

Canadian Literature / Littérature canadienne

A Quarterly of Criticism and Review

Number 207, Winter 2010, Mordecai Richler

Published by The University of British Columbia, Vancouver

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GST R108161779

Publication of *Canadian Literature* is assisted by The University of British Columbia, the Faculty of Arts (UBC), and SSHRC. We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada through the Canada Magazine Fund toward web enhancement and promotional costs.

Canada

Canadian Literature is indexed in *Canadian Periodical Index*, *Canadian Magazine Index*, *Humanities International Complete*, and the *MLA International Bibliography*, among numerous others. The journal is indexed and abstracted by EBSCO, PROQUEST, and ABES. Full text of articles and reviews from 1997 on is available from PROQUEST, GALE, and EBSCO Publishing. The journal is available in microfilm from University Microfilm International.

Publications Mail Agreement

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<http://canlitsubmit.ca>

SUBSCRIPTIONS: \$56 INDIVIDUAL;

\$130 INSTITUTIONAL, GST INCLUDED.

OUTSIDE CANADA: US \$86 INDIVIDUAL;

US \$160 INSTITUTIONAL.

ISSN 0008-4360

Managing Editor: Donna Chin

Donna.Chin@ubc.ca

Production Staff: Matthew Gruman

Kathleen McHale

Beth Veitch

Design: George Vaitkunas

Illustrations: George Kuthan

Printing: Hignell Printing Limited

Typefaces: Minion and Univers

Paper: recycled and acid-free

Mordecai Richler

Nathalie Cooke and Norman Ravvin, Guest Editors

Mordecai Richler's death in the summer of 2001 prompted an outpouring of appreciation for his writerly contributions. After all, how much more bland would our literary landscape be without the endearing curmudgeon who is Barney Panofsky, the fierce independence and chutzpah of Ephraim Gursky, or the set pieces that tempted Richler-the-writer towards the dessert table of extravagant description and away from the main course of plot? (Think of the Bar Mitzvah extravaganza in *Duddy Kravitz*). In the years immediately following his death, it seemed understandably difficult for commentators to separate the man from his work. During "The Richler Challenge," a conference hosted by McGill's Institute for the Study of Canada in 2004, speakers found themselves "missing" him, "remembering when," or laughing outright at Richler's wit and warmth.

Appreciation characterizes much of the commentary published soon after his death. Michael Posner's oral biography *The Last Honest Man* (2004) gathers comments about Richler from friends and colleagues, retaining their range and variety through direct quotation. The tone of Joel Yanofsky's 2003 *Mordecai & Me: An Appreciation of a Kind* is more mixed. Yanofsky, by his own admission removed from Richler's immediate circle, conveys his respect for Richler alongside efforts to resist a Montreal writer of an earlier generation.

Three further biographies are now available, by Charles Foran, M.G. Vassanji, and Reinhold Kramer. All of these express a need for reappraisal of Richler's legacy. What characterizes the impetus and tone of the new views of both the work and the man? In part, it is surely that Richler scholarship

and journalistic commentary are being taken up by individuals who are not part of Richler's immediate or extended circle, or even part of his generation. Kramer's book approaches Richler's life and work through the extensive collection of Richler papers at the University of Calgary Archives, while Foran makes impressive use of interviews with the Richler family.

More surprising still, perhaps, are recent efforts by young francophone scholars and writers who feel compelled to take a fresh look at an established writer and to reappraise Richler's role in the *Quebec* canon. Such willingness to go back to Richler with fresh eyes prompted the 2007 publication of *Un certain sens du ridicule* by Boréal Press. The collection includes translations by Dominique Fortier of a number of Richler's essays, selected by Quebec writer Nadine Bismuth, which address his childhood and his views on the writerly vocation.

Another form of reconsideration is enacted, literally, by way of visiting the neighbourhood in which Richler's Montreal fiction is set. Visitors familiar with Richler but not with the city of Montreal, or, alternatively, those familiar with the city but not with Richler, are drawn to tours of "Richler's Montreal." These are led by, among others, Montreal radio commentator and former John Abbott College instructor Stan Asher. Touring the "Main" places Richler at the scene of his upbringing, on the streets that supported Jewish daily life during the years before and directly after the Second World War. These tours highlight the intimacy with which Jewish writing in Canada is connected with Montreal, and, indirectly, with the city's Yiddish cultural institutions before and after World War Two. Although Yiddish publishing and journalism thrived in Montreal, the English-language book trade in Canada has always been a Toronto-based industry, even as major developments in literary and trade publishing have asserted themselves further afield since the 1960s. A consideration of Mordecai Richler's publishing history is exemplary: his career began in London with his first books; it was based in Toronto throughout his major creative period, with links to New York, through his work for the Book of the Month Club and his friendship with Robert Gottlieb, his editor at Simon & Schuster, and *The New Yorker*.

It should be added that part of Richler's legacy took shape in Vancouver, under the hand of George Woodcock, while he was editor of this journal. Woodcock's introduction to the 1965 McClelland & Stewart imprint of *Son of a Smaller Hero* (1955) set the stage for the way critics and readers understood Richler. Richler, Woodcock wrote, "before he reached the age of thirty" was

among “the most important of the younger generation of Canadian fiction writers.” The novel under discussion was

in its narrowest sense, the account of an attempt by a Jewish youth in Montreal to escape from the mental bonds of the ghetto and, having passed through the feared and desired world of the *Goyim*, to realize his true self in the freedom which he believes exists beyond the invisible walls. Turning by turning, the vistas open. (vii)

Regardless of his years spent in London, the subject matter and outlook that motivated Richler’s work kept him at the forefront of Montrealers’ concerns. It might be argued, too, that the appearance and subsequent notoriety of the essays in Richler’s 1992 collection *Oh Canada! Oh Quebec!: Requiem for a Divided Country* solidified the public’s perceptions of his importance for the broader cultural and political life of his city. The writer of fiction and memoir about a few streets in the old Jewish district, who allowed himself a chapter or two, for contrast, set in Westmount, established himself as a pundit, however idiosyncratic his stance, on the province’s culture, its identity and future. Many non-Jews in Quebec found Richler’s ascendancy to this role appalling. And still feel this way. And their strong feelings have not been stilled. Recent efforts to rename an intersection in the old Jewish neighbourhood Carré Richler had plenty of detractors, including the nationalist St. Jean Baptiste Society and city politicians. The corner of Fairmount and Clark, once a bagel and egg cream haven, will likely keep its familiar street names for some time yet.

But Jewish Canadians, especially those living in Montreal, saw in *Oh Canada! Oh Quebec!* their (and Richler’s own) vindication. The author, who had irked them in the 1950s and 1960s, portraying them as hard-bitten Yiddish-speaking rubes or suburban alrightniks, was now their champion in the face of Quebec nationalistic political pressures. In *Son of a Smaller Hero*, Richler seemed to be telling Montreal Jews that they would never be proper Canadians. With *Oh Canada! Oh Quebec!* he appeared to be administering a bear hug along with the guarantee that he would look out for their best interests.

How much does all of this matter to readers in Fredericton or Calgary or Vancouver? Rather little. Richler spoke to synagogue groups in the West in the 1970s, obviously angry and unwilling to put up with his audience’s questions about his views on Jews. He might call Edmonton the “boiler-room” of the country, but insults don’t travel far when the air is full of money. In some ways, Richler’s representativeness is specific to his hometown, and it is inevitably

linked to the cultural energies and industry of Toronto. His coronation in late career as a cultural icon arose distinctly from these centres. In western cities, a novel by Henry Kreisel or George Bowering is as likely to be found on a “One Book One City” program as one of Richler’s books.

Richler’s relationship with his Montreal constituency is unique, but certain contrasts with his compatriot Leonard Cohen are revealing. In mid-career, Cohen fashioned for himself a kind of logo, which has appeared on music albums and books, constructed of two rounded hearts placed to resemble a Star of David. The impossibility of such an emblem showing up within a country mile of Richler’s output illustrates his basic contrarian stance.

Whether these particularities have affected Richler’s reception in the academic field is difficult to say. His books are taught in Canadian literature courses; *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* is sometimes made to stand in for the whole tradition of Jewish Canadian writing; he has been well-anthologized and translated abroad. Yet he has been lightly served by the Canadian scholarly community, where equally iconic figures such as Margaret Atwood and Margaret Laurence have received far more attentive canonizations. Explanations for these developments are teased out in the essays included here, as well as in the interview, visual, and bibliographic materials that can be found on *Canadian Literature*’s website. The essays included in this special issue are, for the most part, by young scholars, among whom are Canadian and European writers. A recurring theme is an examination of the conflicted relationships of Richler’s heroes with all forms of stable identity—whether as Jews, Quebecers, Canadians, even cosmopolitan intellectuals. Glenn Deer’s review essay takes stock of the most recent biographies, while Melina Baum Singer analyzes Richler’s reception in Canadian literary criticism. From Joseph Glass, Krzysztof Majer, and David Brauner we gain a unique view of Richler’s impact abroad, whether in Jerusalem, Lodz, or London. It does seem that change is afoot, partly motivated by Richler’s death and the associated ground-clearing and myth-making; in a strange way, he is ours now, open to interpretation, however measured and focused it may become, without the author’s capability to do as Richler always saw fit: answer back.



Spem reduxit

Your Toxes and your Chickses may draw out
my two front double teeth, Mrs. Richards, but that's
no reason why I need offer 'em the whole set.
— Susan Nipper, *Dombey and Son*, III

Now the dead must rise
From the little Loyalist cemetery on King Street
And repopulate the generations, so that
Reverence has rationale, and rejection purpose,
To vindicate an ossification of arrival without departure,
The amalgamation of degeneration with delusion,
And deceit with unearned entitlement.

Samuel de Champlain may lie beneath the basilica
Of Notre-Dame-de-Québec, but even in his grave he moved on
After a Christmas death, leaving all to the Virgin Mary.
But the abandonment of Île Ste-Croix presaged
A cruel and clear awareness, the next readiness to assure
The viceroyalty of New France.

Above the bay, No Order of Good Cheer flourishes,
The Loyalist hinterland suckling its recollections of fealty
And slaves, the skeletal coronets of history languishing
At this place of refuge, partitioned from progress,
Indifference perfected by the indolence of insularity.

Their bones are beyond restoration, their
Silent serenity shrivelled with the damage of semblances;
Neither pieced together by glory, nor the inheritors
Of the touchstone of history, the ghosts of time
Only are only remembered and touched for their emptiness.

“Is Richler Canadian Content?”

Jewishness, Race, and Diaspora

In 2004, two questions were asked in reference to Mordecai Richler, questions that position Jewish and Canadian in opposition. The questions—“Is Richler Canadian Content?” and “Whose history is being told? Jewish or Canadian?”—seem to belong to an image of the past found in *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*. And yet these questions not only were asked recently, but failed to draw attention to their ideological assumptions. One was posed as the topic of a plenary panel for “The Richler Challenge” conference, held at the McGill Institute for the Study of Canada, March 18-19, 2004. And the other was asked by Coral Ann Howells and Peter Noble in the introduction to *Where are the Voices Coming From? Canadian Culture and the Legacies of History* (2004). This paper takes up these questions and their underlying logic.

