature and other topics in a variety of journals and books.

Dominic **Marion** est titulaire d'une maîtrise en littérature comparée de l'Université de Montréal. Il poursuit des études de doctorat au département d'études françaises de l'Université Western Ontario, orientant ses recherches sur l'écriture de D.A.F. de Sade.

Keavy **Martin** lives in Treaty 6 territory, where she is Assistant Professor of Indigenous Literatures at the University of Alberta. In the summer, she teaches with the University of Manitoba's annual program in Pangnirtung, Nunavut. She is currently finishing a book-length manuscript on Inuit literature in Canada.

Sam **McKegney** is a settler scholar of Indigenous literatures at Queen's University in lands of shared stewardship between the Haudenosaunee and Algonquin nations. He has written a book entitled *Magic Weapons: Aboriginal Writers Remaking Community after Residential School* and articles on such topics as environmental kinship, Indigenous governance, masculinity theory, and Canadian hockey mythologies.

Stephanie **Oliver** is a doctoral student at the University of Western Ontario. Her dissertation explores the relationship between smell and diasporic subjectivity in contemporary literature by Canadian diasporic women writers.

Deena **Rymhs** is Associate Professor of English at the University of British Columbia. Her book, *From the Iron House: Imprisonment in First Nations Writing* (2008), examines the prison's role in post-contact Indigenous history. Her recent essays have appeared in *Life Writing*, *Biography*, *English Studies in Canada*, and *Canadian Literature*. She is currently writing another book on spaces of violence in Indigenous literature.

Alison **Toron** is a PhD candidate in English at the University of New Brunswick in Fredericton. Her research interests include Canadian fiction, feminist theory, postcolonial literature, humour, and masculinity studies, and her work has appeared in *Postcolonial Text* and *The Encyclopedia of Twentieth-Century Fiction*. Her SSHRC-supported doctoral dissertation examines feminist humour in novels by Margaret Atwood, Suzette Mayr, and Miriam Toews.

Poems

John **Donlan**, Chris **Ewart**, and Changming **Yuan** live in Vancouver. Phinder **Dulai** lives in Surrey. rob **mclennan** lives in Ottawa.

Reviews

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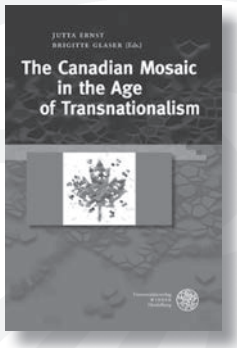

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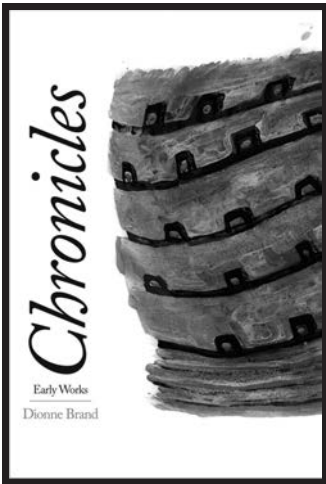

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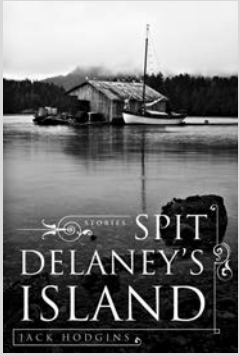

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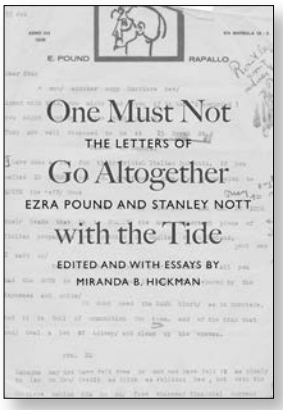
Volume 20, Number 1 (Winter 2011) of the **Journal of Prisoners on Prisons** is edited by Jennifer M. Kilty (University of Ottawa). The issue is devoted to exploring the myriad of concerns related to women's experiences of incarceration. Article and poetry topics include: self-injurious behaviour; mothering in prison; substance use and overcoming addiction through the healing journey; criminalized women, labour and employ-ment/ability; the ongoing failures of Canadian corrections for women; institutional practices of segregation; women's place in the larger prison industrial complex; and experiences of reintegration. The Prisoners' Struggles section includes material from CFAD (Continuité-Famille Auprès des Détenues/ Family Continuity for Female Inmates) and the Crossing Communities Art Project - two community-based organizations that strive to work with at-risk and criminalized women and girls. The issue also contains a Book Review of the Mean Girl Motive by Nicole E. R. Landry. This important and special issue is beautifully book ended with paintings by Ojibway artist Jackie Traverse.

Volume 20, Number 2 (Fall 2011) promises to be a rich and wide-ranging text. It will include both a general section and two short special sections – one based on the discussions arising from the June 2010 13th International Conference on Penal Abolition (ICOPA) in Belfast, Northern Ireland, and one on 'summit detention' and the mass arrests and detentions that occurred during the June 2010 G20 protests in Toronto, Ontario, Canada.



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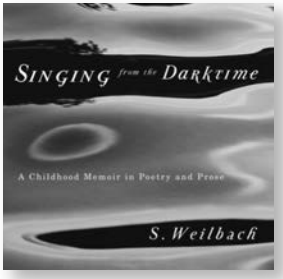

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