“The Richler Challenge” conference promoted itself, in the words of co-organizer Nathalie Cooke, as “want[ing] to challenge contemporary readers to come to terms with the impact of [Mordecai] Richler’s work” (qtd. in Arnold 25). On the last day of the conference, a plenary session asked panelists to respond to the question “Is Richler Canadian Content?” Glenn Deer argued that Richler’s writings displayed his discontent with national categories and that he was preoccupied with the sacrifice of the naïve or weak national self. Neil Besner pointed out that Richler’s concerns with French-English tensions and with broader issues of cultural and ethnic origins emphasized uncomfortable questions about “Canadian” content. David Macfarlane asserted that Richler’s writing transcended all categories. Although he noted the offensiveness of asking if a Jewish Montreal writer

is Canadian, he emphasized the great pleasure that Richler took in his own satiric mockery of these identifications. Blair Munro focused on Richler's unpublished first novel and its connection to American and European literary models. Frank Davey responded that Richler was more Canadian discontent than content, and that categories like Canadian and multicultural are redundant in a transnational time. Although each was quick to say that Richler would have rejected the question, they did not query its logic. Why ask the question? And why ask the question in relation to Richler? Is there something specific to him or his body of work that might prompt such a question to be taken seriously?

In the introduction to *Where are the Voices Coming From?* Howells and Noble situate the text as an exploration of "the problematic representation of Canadianness" and its "different constructions of history and its legacies" (x). The papers explore Canadian cultural history and identity in three sections: English-French, First Nations, and Jewish-Canadian. In reference to literary works by Régine Robin and Anne Michaels, and the films *Anne Trister* and *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, Howells and Noble make a significant distinction:

The differences of perspectives are multiplied in the case of First Nations writers, while versions of immigrant experience in post-World War II in Montreal and Toronto represent yet another, far more cosmopolitan view of history. We have chosen examples by Jewish Canadians here. *Whose history is being told? Jewish or Canadian?* And how to tell European Jewish history to Jews born and brought up in Canada? (xii-xiii, italics added)

Howells and Noble do not remark on what basis they distinguish between Jewish and Canadian, other than to figure Jewish as an immigrant community. Nor do they reveal their reasons why Jewish Canadian representations of history not only figure as cosmopolitan, but also as perhaps more cosmopolitan than other "immigrant" communities in Canada (as implied by the lack of comparative ethnic representation).

The two questions "Is Richler Canadian content?" and "Whose history is being told. Jewish or Canadian?" set up a particular scene of inquiry regarding how "Richler" troubles the category of Canadian, a scene that turns on assumptions about Jewish, and by extension Canadian, identity. The questions also raise a subset of questions. Are Jewish and Canadian mutually exclusive categories of identity? What creates the terms for framing "Jewish" outside the Canadian nation-state or, as Howells and Noble's comment seems to imply, outside all national identifications?¹ Both the questions and the lack of attention to their ideological assumptions trouble me, and lead to this

paper's thesis that there is a clear need for a renewed discussion about the ways in which to speak about Jewishness in Canada.

I believe it is not a coincidence that the questions take Richler for their frame of reference. "Richler" has a unique place in the Canadian literary imaginary. He was among the first wave of ethnic writers to achieve both critical and popular literary success, and his body of work stands at the precipice between two literary and critical landscapes—representations of and by non-Anglo-Europeans and non-Europeans—that together profoundly and irrevocably altered the Anglo-European dominance of Canadian literature.

This paper first reads Richler and *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* (1959) as a barometer for understanding the frames that shape the perception of Jewishness in the two questions. From the basic perspective of plot and action, the novel portrays a young Canadian Jew's ruthless obsession with buying property in Canada, but peripheral to the main story runs a narrative about the construction of whiteness in Canada. I will explore the ways in which this narrative situates Jews in relation to Anglo-Canadian culture and post-war hierarchies of racialization. This reading, then, becomes the basis for a consideration of whether the critical reception of the text and the two questions reflect or challenge the text's construction of Jewishness and its assumptions related to nation, race, class, and religion.

Then I will turn to what I believe is a contradictory perspective on Jewishness found in contemporary diaspora studies in Canada. Richler's text, and by extension Canadian Jewish literature, seem to fit uneasily into this new critical territory, as the terms of what constitutes diaspora have shifted. This criticism reflects a particular relationship to whiteness. Although it recognizes the historical place of Jewish experience in the development of the conception of diaspora, the discourse of diaspora in Canada has become tied to racialized communities in such a way that Jewishness falls outside its concerns. This study locates these two disparate strands of contemporary thinking concerning Jewishness in Canada and argues that they not only reveal an uncertainty about how to speak about Jewishness, but also possibly reflect the ambiguities and complexities within Jewish identity formation itself.

Racializing Jews

Mordecai Richler's body of work overlaps two landscapes, landscapes best characterized by different relationships to whiteness that have accompanied radical changes in the domination of English Canadian literature by those

of British descent. From a critical perspective, I read the landscapes as discontinuous, but realize that they are also developmental in the sense that A.M. Klein's success opened the door to the first wave of literatures by ethnicized minorities published in Canada. The narrative realism of these texts energized representations of racialized working-class, immigrant, and refugee communities in Canada and their transgenerational interactions with larger social and cultural structures. There is no question that the characters depicted are perceived, internally and externally, as other to mainstream Canadian culture.

Within this early wave of representations of and by these "other" Canadians, Richler's texts stand out. As John Ower notes, "as a 'Jewish' novel, *The Apprenticeship* has both a pungent ethnic flavour and the convincingness that arises when a writer deals with a milieu with which he is completely familiar" (413). The text's *odour*, itself a typical displaced criticism levied at ethnic groups, comes from the way it powerfully critiques social and political post-war Canadian culture. By moving away from realism's stock character types, Richler's novel is among the first to expose and, in so doing, challenge calcified assumptions constituting "Canadians" as well as "Jewishness."

Early criticism of the text focuses primarily on class and religion in its understanding of Jewishness. In reference to Montreal, Ower describes "Duddy's Montreal [as] divided along social, cultural, and economic lines" (414). He understands Jews as forming a collective based on overlapping categories of class, religion, and culture. In his study of the text, Terry Goldie does not construct Jewishness per se, but situates Jews, as he does Hindus in Trinidad, as a marginal and disenfranchised community. Goldie writes "The Hindus and Jews are doubly removed from control. The Jews are of little concern to the rulers of Canada, the Hindus to the rulers of Trinidad" (16). It is open to speculation on what basis Goldie believes Jews to be marginalized. Yet, the alignment with Hindus in Trinidad suggests religion may be the factor. Alternatively, Stephen Henighan reads class as the central focus of the text's depiction of Jews: "Richler's novel . . . projects . . . the egos of the upwardly mobile second- and third-generation Montreal Jews who grew up in poverty on St. Urbain Street, and broke out of the ghetto and into the business and professional class, eventually establishing themselves in the upper-middle-class redoubts of Hampstead and Cote St. Luc" (22-3). Yet, all three critics read Jewishness as a stable category, rather than picking up on the ways in which Richler reveals Jewish culture to be contested and fragmented.

None of the critics mention race, which I believe is key to understanding the text's reflection of Montreal's social hierarchy, represented through the nexus of Anglo, French, and Jewish communities. Race, in this reading, however, is not a pre-given category, but a result of the process Michael Omi and Howard Winant define as racialization: "the term racialization . . . signif[ies] the extension of racial meaning to a previously racially unclassified relationship, social practice, or group. Racialization is an ideological process, an historically specific one . . . emerg[ing] from the struggles of competing political projects and ideas" (64).

Speaking as the voice of British cultural values and beliefs, a teacher at Duddy's school articulates a clearly demarcated social hierarchy that places race at the center of various markers of identity formation. In commenting that "there were already three gentiles in the school (that is to say, Anglo-Saxons; for Ukrainians, Poles, and Yugoslavs, with funny names and customs of their own, did not count as true gentiles)" (7), the teacher approaches identity equipped with overlapping assumptions about class and religion and yet arranging them in a racial hierarchy. The text establishes "Anglo-Saxons" on the top and Jews and other non-Protestant communities on the bottom. Like other European ethnic groups who practice other forms of Christianity, Jews are racialized pejoratively as non-gentile or non-white. White is a category reserved for Anglo-Saxons, a community whom the teacher certainly would describe as having "normal" "names and customs." Other religions, as well as visible minorities, do not even register in the hierarchy the teacher lays out—their total absence, throughout the text, speaks to their social and political non-presence in the imaginary of this textual world.

Although he does not use the word "white," Duddy's teacher's reference to gentiles speaks to what Daniel Coleman describes as "white civility," performative projects based on "the standardizing ideals of the ideals of whiteness, masculinity, and Britishness" (10). As I suggested with regard to Duddy's comment, religious affiliation plays an important role in the normalizing of what it means to be a Canadian. It is not the teacher or any other member of his community, significantly, who speaks of whiteness as the touchstone for cultural belonging; rather it is Duddy who articulates whiteness as signifying a larger set of modes or "performative projects": "White men, Duddy thought. *Ver gerharget*. With them you just didn't make deals. You had to diddle . . . I suppose he [Mr. Calder] wanted me to play golf with him for eighteen years or something. I haven't got that much time to waste . . ." (227). Duddy understands that Mr. Calder, a

wealthy establishment figure who initially seems to mentor Duddy, has time to entertain himself—the luxury of leisure, a luxury Duddy views as an upper middle-class white privilege. By contrast, Duddy is literally and metaphorically always on the run, trying to make his mark in the world and establish himself as a “contender.” Beneath the sarcasm, Duddy understands that there are unwritten modes-of-being that represent and maintain the stability, security, and power of white cultural dominance, and alternatively the fragility, insecurity, and powerlessness of other peoples racialized as non-white. As Coleman asserts, “at the same time that civility involves the creation of justice and equality, it simultaneously creates borders to the sphere in which justice and equality are maintained” (9).

Duddy is prevented from penetrating the mainstream society, as he has not yet internalized what Coleman calls the “manners and behaviours” (21) of white civility. Duddy and Mr. Calder have a conversation about their relationship that illustrates this point further, while also emphasizing the relationship between race and class. Duddy asks,

“[H]ow come you never introduce me to any of your other friends?”

“They might not understand you.”

“You mean I might try to make a deal with them like I did with you over the scrap and that would embarrass you. I’m a little Jewish *pusherke*. Right?”

Mr. Calder didn’t answer.

“If I was a white man I wouldn’t say that. You guys never say what’s on your mind. It’s not—well, polite. Right?” (259)

Duddy knows his lack of “civility” or whiteness structures his difference. Mr. Calder may entertain himself with Duddy in the privacy of his home, but their relationship has no real place in his larger life. And Duddy finally realizes that his hopes that Mr. Calder will foster his entrance into the mainstream cultural milieu are a fantasy. Yet, the fact that Duddy is of European descent—he is, to borrow Homi Bhabha’s phrase, “almost the same, but not quite” (114)—enables some sort of relationship between them. For, if Duddy were a member of a visible minority, in today’s lexicon, one can imagine that there would be no possibility that Mr. Calder would spend time with him.

For in the moment of the text’s imaginary, the hierarchical structure offers only communities with European descent the promise of social and political rewards. Assimilate and be recognized as a Canadian! The act of bridging the difference between non-Canadian and Canadian relates to the central motif of the text, the equation between owning land and becoming somebody: “A

man without land is nothing” (48). Put more directly, Duddy “knew what he wanted, and that was to own his own land and to be rich, a somebody” (75). As Duddy notices, working-class Jews and French-Canadians seem to occupy similar marginal social and political positions that relate to the land they occupy:

Duddy saw for the first time the part of Ste Agathe where the poorer French-Canadians lived and the summer residents and tourists never came. The unpainted houses had been washed grey by the wind and the rain. Roosters crowed in yards littered with junk and small hopeless vegetable patches and Duddy was reminded of his grandfather and St Dominique Street. (92)

The depiction of Duddy’s grandfather’s backyard shares a similar sense of fruitlessness: “His family lived upstairs, and outside in the gritty hostile soil of his back yard, Simcha planted corn and radishes, peas, carrots and cucumbers. Each year the corn came up scrawnier and the cucumbers yellowed before they ripened” (45). Although Duddy’s grandfather is credited with the phrase “a man without land is nobody,” it most likely comes from a larger cultural view of communities wanting to share in the possibilities that middle-class resources and, alternatively, civility can endow.

Perhaps referring to a popular perception of the text and possibly anticipating subsequent readings such as John Ower’s, in which he comments that Duddy plans to “mak[e] the resort into a sort of little Israel” (425), George Woodcock argues that “Duddy Kravitz in his obsessive longing for land is in fact not living out the Zionist wish for homeland; he is living out the Canadian desire to possess land which he can immediately tame, transform, cover with buildings, fill with people, and put to a commercial use” (36). I strongly agree with the relevance of Woodcock’s focus on class and believe it overly simplistic, not to mention politically problematic, to overlay the complexities of the Israeli and Palestinian conflict onto the text. Woodcock’s class orientation also points towards a postcolonial reading of the text, and his rebuttal of reading Duddy as a Zionist raises an important question: why has there never been a postcolonial reading of *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*?

Is it not possible that Richler is satirizing Canadian history as it pertains to Jewish communities and experiences? Alternatively, because Richler is a Jew, however defined, is he, or must he, always be looking beyond Canada towards Israel? As Woodcock points out, the novel clearly situates its action in Canada, and responds to specific Canadian relations pertaining to the covert theft of land and ownership rights. Those who seek “land” have no

historic or contemporary indigenous claims; Duddy is Canadian but the land he desires is described as "Injun territory" (308), thus making the present French-Canadian owner, Duddy, and Westmount WASPs equally guilty in the capitalist-colonial enterprise. Duddy's obsession with land is a modern-day invader-settler narrative. A classic Canadian story. Land and its resources are, after all, the engine that drives the colonial project. Owning land, for Duddy, a minority, also represents a passport to obtaining mainstream visibility and power, as ownership carries with it the inherent possibility that it will cleanse him of the *odour* or "grit" (45) of his working-class and religious affiliations. Duddy's desire for land is an aspirational desire, a desire to become a part of the upwardly mobile middle class—the class that, perhaps best, embodies the invader-settler belief that the highest achievement is owning land: a belief that the rewards of citizenship stem from becoming a shareholder in "Canada." Duddy thus seeks to free himself from his internalized self-construction as "a nobody" and become a somebody, or otherwise put, a full-fledged Canadian.

The Contemporary Terrain

The questions—"Is Richler Canadian Content?" and "Whose history is being told? Jewish or Canadian?"—seem to belong to an image of the past I traced in *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*. And yet these questions not only were asked recently, but the answers also failed to probe their ideological assumptions. In light of the absence of similar questions posed about other canonical British-descended writers, such as Margaret Atwood, Alice Munro, and Timothy Findley, the questions are revealing. Such questions might well be asked about a writer like Dionne Brand, an immigrant herself whose texts explore transnational patterns of oppression and marginalization. Although Richler lived in Europe for an extended period of time (from 1951 till 1972), Montreal was his home for most of his life. Furthermore, his body of work is largely set in Canada and explores distinctly Canadian problems and events, which are also explored in his journalistic responses to particulars of Quebec social and political life. (My own father read Richler in the early 1970s as a humorous "guidebook" to Canada and Canadian political culture after his emigration from Germany).

Yet Richler and Brand occupy two related but differing landscapes. Richler's fictional texts animate a trajectory that moves the Canadian canon from depictions of British-inflected cultural landscapes to include other cultures. From the contemporary perspective, this first turn away, however

radical it was at the time, was one towards Canadians who shared European descent, albeit with ethnicities, like Richler's Jews, who have been racialized as non-white. The second shift began in the early 1980s, with increasing interest in the representations of and by peoples from visible minority or non-European cultures, who may have been in Canada for many generations or new immigrants.

In light of this shift, Richler's work, in content, experience, and narrative form, seems entrenched in the past: the perception of his work changed, in critical reception, from that of radical otherness to being suspect for its gendered and nostalgic old-school blindness and concerns. Warren Tallman, in 1973, notes that "[t]o a newer generation of writers it's doubtless [that] Richler's prose . . . seems elegiac, inviting comparison, not forward to the much more open, freely improvisational modes in which they work, but back to modes they have all abandoned" (77). By the 1980s, Richler had become part of the establishment, a major CanLit insider. Yet, in 2004, planning "The Richler Challenge," the event's organizers found that scant scholarly attention was being paid to Richler. I believe the complexities that face Jewish Canadian writing—in terms of a lack of critical and contemporary vocabulary to speak about and argue for the continuing relevance of thinking about Jewishness—contribute to this impasse.

In contending with the question of what Richler shares with Brand and other immigrant writers, we arrive at a more careful examination of processes of racialization. On one level, Richler's and Brand's bodies of work express a common sense of otherness. They both examine the ways in which "white" Canada has *overdetermined* their identities as non-Canadian in racialized ways. An early influential examination of these concerns appeared in the writings of Frantz Fanon.

The Jew . . . is a white man, and, apart from some rather debatable characteristics, he can sometimes go unnoticed . . . the Jews are harassed—what am I thinking of? They are hunted down, exterminated, cremated. *But these are little family quarrels.* The Jew is disliked from the moment he is tracked down. But in my case everything takes on a new guise. I am given no chance. I am overdetermined from without. I am the slave not of the "idea" that others have of me but of my own appearance. (115-16, italics added)

Fanon's characterization of the history of European anti-Semitism as "little family quarrels" positions Jews as a part of the family of "white men." He reads the attempted genocide of European Jews as an internal "white" war that will, paradoxically, cleanse Europe of racial difference. Omi and Winant's assertion that "[r]acial categories and the meaning of race are given concrete

expression by the specific social relations and historical context in which they are embedded" (59) is useful here to understand Duddy's pursuit of "whiteness," or at least the social power that comes with being seen as white.

Dionne Brand argues that "[b]uilt around the obvious and easy distinction of colour, "whiteness" became more and more the way to differentiate the coloniser from the colonised . . . [i]nclusion in or access to Canadian identity, nationality and citizenship (de facto) depended and depends on one's relationship to this 'whiteness'" (187). Brand, echoing Fanon, goes on to argue that Canadian ideas of "whiteness" have a "certain elasticity" (187) to "contain inter-ethnic squabbles, like that between the English and the French" as well as to "swallow" (188) other white Europeans—albeit once assimilation has been realized. Although her characterization describes Duddy's relationship to Anglo-Canadian culture, Brand ultimately understands the racialized body as being excluded from the colonial nation-state's sense of belonging: you are either white and a Canadian or non-white and an outsider.

Non-white immigration has also played a role in the whitening of Jewishness, and contributed to the downplaying of deployment of "Semitic" (Middle-Eastern descent) as a misnomer for non-white. Jews can drop their "colour" and become white, but only because there are new minority groups who are compelled to take up the lower social positions, once held by the likes of Duddy's father, who works as a taxi-driver and small-time pimp. The cycle continues: Canada depends on a cheap labour force of racialized peoples (who work as nannies, maids, and labourers, for example) whom "white" Canadians can feel to be *other* to themselves. The neoliberal narrative assures both groups the acceptability of low wages and lack of security, necessary "contracts" towards the achievement of a better life and a Canadian identity.

In spite of the whitening of Jewishness in Canada, the recent rephrasing of what seems like an archaic opposition (Canadian versus Jewish) begs the question of where to find the discursive language to study the complexities of Jewishness in Canada. One would assume that diaspora studies would be one such logical place. Although it remains a term taken for granted in Jewish Studies, *diaspora* is being actively rethought in the broader field of comparative diaspora studies. Internationally recognized scholars in the field (including Avtar Brah, Brent Hayes Edwards, and Stuart Hall) recognize the Jewish experience as historically important, but its relevance has been delinked from the category and has faded in importance. The irony, of

course, is that diaspora historically characterizes the Jewish experience of exile, community, and relationship to homeland and embodies the tension within the push-pull of place and memory for diasporic communities. But on a number of levels, Richler's text, as well as Jewish Canadian literature, fits uneasily in this new field of inquiry.

At a public lecture at the University of Western Ontario in 2004, Rinaldo Walcott made a distinction between globalization studies and diaspora studies, which helps us examine the contradictory context within which Jewishness is understood in Canada today. He asserted that the former is a "white" area of study and the latter is a "non-white" area of study. In light of this binary, Jews would be discussed in relation to globalization and assumptions relating to privilege, mobility, and most significantly, "whiteness." This raises the point that Jews in Canada are not all "white"—Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews have long histories in countries such as Palestine, Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Syria, Yemen, India, Ethiopia, and Morocco as well as histories of habitation within Europe—nor are all middle or upper-middle class. In reference to Jews of European descent, it is also impossible to totalize such a broad community as necessarily "white," since such Jews form, historically and currently, a range of "racial" communities.

In recent Canadian criticism, diaspora has become mobilized to talk about peoples and experiences on the underbelly of Empire, globalization, and transnational capitalism. David Chariandy summarizes the desires of what he describes as "postcolonial diaspora studies" this way:

diaspora studies will help foreground the cultural practices of both forcefully exiled and voluntarily migrant peoples; diaspora studies will help challenge certain calcified assumptions about ethnic, racial, and, above all, national belonging; . . . diaspora studies will help forge new links between emergent critical methodologies and contemporary social justice movements. (n.p.)

Chariandy focuses on the urgent need to address inequities. These inequities, he goes on to say, face "specific racialized collectivities within the modern West" (n.p.). Tightening the focus further, Lily Cho stresses the experience of racialization as the cause for diasporic belonging. She writes, "Minority marks a relation defined by racialization and experienced as diaspora" ("Citizenship" 98). Implicitly connecting to her point about minority communities, Cho contends, in another paper, "I want to reserve diaspora for the underclass, for those who must move through the world in, or are haunted by, the shadowy uncertainties of dispossession" ("Turn" 19). Although each writer touches on aspects of the "classical" experience of Jewish diaspora,

Chariandy and Cho emphasize the need to rethink the term in a contemporary sense, in light of current injustices that directly centre on the psyche of racialization, as well as its social and political effects.

The emphasis on the present has consequences for questions relating to Jewishness and Jewish experience, isolating criticism relating to Jews in a separate, and perhaps historical, field of study, rather than creating a location where a text like *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* can be included in a comparative dialogue about colonial racialization and its intersection with religion and class in Canada. This new direction in diaspora studies implicitly characterizes Jews as having *arrived* and as having successfully transcended the type of racialized otherness I traced in Richler's text. Providing they are able to shed traditional and visible markers of identity and earn financial, educational, or social rewards, Jews have the opportunity to move up the very same hierarchy that was once a hindrance to upward mobility. For in terms of mainstream power and access to political and cultural discourse, Jews for all intents and purposes are understood as "white." This perspective situates Richler's text, then, as a relic from the past, one whose depictions of injustices towards Jews are now out-dated, because the injustices are presumed no longer to occur.

The focus on contemporary urgencies, specifically, does not take into account what Jonathan and Daniel Boyarin describe as "rediasporification" (11) and its significant transgenerational effects. Since the first dispersion, there has been a long history of Jewish settlement, migration, and exile from every area of the globe.² Migration, forced or voluntary, contributed to the multi-racial formation of Jewishness. (I clearly remember the surprise I felt when I encountered a large group of Indian Jewish women, all wearing saris, speaking perfect Hebrew in a synagogue in Vienna. When I spoke to one woman, she explained they were Cochin Jews. I also have had many conversations with academics who feel equally surprised to learn that my partner's family are Turkish Jews. Many have expressed surprise and disbelief that Jews do not only hail from Europe.)

The ancient territory pertaining to modern-day Israel plays a significant role in this history, but so do Vienna, Berlin, Budapest, Odessa, Istanbul, Damascus, Baghdad, Fez, Adis Ababa, and Cochin, not to mention, Lodz, the Polish birthplace of Duddy's grandfather. Richler does not write about whether Duddy's family had long or short histories in Lodz. Nevertheless, these cities are but a few Jewish homelands, homelands that may continue to be viable or perhaps exist only as unsettling presences, structuring

the dreams and imaginations of their former inhabitants as well as their descendents, and thus play a role in expanding the understanding of the complexities of the constitution of Jewish diasporic belonging.

Although the contemporary study of diaspora reads race in visible and political terms, I read the representation of Jewishness in Richler's work idiosyncratically for its challenge to the assumed clarity of the white-non-white divide. In Canada, Jewishness, on a superficial level, may seem to have lost its racialized construction, but I believe the two questions as well as the lack of attention to understanding their assumptions and implications suggest that there is still a great deal more thinking to be done about Jews and Jewishness, or more broadly about race, religion, and national identity formation—conversations to which I believe texts like Richler's *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* can contribute. It is exactly the paradoxical and *scandalous* nature of Jewishness that I seek to hang on to, an internally heterogenous understanding of diasporic difference.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Early drafts of this paper were presented at the “Beyond Autoethnography: Writing Race and Ethnicity in Canada” (Wilfrid Laurier University, 2005) and ACCUTE (University of Western Ontario, 2005) conferences. I want to thank the conference organizers for the opportunity and the participants for their questions. My sincere thanks are also due to Frank Davey, Lily Cho, and Smaro Kamboureli for their comments on various versions of this paper, and Nathalie Cooke, Norm Ravvin, Margery Fee, and two anonymous readers for their observations on this paper. For my father.

NOTES

- 1 In the absence of reference to the national origins of Jewish immigrants, Howells and Noble's comment seems to unify such communities under “Jewish.”
- 2 597 is the year when Jerusalem was conquered by the Babylonians, leading to the exile of the Jews.

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Our Husband

skins himself over the vanity. One hand spreads to pull his frayed face up while the other rinses the razor in standing water tapped like resin turned vinegar. He squints. A coil or stricture of nerve endings chokes the drain. That is to say you must not squander our husband's ink.

N.

omen a broken bough to soberly sew

in

vein a weak finger to knuckle gnarl knotty

pine

to candle axhandle cushion or ingrown antler

tine

velour over burrowing sexton or forceps forehead

Latin

agricultura doggerel bark baubau you you to augur

Our husband sinks one hand down to a stump of thumb. His middle and ring fingers pinch a root or nervy ligature that has looped into the pipes from the tree he sawed like bone turned honeycomb. The tendril re-coils. He winces. Needless to say

ennui . . .

bore through trunkgreen feltdust drymarrow to mount a trophy

that's not the way you were raised.

Son of a Smaller (Super) Hero

Ethnicity, Comic Books, and Secret Identity in Richler's Novels of Apprenticeship

"What's the, um, Golem?"

"A sort of Jewish Batman."

— Mordecai Richler, *St. Urbain's Horseman* (252)

In 1968, Mordecai Richler published an article on Ian Fleming's British super-spy James Bond in which he argues that the Bond saga is fundamentally anti-Semitic, despite the ostensible catholicity of its multi-ethnic pantheon of villains. This evil pantheon, Richler argues, is only superficially diverse. Bond villains, with their numerous physical deformities, their secret organizations, their lust for gold, and their projects of world domination, are actually coded versions of the Elders of Zion, the fictitious cabal whose forged *Protocols* constituted the ultimate anti-Semitic conspiracy fantasy of the early twentieth century. The Bond novels and films re-enact this paranoid fantasy from the perspective of a post-war England that is in decline as a world power and on the lookout for satisfying scapegoats and a license to kill.

The same year that he was excoriating Her Majesty's super-spy, Richler published a second essay on the subject of male fantasy figures and their connection to popular representations of Jewish ethnicity—this one on American superheroes. This essay's conclusions about the significance of male fantasy figures, however, invert his critique of Bond. The target of Richler's satiric pen in "The Great Comic Book Heroes" turns out not to be the spandex-clad heroes themselves (as we might expect), but rather Friedrich Wertheimer, a German Jew who changed his name to Dr. Fredrick Wertham when he moved to New York to practice forensic psychiatry in

the 1920s. Writing under the influence of Theodor Adorno's critique of the "culture industry," Wertham subsequently authored an influential study detailing the supposedly mind-rotting effects of comic books on children, portentously titled (after a horror comic of the same name) *Seduction of the Innocent* (1954) (Jones 271-72). Wertham thus paradoxically became a spokesperson for the WASP family values of the 1950s that Richler abhors, as, for instance, when he characterizes the adventures of Batman and Robin (Bruce Wayne and "Dick" Grayson) as the "wish dream of two homosexuals living together" or warns mothers against allowing their daughters to fall prey to the Sapphic temptations of Wonder Woman (qtd. in Richler, "Great" 121). Richler's responses to this sort of "sexual McCarthyism" (121) are predictably tart and funny, but the point of his attack on Wertham's prurient homophobia is that it is complicit with the racism and xenophobia of twentieth-century world politics generally. Indeed, Richler views Wertham's attack on American comic books of the 1940s and 1950s not only as a perpetuation of these ideologies, but also as an attack on the very objects of popular culture that provided him with an incipient counter-discourse to the racisms of contemporary history in the first place.

"For my generation, born into the depression, beginning to encourage and count pubic hairs during World War II," Richler writes,

there was nothing quite like the comic books. While bigger, more mature men were . . . making atomic bombs, burning Jews and gassing Gypsies; [and] while General ("Old Blood and Guts") Patton was opening the Anglo-American service club in London saying, "The idea of these clubs could not be better because undoubtedly it is the destiny of the English and American people to rule the world" . . . we, the young, the hope of the world, were . . . being warped by Captain Marvel, The Human Torch, The Flash, Sheena, Queen of the Jungle, Hawkman, Plastic Man, Sub Mariner, and Batman and Robin. (120-21)

These costumed heroes were "[o]ur champions; our revenge figures against what seemed a gratuitously cruel adult world" (121), and also, "our golems": "[t]hey were invulnerable, all-conquering, whereas we were puny, miserable, and defeated" (128). Like other critical and popular revisionist histories that emphasize the Jewish context of superhero comics,¹ Richler reminds us that Superman was "the inspired creation of two Jewish boys, Jerome Siegal [sic] and Joe Schuster" (120), a genesis whose ethnic roots are encoded in the very details of the character's science fiction origin story as an alien orphan adopted by an American family. Indeed, Richler reads not only Superman but most of the superheroes of his youth as figures of Jewish fantasy, heroes "made of paltry stuff" (128)—but only on the surface:

The World's Mightiest Man, Powerful Champion of Justice, Captain Marvel was mere Billy Batson, newsboy, until he uttered the magic word, "Shazam!" The Flash is another case in point. "Faster than the streak of lightning in the sky . . . Swifter than the speed of light itself . . . Fleeter than the rapidity of thought . . . is *The Flash*, reincarnation of the winged Mercury . . . His speed is the dismay of scientists, the joy of the oppressed—And the open mouthed wonder of the multitudes!" Originally however he was as weak as you or I. A decidedly forlorn figure. He was Jay Garrick, "an unknown student at a mid-western university . . ." and, for my money, a Jew. (128)

Richler's fascination with the ethnic subtexts of popular male fantasy in these 1968 essays provides a framework for my examination of the relationship between the superhero, the boy hero, and the anti-hero in two of Richler's earlier novels of apprenticeship, *Son of a Smaller Hero* (1955) and *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* (1959). What interests me particularly is the apparent difference between the essays and the novels in their deployment of superhero tropes. The essays project an epic grudge match between empowered minoritarian superheroes and the villainous forces of twentieth-century history represented by the anti-Semitic James Bond and Dr. Wertham's comic strip double, the "boring" Rex Morgan, M.D. (129). By contrast, the novels examine the notion of heroic Jewish "revenge figures" more cautiously and more critically. In both of these *Bildungsromane* the superhero is ultimately not held up as an ego-ideal for its rebellious Jewish boy-heroes, but rather as a dangerous temptation. As such, it functions as a parodic comment on the insular version of heroic Jewish masculinity that becomes the main target of Richler's satire. This reversal is due to the fact that, unlike Richler's essay on comic books, which concerns the interventions of Jewish artists into the metanarratives of American mass culture, the novels concentrate on the issue of self-ghettoization in Jewish Montreal: what Richler, in *Son of a Smaller Hero*, satirizes as a form of imbrication behind "the walls . . . [of] habit and atavism" (14).

Richler's preferred model of Jewish identity is a form of cosmopolitanism towards which the novels gesture when they present the dilemma of male Jewish identity formation as a false choice between "tribalism" and "assimilation." As the hero attempts (often unsuccessfully) to navigate a path between the "ghetto" and the "world," maturation in these novels comes tacitly to be associated with the deconstruction of the tribalist/assimilationist binary and with the consequent adoption of a Jewish identity that subsumes ethnic, familial, and historical ties within a more mobile and worldly paradigm of identification.

In *Son of a Smaller Hero*, Richler presents the maturation of the protagonist, Noah Adler, as a process of escaping from the orthodox world of tradition represented by his grandfather, Melech Adler, and the Jewish ghetto of Montreal. The consequences of reaffirming an identity defined solely in terms of Jewish ethnicity and rooted in obeisance to “the past” are suggested by the destructive paths taken by Noah’s father and uncle, men of the previous generation, both of whom are parodies of the superhero as golem. Noah’s Uncle Shloime, for instance, rebels against Melech’s orthodox Jewish values, falling into a life of petty crime that ultimately leads to his torching of the patriarch’s business and his beating and robbing of the novel’s socialist business owner, a character who supplies a significant counter-voice to Melech’s “tribalism.” These symbolic crimes against contending father figures vividly suggest the predicament that Richler attributes to the children and grandchildren of Jewish immigrants: locked in an angry rebellion against the traditionalism and rigidity of their parents, they are ultimately unable to break out of their pattern. Thus, Shloime’s attempt to convince his nephew Noah (Melech’s grandson) that they have “a lot in common” is marked by a rebelliousness that collapses back into an essentialist identification with ethnic roots:

“We’re both lone operators, eh? We both like *shiksas*—dames—and we both don’t give a damn about eating kosher and . . .”

“We’ve got nothing in common,” Noah said sharply.

“At least I admit what I am,” Shloime continued. “At least I don’t pretend to be a *Goy* . . .” (84)

Later, Shloime’s tribalist rebound is ironically confirmed when he rationalizes joining the army on the grounds of protecting Canada from “the commie menace,” and Noah is appalled by the way that his uncle’s speech reflects “an incongruous mixture of newspaper editorials, army lectures, and ghetto fear” (184). “Obviously,” Noah concludes, “Shloime had found his level. He was a fully adjusted member. Had Melech Adler abandoned love for the sake of righteousness and come to America to produce this dangerously small man? Was this boy the end-product of religious fanaticism?” (184).

The novel’s answer to these rhetorical questions is an emphatic “yes,” and Richler articulates this answer by presenting Shloime as a corrupt version of the Jewish superhero. Nicknamed “Kid Lightning” (21-22), and hanging out with a Jewish gang called “The Avengers” led by Lou “The Hook” Edelman (86, 58), Shloime is to some extent a parody of American Jewish gangsters like Benjamin “Bugsy” Siegel and Meyer Lansky who operated in the 1920s and 1930s in New York. But Shloime’s criminal nickname is

also an allusion to the lightning-powered “Jewish” superheroes with whom Richler identified in his youth: newsboy Billy Batson who calls down a magic bolt of lightning by uttering the word “Shazam!” to transform himself into Captain Marvel, and Jay Garrick, The Flash, who could run “faster than the streak of lightning in the sky” (“Great” 128). Shloime’s petty gang, “The Avengers,” seems likewise to be a parodic assembly of Richler’s nostalgic superhero “revenge figures.” In this way, Richler anticipates his reclamation of the superhero for Jewish counter-culture in “The Great Comic Book Heroes,” but also warns of the potential slippage between the desire for counter-cultural “revenge” and the reactionary ethnic “fanaticism” of the “dangerously small man” (*Smaller Hero* 184).

Richler’s satire of the dangers of insularity is developed further in the novel’s presentation of Noah’s unhappy father, Wolf, whose story, like his brother Shloime’s, also contains overtones of superhero parody. Not a “superhero,” but the “smaller hero” of the novel’s title, Wolf Adler is Melech’s eldest and most obedient son whose hopes for success hinge on becoming a partner in his father’s salvage business. When Melech’s scrap yard burns down, Wolf becomes an iconic hero for the Jewish community, dying in the fire, apparently trying to rescue the box of parchment scrolls that Melech kept locked in his office. The myth spreads that “Wolf Adler died for the Torah” (142), but this is far from the truth. Wolf, a “smaller hero” indeed, has privately fantasized about murdering Melech and mistakenly believed that his father’s lock-box was filled with money, not Torah scrolls. “[T]he true story of Wolf’s death” must thus be covered up by the family lest the anti-Semites get hold of this seeming confirmation of the prejudice “that the Jews only care for money. That they’d even die for it” (190-91). Richler’s satiric treatment of Wolf is moderately gentler than his outright condemnation of Shloime because it is clear that Melech treats the former unfairly. Nonetheless, Wolf, too, is ultimately satirized and rejected as a model for Noah’s own maturation because, like Shloime’s adolescent revolt, Wolf’s Oedipal rebellions against the family patriarch remain impotent and self-destructive.

As before, Richler conveys Wolf’s failure to move beyond the world of traditionalism and filial piety demanded by the patriarch through ironic allusions to a comic book superhero—in this case, Batman and his hidden lair, the Bat Cave. Wolf, whose very name recalls the menacing creatures of the night upon which Bruce Wayne bases his superhero identity, is most at home in a domestic cave of his own, which Richler presents as a microcosm of the entrapping “Jewish ghetto.” Despite Wolf’s constant anxiety,

he was seldom nervous or afraid in the den. The den was his. . . . One wall of the den was completely taken up by his bookshelves. Here he kept his old copies of *Life*, *Popular Mechanics*, *Reader's Digest*, *True Crime*, and several volumes of scrapbooks. . . . Most of the drawers to his desk were locked. His diary he kept in the bottom drawer, which also had a false bottom where he kept his personal papers and letters. Except for prosaic entries, such as family birthdays, dates of operations and graduations, his diary was kept in a code of his own invention. (133-34)

Wolf's den with its *True Crime* pulps and its false-bottomed drawers and secret codes is, like Batman's Bat Cave, a space of male fantasy where powerless men project imaginary compensations. In fact, Wolf even appears to fantasize that he has a sort of "super power":

When he had to contend with the big drunken Irishmen who came into his office . . . or when he was about to ask his father for more pay, he had a trick of wiggling his ears and raising his eyebrows and making his glasses go up and down on his nose. That way, if the others took what he said in the wrong spirit, he could always reply that he had been joking. (33)

The contents of his encrypted diaries convey a similar wish for extraordinary abilities and heroic schemes. At one point he converts his daily walks into a project of imaginatively circumnavigating the globe (177); at another, he formulates "a project to build a bridge across the Atlantic" and "[a]n ideal society, with secret signals, had been planned" (179), ambitions which not only present hopeful possibilities, but also, perhaps, obliquely suggest the Zionism of his father, Melech, that Richler treats as an extension of "ghetto mentality." The novel's "smaller hero," in other words, is a parodic Batman who is not only trapped in the Bat Cave of his father's traditionalism, but who is also literally entombed in the earth beneath the rubble of his father's business. Once again, Richler suggests that narrowly imagined culture-heroes are not only to a large extent fabrications, but also represent a dangerous "dead end" for the maturation of his fictional protagonists.

If Richler links his mockery of the failed rebellions of Shloime and Wolf to a critique of insular forms of "heroic" Jewish masculinity, what alternative model of Jewish identity does the novel propose? Discovering this alternative is the theme of Noah's narrative, in which "freedom" is initially represented as a rebellion that amounts to assimilation, symbolized (as is often the case in Richler's works) by the protagonist's love affair with a "perfect" Gentile woman—the wife of Noah's English professor (49). The implications of this affair are underlined by an argument Noah has with her in which she asks him if he "worr[ies] about being a Jew" and accuses him of being the kind

of Jew “who turns all the way around and becomes an anti-Semite himself” (70). This accusation is often levelled at Richler as well, and Noah is indeed plagued by the sense that his rebellion is an unsatisfactory one: “[he] had renounced a world with which he had at least been familiar and no new world had as yet replaced it. He was hungering for an anger or a community or a tradition to which he could relate his experience” (64). Eventually, he feels that he has become a “stranger,” thinks nostalgically of his family, and feels “no longer proud to have been accepted by the *Goyim*” (97). But his father Wolf tells him bluntly that there is no going back, “You’re no longer a Jew and you’ll never become one. So what are you? A nothing . . .” (123). The challenge the novel dramatizes is Noah’s attempt to transform this “nothing” into the ground of a cosmopolitan identity that refuses the either/or logic of tribalism and assimilation. Noah repeatedly characterizes this possibility as the need to do more than simply say “No” to the riddle of ethnicity (179): “It’s not enough to rebel, he thought. To destroy. It is necessary to say yes to something” (29). Ultimately, this “yes” is represented in the novel by the great Richlerian panacea of “Europe,” for which Noah eventually departs; and unlike his affair with the professor’s wife, this mode of departure from his family connotes a more satisfying (though also more ambiguous) set of identifications:

“You are going from us?”

“I am going and I’m not going. I can no more leave you [Melech], my mother, or my father’s memory, than I can renounce myself. But I can refuse to take part in this. . . .” (203)

Predictably, Melech reads Noah’s choice as a form of assimilation: “Go, become a *Goy* . . . Go join, become my enemy” (203). But Noah leaves this climactic meeting between generations with one of the Torah scrolls inadvertently rescued by his father and inscribed in his grandfather’s hand, a gesture that reaffirms his commitment to a form of cosmopolitanism that does not renounce ethnic and family histories, even as its practitioner sets out for broader horizons.

Significantly, Noah’s transvaluation of what his grandfather perceives as assimilation into a form of rooted cosmopolitanism is inherent in Richler’s reading of the Jewish secret identities of “The Great Comic Book Heroes.” The progeny of Jewish creators as well as an alien who crash lands on earth only to be adopted by a kindly family from “Smallville,” USA and given the white-bread name “Clark Kent,” Superman has become the preeminent pop culture metaphor for Jewish assimilation. Anticipating comic historian Jules

Feiffer's observation that Superman is the "ultimate assimilationist fantasy" (qtd. in Hoberman and Shandler 166), Richler points out that Superman may be symbolically Jewish, but Clark Kent "is the archetypal middle-class Canadian WASP, superficially nice, self-effacing, but within whom burns a hate-ball, a would-be avenger with superhuman powers" ("Great" 123). At one level, then, the Superman/Clark Kent dual identity might be read simply as symbolic of "passing" or assimilation, since the hero's "true" identity must ever remain "secret." But Richler views this "assimilated" hero with his own brand of X-ray vision that brings the Jewish ethnicity of Superman's creators and the Jewish immigrant allegory of the character's story into the foreground, without entirely obliterating the glossy costumed surface. Indeed, Richler suggests that Superman's Jewishness was never really a "secret identity" at all. It was an open secret, especially given that these heroes were created at a time "when Jews were still thinly disguised as Gentiles on stage, in novels, and comic books" (128). The key word for Richler is "thinly." And under the inspection of Richler's X-Ray vision, the costume of assimilation is rendered even more transparent, revealing not simply a core of "Jewish" identity, but, as Richler says of Superman, "a universal hero" (123). Such a doubling of identity—which transforms the signifiers of assimilation into palimpsests to imagine something more fluid and complex—begins, in turn, to look very much like a representation of Richler's own brand of cosmopolitanism, which attempts to deconstruct either/or models of ethnic identity through an action of shuttling between the particular and the universal. Like Noah's departure for Europe, which sets the Torah scrolls in his pocket to flight at the end of *Son of a Smaller Hero*, such a shuttling rejects any form of "self-ghettoizing" identity politics in favour of the more worldly model of ethnic selfhood cultivated by Richler himself. Richler was a satirist and cosmopolitan exile whose ambivalent relationship to the Jewish community of Montreal as well as to his own status as a "Jewish writer" are well-documented (Ramraj 2). Thus, in his seminal study of Richler's "ambivalent vision," Victor Ramraj makes the striking claim that "[t]hrough these novels focus on the Jewish community, Richler is not preoccupied with ethnic issues" (1, 17). It is under the terms of Richler's ambivalent form of "rooted cosmopolitanism," I would argue, that one may best understand such a claim and assent to the argument that these novels "transcend time, place, and race, and become novels that are at once Jewish, Canadian, and universal" (17).

Richler's presentation of Shloime and Wolf as parodies of the Jewish superhero in *Son of a Smaller Hero* anticipates the reading of ethnicity,

superheroes, and secret identities that I have just been tracing. They are parodies precisely because they are unable to imagine a type of Jewish “Superman” who would soar beyond the ghetto to become a “universal hero.” Shloime’s “Kid Lightning” identity, in particular, is a grotesque version of Richler’s superhero fantasy, for “The Flash,” the comic book character he parodies, is, even more than Superman, Richler’s ultimate example of the cosmopolitan Jew. “With *The Flash*,” Richler writes, “we are on the brink of a new, a liberated era. Jay Garrick is Jewish, but Reform. Semi-assimilated. In the opening frame, lovely Joan (significantly blonde) won’t date him, because he is only a scrub on the university football team while Bull Tyson is already a captain. . . . Jay, naturally, is intellectually inclined. . . . [He] spends most of the time in the lab with his professor” (“Great” 129). Moreover, The Flash’s origin story suggests an allegory for the process of cosmopolitan transformation that Noah eventually undergoes. After an experiment with hard water in the college laboratory goes wrong, Jay Garrick collapses: “He lies between life and death for weeks,” (129) caught, like Noah, between extremes that Richler’s texts allegorize as “tradition” and “assimilation.” But in the end, Jay wakes up, “endowed with superhuman powers . . . [able to] walk, talk, run, and think swifter than thought. . . . He will probably be able to outrace a bullet!” (129). This attainment of “superhuman powers” of speed, movement, and thought, Richler implies, is an apt metaphor for the “liberated era” of “semi-assimilat[ion]” that Jay Garrick represents and that Noah’s narrative of maturation towards cosmopolitan mobility dramatizes.

Richler’s comic-book deconstruction of ethnic identity is developed further in *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, but here the case is more complicated because unlike *Son of a Smaller Hero*, *Duddy Kravitz* is not as straightforward. As J. A. Wainwright has shown, Richler’s attitude to Duddy is frequently sympathetic, and the novel is careful to demonstrate why Duddy cannot be dismissed simply as a “*pusherke*,” a “little Jew-boy on the make,” “a busy, conniving little yid” (244, 280). Whatever moral failings he might have, the novel clearly shows that they are shaped by and against the dominant values of his corrupt environment: an environment defined not only by his father’s petty criminality, but also by the pervasive anti-Semitism of the city and the ruthlessness of the capitalist world. Nonetheless, as the many debates this novel has engendered attest,² it remains the case that Duddy’s ascent through a series of underhanded schemes and betrayals, from meagre beginnings in Montreal’s Jewish community to success as the wealthy owner of lakefront properties in Sainte Agathe, remains an

“apprenticeship to a perverted myth” (McGregor 133). In effect, the heavily satirized Shloime and Wolf plots of *Son of a Smaller Hero* move into the foreground in *Duddy Kravitz*, as do their associations with superhero comics and the Jewish ghetto’s construction of parodic culture-heroes—though with significant expansions and complications.

Taking Wolf’s place as a parodic culture-hero is “the legendary” Jerry Dingleman (24), a local Jewish hustler who has “made his name” (24), growing up to become an infamous gangster and dope-smuggler known as “The Boy Wonder” (10). For Duddy’s father Max (who plays the role of Dingleman’s sycophantic bard), the story of how the Boy Wonder parlays the twenty-five cents he makes from the sale of discarded streetcar transfers into a fortune and a criminal empire is not just a crystallization of the community’s “fears and hopes” (26); it is also a legend of heroic Jewish vengeance against a larger anti-Semitic culture by “a God-fearing man” who “didn’t smoke or drive his car or place bets on the Sabbath” (25, 131). The novel, however, presents him as a grotesque parody of the heroic community ideal, for rather than receiving superpowers like Richler’s fleet-footed Flash, the “Boy Wonder had been struck by polio” in his twenties, and now “[h]is legs were twisted and useless” (131). Moreover, like Shloime “Kid Lightning” Adler (whose criminal misadventures are echoed by his own), the “Boy Wonder” has a diminutive nickname that undercuts the stature of his legend. Dingleman’s name may be that of a superhero, but it is an allusion to Batman’s kid sidekick, Robin. If Wolf and his Wolf’s Den were *Son of a Smaller Hero*’s parodic answers to Batman and the Bat Cave, *Duddy Kravitz*’s “Boy Wonder” legend brings the novels’ use of the Batman myth to parody dubious culture-heroes full circle: no matter how far the “twisted” culture-hero’s “nerve” (25) might take him in the eyes of the community, his criminality dooms him never to rise above the status of morally-stunted sidekick in the eyes of the satirist.

Max Kravitz’s naïve hero-worship of the Boy Wonder legend forms the backdrop of Duddy’s upbringing. It is therefore not surprising that, unlike Noah, in *Son of a Smaller Hero*, Duddy apprentices himself to the parodic culture-hero’s example (63), and he eventually succeeds in taking his place within the symbolic economy of St. Urbain Street’s legendary figures (318-19). As a delinquent schoolboy, Duddy leads a gang called “The Warriors” (50) and postures as a “big hero” (12), even calling himself “The Avenger” (15) when tormenting his English teacher with prank phone calls, one of which inadvertently leads to the death of the man’s wife. Richler also

explicitly links Duddy's development as a Boy-Wonder-in-training to comic book superheroes by having one of Duddy's earliest schemes be his rental of "contraband" American comic books during wartime, when these sought-after items were in short supply (55)—a situation that Richler later remembers in "The Great Comic Book Heroes" as a "flourish[ing] . . . street corner black market in *Detective* and *Action* comics" (126; see also *The Street* 61). The parodic nature of Duddy's development as a comic book mogul is made explicit, too, for Duddy soon begins dealing in pornographic comic strip parodies like "*Dick Tracy's Night Out . . . Lil Abner gets Daisy Mae, Terry and the Dragon Lady, Blondie plays strip poker, Gasoline Alley Gang Bang, and more*"—a "venture [that] was the first of Duddy's to end in disaster" (55-56). In addition to their broad satirical overtones, some of these details suggest that Richler has modeled Duddy on the false-hero Shloime Adler from the previous novel, even going so far as to give Duddy an alias that is the same as that of Shloime's gang, "The Avengers." The name is appropriate, for Duddy is Richler's most fully-developed comic book "revenge figure"—a revenge figure whose ambition, like Dingleman's, reflects obedience to the precepts of a "ghettoized" ethnicity and, like Shloime's and Wolf's, is rigidly circumscribed by the values of a severe Jewish patriarch.

In Duddy's case, the rooting of his "heroism" in a traditional concept of ethnicity is signified by his veneration of his grandfather Simcha's slogan, "A man without land is nobody" (49). This kernel of patriarchal "wisdom" feeds Duddy's dream of owning land in Sainte Agathe, where he plans to build "a whole town," complete with a synagogue and a farm for his grandfather (311). More importantly, it also guides Duddy's pursuit of selfhood, a process which is directly bound up in the realization of this dream. Becoming "a somebody," for Duddy, is identical with owning land in accordance with his grandfather's dictum and with replacing the Boy Wonder as the culture hero of St. Urbain Street's Jewish ghetto (62-63, 315). Richler satirizes this goal as too narrow, underlining the culture-hero's ruthlessness in part through the grandfather's refusal of the proffered farm and withdrawal of his blessing once he discovers that Duddy has come by this land dishonestly. But Richler undercuts the patriarch's moral authority as well. Ironically, it is the corrupt Boy Wonder who provides a direct critique of his insular values, telling Duddy that his grandfather never wanted a farm in the first place because, for "old men" like him, "[s]itting in their dark cramped ghetto corners," the land was only ever a pastoral fantasy: in actuality, those men "want to die

in the same suffocating way they lived, bent over a last or a cutting table or a freezing junk yard shack” (313). Thus, whereas *Son of a Smaller Hero* ends with Noah embarking on a quest for a new ground of Jewish identity, thereby confirming his status as a cosmopolitan revision of the Biblical Noah, *Duddy Kravitz* ends with Duddy as a parodic Moses who, despite his heroic stature, finds the narrative of homecoming elusive. Not only does Duddy’s grandfather repudiate him, but also “Moses, [Duddy] recalled from *Bible Comics*, died without ever reaching the Promised Land” (212). Like the Boy Wonder, in other words, Duddy becomes a powerless comic book hero too. That he finds his parodic identity mirrored in the cartoonish patriarchs of *Bible Comics* is Richler’s darkly humorous reproach to the culture-hero’s limitations. In the end, Duddy has been so intent on *becoming* a local legend that he remains blind to what Richler elsewhere presents as the superhero medium’s potential to act as a form of pop culture epistemology, by providing metaphors for imagining new ways of becoming “a somebody”—or, like Noah in *Son of a Smaller Hero*, a cosmopolitan “nobody.”

The critique of ethnic insularity via a parody of Jewish superheros that one finds in the novels of apprenticeship is a significant *leitmotif* in Richler’s oeuvre, one that reappears dramatically, for instance, in Richler’s depiction of misplaced idolatry in *St. Urbain’s Horseman*. In this later novel, the Jewish protagonist, Jake Hersh, gradually becomes disillusioned with the globe-trotting heroics of his Nazi-hunting cousin Joey Hersh, the titular “avenging Horseman” (31) of St. Urbain Street whose aggressive defence of Israel symbolizes “the possibility of the Jews becoming assertive and heroic, shedding their image as a people who accept unprotestingly persecution and exploitation as their lot,” even as “his craving for vengeance . . . makes him cruel and exploitative” in turn, marking him as a “false god in the ethical sphere of the novel” (Ramraj 102-3, 100, 104). The morally ambiguous Horseman flits through Jake’s dreams in images of romance tinged with threat, “bronzed as a lifeguard, trousers buckled tight against a flat stomach . . . [e]xhorting the men, mocking them, demanding vengeance” (64-65); he is characterized variously as “a knight returned from a foreign crusade” (119), a fighter “in boxing trunks” and a cowboy “drawing a gun menacingly” (127). Most significant, however, is Jake’s mythopoeic identification of the Horseman as an embodiment of the Golem, a “body without a soul . . . made by Rabbi Judah Ben Bezalel in the sixteenth century to defend the Jews of Prague from a pogrom and [who] . . . still wanders the world, turning up whenever a defender is most needed” (252-53). The Golem is, in other words,

“[a] sort of Jewish Batman” (252)—a pop culture gloss on Jewish folklore that confirms not only the Horseman’s superhero pedigree, but also his kinship with the satirically portrayed “Kid Lightning” and “Boy Wonder” figures of the earlier novels as well. The Horseman’s ambiguous demise—at the hands of either the Nazi Doctor Mengele or a community of Jews living in Paraguay—carries the force of the satirist’s judgment on “golems” and “revenge figures” whose moral compass cannot navigate beyond the limits of the ethnic enclave.

Jake himself, meanwhile, follows an ironic trajectory of development reminiscent of Duddy Kravitz’s, for, like Duddy, Jake reveres, questions, and recuperates the dream of superheroic Jewish masculinity over the course of the narrative, ultimately appearing to adopt the fallen Horseman’s identity as “Jewish Batman,” a transformation reminiscent of the way that Duddy comes to supplant the legendary status of the gangster named for Batman’s own apprentice, the Boy Wonder. Suppressing his intuition that the mythic Horseman might only be “a graven image” (434) or “distorting mirror” in which “we each took the self-justifying image we required of him” (433), Jake ultimately appears to surrender to what Ramraj aptly calls “the nightmare of horsemanship” (105), dreaming that “he was the Horseman now. It was Jake who was St. Urbain’s rider on the white stallion. Come to extract the gold fillings from the triangular cleft between Mengele’s upper front teeth with pliers” (435). Significantly, the “nightmare” (435) culminates in Jake’s retreat to his “attic aerie”—a secret lair protected by “booby traps” (3) that recalls Wolf Adler’s den—where he implicitly writes himself into the Horseman’s legendary history (436). Within the context of Richler’s superhero poetics, such a conclusion does more than simply affirm Ramraj’s suggestion that the Horseman is Jake’s “alter ego” (93); it suggests that Jake Hersh is, in effect, the Horseman’s analeptic secret identity.

Richler’s ambivalent appreciation of Jewish culture-heroes, and his novels’ implicit endorsement of eccentric, anti-essentialist forms of Jewish identity that he finds modeled in the superhero “fantasy figures” of the 1940s and 1950s, ultimately court the accusation that Richler’s cosmopolitanism is a cosmopolitanism of the imagination only—a cosmopolitanism, in other words, of the deracinated artist. *Son of a Smaller Hero* ends with Noah’s symbolically-loaded departure, but gives little sense of what a rooted cosmopolitanism would look like in practice. *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* is even less forthcoming, presenting the cosmopolitan alternative to Duddy’s ironic “success story” almost entirely by implication. Its minor

representatives are Duddy's Uncle Benjy, who urges his nephew to murder the "brute" within and become a "*mensh*" (280), and Duddy's schoolyard acquaintance, Hersh, who rejects the path of becoming "the apogee of the Jewish bourgeois dream" (a doctor or a lawyer) and who succeeds in "purging [him]self of the ghetto mentality" (225) by becoming an artist and following Noah Adler into voluntary European exile. These novels, in other words, tend to privilege metaphors and artist heroes whose voluntaristic models of cosmopolitan identity formation may in some sense be as much "fantasy figures" as Richler's boyhood superheroes. The bleaker subject of how material and historical forces might limit the freedom of cosmopolitan self-invention is one that the novels often veer away from confronting. To the inevitable question "What about Germany?" the novels tend to offer what amounts to a liberal evasion epitomized by Noah's rather Olympian universalism: "The important thing is not that they burned Jews but that they burned men" (*Smaller Hero* 70). Their superhero poetics of a cosmopolitan Jewish identity that attempts a flight beyond conventional notions of ethnicity might therefore seem overly idealistic and, in a derogatory sense, "comic bookish."

Nonetheless, Richler's turn to the comic book trope of superheroes to narrate the development of young Jewish men is itself instructive. For, although Richler's male protagonists often fall significantly short of "heroism" and are reduced to parodies of the golems and culture-heroes they aspire to become, Richler's hybridization of the *Bildungsroman* with the pop culture grammar of superheroics suggests that masculine identity formation in ethnic minority cultures can often only be fully grasped through the rubric of hyperbolic heroic struggle—a "superheroism" to which the conventions of comic book melodrama and cinematic male fantasy are ideally suited. Noticing that his sons have become "crazy about James Bond movies" and that "they identify with 007" without realizing that "they have been cast as the villains of the dramas," Richler observes (paraphrasing Norman Mailer), that "[t]he minority man . . . grows up with a double image of himself, his own and society's" ("Bond" 55). This double image is perhaps why Richler's novels of development are rife with comic book subtext, why the identity of his protagonists is so often troubled by the spectre of a second, "secret identity," and why the novels feel crowded with invisible battles that pit nascent Jewish superheroes against the James Bonds and Fredrick Werthams of the dominant culture, even as Richler remains vigilant that his more cosmopolitan heroes do not end up becoming simply "revenge figures."

NOTES

- 1 Richler's account of superheroes as Jewish "revenge figures" anticipates Jeff Salamon's contention that Superman is a version of Max Nordeau's fin-de-siècle Zionist fantasy of Jewish Supermen, the *Muskelfjuden* (Hoberman and Shandler 166), as well as Gerard Jones' defence of Superman against Wertham's charge that the last son of Krypton is a racial supremacist who should have "S.S." emblazoned upon his uniform. "Wertham would have said that the Jews of comics were just playing at fascism for profit, but the men themselves knew: theirs were the fantasies of *real* Jews, the daydreams of kids who'd been made to pay personally, by Russian pogroms and Irish fists, for their Jewishness" (274). The Jewish progeny of superhero comics as well as the motif of the Jewish superhero as golem also feature prominently in Michael Chabon's novel, *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* (2000).
- 2 For useful interventions into conflicting readings of the novel by Warren Tallman and A. R. Bevan, see Ferns 77-82. For an important defence of Duddy Kravitz see Wainwright 56-73.

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Benjy's Education

*It must be a Big thing, Benjy thinks,
to throw your daughter down the stairs.
His sister's not Big like his Mummy is. But little
girls ought'a learn, Benjy's heard, what that means:
That's a Big girl's education.
And where does that leave the boys?*

What he cannot understand
is how that baby boy in diapers and all his
strident squeals & moans—how all those
scales he heard played out
seemed so chromatic then—became Big,
whether he knows what that means or not.

As he looks back on his sister
at her studies (crying), Benjy is struck
with a most confusing conception of himself:
*Even if I have to die, he declares,
to get to the bottom of things I will.*
Tomorrow, Benjy's gonna throw himself down the stairs.

Early Richler, *Las Fallas*, and Sacrificing the National Self

Looking back in 1968 at his fifteen years as a “Jewish writer from Canada,” Mordecai Richler introduced his essay collection *Hunting Tigers Under Glass* with withering glances at “proliferating Canada culture boosters” (10), but also satirized his own “pompous” attempts to rise above a narrow regionalism:

Because I didn’t want to be taken for that pathetic provincial, the Canadian writer, I wouldn’t allow my first novel to be compromised by the imprint of a Toronto publisher and went out of my way to have *The Acrobats* published in England.

Neither, I now recall with embarrassment, did I wish to be classified as a Jewish writer. No, no. I was, as I pompously protested to an interviewer, a writer who merely happened to be Jewish.

Fortunately for me, a Yiddish newspaper in Montreal saw the interview and swiftly cut me down to size: “The oven is big, the loaf is small.” (8)

As a skeptic whose withering ironies and the “tendency to deflate” (*Hunting* 10) were turned both against his own attempts to deny his roots, Canadian and Jewish, *and* the pretensions of cultural nationalism in general, Richler was an exuberant shape-shifter and trickster—a thorn in the funny-bone of Canadian nationalist aspirations. Faced with the question of his own place within the CanLit canon, he would have expelled cigar smoke in our general academic direction. His defiance of national identification typifies his early process of writerly self-construction as a contrarian satirist who enthusiastically set out to skewer images of the

subsidized, artificially protected, and institutionally coddled Canadian artist. Not “compromised by the imprint of a Toronto publisher” in its initial printing, Richler’s earliest novel, *The Acrobats*, is particularly ferocious in targeting the weaknesses of the naïve Canadian artist, represented by the character of André Bennett. Indeed, the continuing importance of *The Acrobats* is emphasized in his 1970 essay, “Why I Write”: “I’m still lumbered with the characters and ideas, the social concerns I first attempted in *The Acrobats*. Every serious writer has, I think, one theme, many variations to play on it” (*Shovelling Trouble* 19).

Richler’s earliest three novels, like *The Acrobats*, are preoccupied with allegorical sacrifice, death, violent killing, or social ostracism of weak male characters who are unable to compete with bullies, patriarchs, and opportunistic predators: this narrative pattern is exemplified through the murder of the artist figure of André Bennett in *The Acrobats* (1954), the death of the weak father figure of Wolf Adler and the humiliation of Theo Hall in *Son of a Smaller Hero* (1955), and, finally, through the murder of Nicky Singleton and the social alienation of Norman Price in *A Choice of Enemies* (1957). Richler’s early novels, thus, *begin* with narratives of the *end* of weak male identities that he regards as outmoded. These weak male victims prefigure the sacrifice of an important figure of Scots-Canadian pacifism in Richler’s fourth novel, Mr. MacPherson, the high school history teacher who plays the dual roles of ethnic victimizer and national sacrificial victim in the opening chapters of *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* (1959). MacPherson arguably represents those elements of order and “polite behavior”⁽¹⁰⁾ that embody the discourse of what Daniel Coleman calls “white civility,” and it is this white civility and its attendant subterfuge and hypocrisy that kick-start the full fury of Duddy’s malicious vengeance and Richler’s satire. This essay will explore the meanings of the sacrifice of the male victims in Richler’s first four novels, and will also discuss how Richler develops a distinctive hard-boiled, vernacular style that exemplifies the tough sensibility that the male victims lack in his narrative. As the literary “executioner” of the weak male representatives of expatriate aesthetic experiment (André Bennett in *The Acrobats*), Anglophone liberal tolerance and civility (Theo Hall and Mr. MacPherson in *Son of a Smaller Hero*), Jewish compliance with patriarchy (Wolf Adler in *Son of a Smaller Hero*), and liberal tolerance (Nicky Singleton and Norman Price in *A Choice of Enemies*), Richler as the implied author will script a discursive voice that will compensate for the lack of male strength in these sacrificial victims.

While these categories of male victimization cover a broad spectrum, from Anglophone artists to Jewish fathers, all of these men suffer from an inability to take pragmatic action to protect their interests, their art, their lovers, or their social reputations from competitors or stronger, more assertive male predators. Richler, however, was not systematic in his representations of male victims, and John Moss has noted that while Richler is a “moral writer” who judges society through his characters, “this is expressed in his fiction by attitude, not a coherent moral system.” Richler “shows hurt and outrage, and perhaps less of peace and ecstasy” (144). Excoriating all folly, equally infuriated by hollow Canadian patriotism and Jewish conservatism, Richler takes aim at “popular culture, mass media, stereotypes of all sorts, numberless things that offend him. Ultimately, none of us are spared, even those who piously struggle to agree with him. He is a threat to the very least among us” (Moss 145). Yet while the terrain of Richler’s attacks is broad, the early work demonstrates the development of an increasingly confident voice that rids itself of ideological ties and becomes bolder over time. Bruce Stovel, in his preface to *A Choice of Enemies*, refers to how Richler saw himself initially as a socialist, but then wrote a “political novel to exorcise the political activist within himself”: “the novelist must be, by ideology, a man who rejects all ideologies” (xi). An essential part of this narrative of Richler’s “exorcism,” I argue, is the symbolic sacrifice of male victims.

Classic theories of symbolic sacrifice from Kenneth Burke to René Girard emphasize that sacrifice is a form of ritualized substitution that channels violent social retribution, revenge, punishment, or justice against a “surrogate victim” (Girard 2), thereby acting as a form of catharsis that manages the surplus violence which circulates through human societies. Girard emphasizes that the violence of ritualistic sacrifice is ubiquitous in the routine activities of society, and that “rites of sacrifice serve to polarize the community’s aggressive impulse and redirect them towards victims that may be actual or figurative, animate or inanimate, but that are always incapable of propagating further vengeance” (18). The figure of the surrogate sacrificial victim is explicitly referenced in Richler’s *The Acrobats*, set during the annual Valencian fiesta of St. Joseph: the festival prominently features the burning of satirical and often grotesque effigies. These sacrificed effigies are forms of the ritualized “*fallas*,” surrogates for social types from *The Acrobats*, the satirically caricatured effigies that are burned in the annual Spanish-Valencian spring rituals which symbolize the clearing away of the

accumulated past. These purgations are a prominent feature of *The Acrobats*, but ritualized victimization and the killing or ostracism of such characters are also important in Richler's three subsequent novels.

The festival of the *Fallas* in *The Acrobats* marks an important transitional period in Richler's life and writing career. During the winter of 1951 to 1952, seeking exotic European experiences far from provincial Montreal, and cheaper places to live and write, Richler made his way from Paris to Barcelona, and then to Ibiza and Valencia. On March 19, 1952, in Valencia, he witnessed the spectacular fireworks and burning of the huge effigies, including one of a "pot-bellied gypsy" (*Images* 22-23), that are part of the annual St. Joseph's fiesta. His brief memoir of this period that accompanies the photography of Peter Christopher in the travel book *Images of Spain* (1977) explicitly associates the burning of the *fallas* with the purgative destruction of bourgeois Jewish expectations, Canadian residential obligations, and even the cultural capital of high modernist literature:

. . . those flames in Valencia consumed not only a pot-bellied gypsy, after all, a stranger, but also a host of personal devils. The most wintry of my Canadian baggage as well as some of the more stultifying Jewish injunctions I had grown up with. Gone with the flames went the guilt acquired by leaving college without a degree. Not going on to medicine or law, which would have delighted my parents. Up with the smoke went the need to squirrel something away for a rainy day. The compulsion to be sensible above all. Into the ashes went the obligation to endure Canadian winters, simply because I had been born there. Or the necessity, this one more recently acquired, to understand *Finnegan's Wake* or adjudge myself shallow.

I'm a slow learner. But walking away from that fire I grasped, for the first time, that I was a free man. I owed no apologies. My life was mine to spend as I pleased. (*Images* 23)

Victor Ramraj has written that the death of André Bennett in *The Acrobats*, which occurs "simultaneously with the burning of the giant *falla*, an inanimate scapegoat of the fiesta ceremony, suggests also that he is a sacrifice for humanity—an observation supported by Chaim's remark that André's killer was the 'instrument of us all'" (188). Reinhold Kramer also regards the characters in the novel as "Fallas, exaggerated versions of human beings, made for burning, representatives of stances that must be destroyed" (99). I would add to Ramraj's and Kramer's readings of the sacrificial nature of André's death that the *fallas* are an integral part of Richler's many uses of characters as purgative effigies, and that Richler's witnessing of the pyrotechnics of the Valencian *Fallas* was crucial in the author's own identity formation (Foran 124). The *Fallas* serve as a purgative burning away of the

shackles of his imagined cultural obligations and are not “tragic” (Kramer 99), but productively liberatory and essential in his development as a satirist.

Richler’s personal struggle to define himself by a conscious rejection of provincial Canada and cultural orthodoxies might initially seem a classic Jewish Canadian version of the “romance of family progress.” This myth, described by Daniel Coleman in *Masculine Migrations*, continues to be explored by contemporary writers from other non-European diasporic traditions such as Michael Ondaatje in *Running in the Family*, Rohinton Mistry in *Such a Long Journey*, and Ven Begamudré in *Van de Graaff Days*. As Coleman states,

[a]ccording to the romance of family progress, your place of origin is a dead end. In this place, there is no future: it is too backward, too impoverished, too corrupt for you to make anything of yourself here. Especially if you are young. It is different for the old; their roots are sunk too deep in this overtilled soil to pull up now. But the young must leave this hopeless place and make a name for themselves in the big world. (131-32)

Coleman emphasizes that novels by Rohinton Mistry and Ven Begamudré represent the son’s attempt to heal the wounded father, “to rewrite and heal that composite internalized father, to compose through fiction a new relationship with that old inner pain” (*Masculine* 136). This pain results from Oedipal competition, the traumatic violence of the “Law of the Father,” and the “conflicts and anxieties of a father who loves and fears his son, who comes to see his son as inheritor and disinheritor, friend and rival, comrade and traitor” (134). The sons in these novels expose the inadequacies of the father’s version of the myth of progress. However, the romance of progress is more complicated in Richler’s first three novels because of the lack of strong father figures. For Richler, the Law of the Father is problematically weak, since the patriarchal law is often undermined by the assertions and independence of women: even Melech, the proud and rigid grandfather who resents the disrespect of Noah Adler in *Son of a Smaller Hero*, is finally reduced to an embarrassed and pathetic voyeur by his daughter, whom he accidentally spies dancing in the nude (197). She uses the occasion of his transgressive gaze to gain the ethical upper hand and to announce the end of his authority over her: “Spying on me, eh?,” Ida says in reproach to him: “I’m going and I’m glad. What are you looking at? Did you ever let me do what I want? *Once*. Ever ask me how I felt? I’m going. I’m glad, you hear?” (197). *Son of a Smaller Hero*, Richler’s second novel, features a progressive escape by *both* men and women from the domestic “cage” established through the law of the patriarchal Melech Adler.

Certainly Ida Adler, after confronting the humiliated Melech, would likely agree with the title of Richler's essay from the 1984 collection *Home Sweet Home* that "Home is Where You Hang Yourself." In this essay, Richler wrote that he left Canada in 1951 to leave his "picayune past behind" (4), and that he was "charged with a scorn for all things Canadian," though his travel experiences would later qualify this youthful disdain with the understanding that "the boring, the inane, and the absurd" (9) were available wherever one eventually settled. By 1968, the year that Richler won the Governor General's Literary Award for *Cocksure* and *Hunting Tigers Under Glass*, he had built his image as a distinctively acerbic commentator on Canadian culture through six novels and a growing body of essays in such publications as the *New York Review of Books*, *Commentary*, the *New Statesman*, *London Magazine*, and *Maclean's*. And even while Richler clearly was part of the emerging Canadian literary establishment (along with the Governor General's Award in 1968, his establishment credentials were confirmed by Canada Council Fellowships in 1959, 1960, and 1967 and even a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1961), in the late 1960s he continued to serve as a skeptical check on nationalist self-puffery. While he once regretted that Canada was "starved for culture," by 1968 he was lamenting that "now . . . the country is culture-crazed and more preoccupied than ever before with its own absence of a navel, how one yearns for Canada's engaging buckeye suspicion of art and artists of not so long ago" (*Hunting Tigers* 14). Of course, it is a "buckeye suspicion of art and artists" that colours the tone and narrative structure of Richler's first three novels, a period during which he consistently set up ineffectual Canadian artists, academics, orthodox Jewish patriarchs, expatriate writers, and representatives of white civility as the targets of his satiric vitriol.

As part of his contrarian stance, Richler at the outset cultivated a mocking, street-toughened persona that disdained abstract intellectual posturing. Even though he regarded the muscular, macho posturing of Norman Mailer as a ridiculous spectacle—"One still hopes he will stop clowning and settle down to the book he talked about for so many years" (*Hunting Tigers* 108)—he admired both the tough literary essayists like Mailer and the mature intellect of Saul Bellow: "While the toughest kids on the block [like Mailer] were brawling under an *Esquire* street lamp, the men were sitting inside writing novels. Like *Herzog*" (*Hunting Tigers* 104). Nonetheless, Richler still derided the cloistered, academically supported writer so securely removed from the gritty urban labours of the first-generation of fathers who toiled to earn a living with their hands. As an example, in his review of Bernard Malamud's

The Fixer—which he both admires and critiques for its quality of being “forced in the humanist’s greenhouse” (*Hunting Tigers* 113)—he mocks the tenured creative writers of America:

Our fathers struggled to educate us, we compete, leading with the elbows, for foundation grants. The campus in the cornfields has displaced the garment district. . . and then Hollywood (*What Makes Sammy Run*, *The Day of the Locust*) as the canvas for Jewish fiction. The archetypal ineffectual hero in today’s Jewish-American novel holds tenure at a mid-western university, usually the pillowy creative writing chair where Herzog, Gabriel Wallach (Philip Roth’s *Letting Go*) and Seymour Levin (Malamud’s *A New Life*) are already toiling. (*Hunting Tigers* 109)

Richler’s early literary identity was thus shaped by a rather conventionalized post-war rags-to-riches family romance of the vulnerable but tough and resourceful Jewish urban sons—the Duddy Kravitzes of the world. Such a protagonist participates in a Jewish Canadian “masculinizing process” that Warren Rosenberg in *Legacy of Rage* identifies as an assimilative experience that Jewish men in America, during the early twentieth century, struggled to accommodate: “Considering that many of the immigrants were escaping military service in various European armies, in part because of their culture’s ambivalent attitude toward the body and violence, becoming fully accepted Americans would be a particularly difficult struggle” (22). However, as he writes his way into the distinctively urban Canadian idioms and movements of his assertive male characters, Richler also devises the Canadian failures who must be left behind: these are the *fallas* of the past who must be destroyed to clear the ground for more robust, active agency. Thus, Richler’s rejection of narrow nationalism is inscribed in allegories of the killing of the emasculated male figures who are incapable of either effectively resisting the Law of the Father or loyally transmitting its edicts through their weak personalities. Bluntly put, Richler culls the naïve Canadian male losers in his first three novels, representatives of a naïve national self who are bereft of an assertive masculinity.

This lack of a certain *machismo* is compensated for in Richler’s own discourse by strenuous rhetorical attempts to emulate the tonalities and stylistic register of the American hard-boiled school of writing, stylistic moves that distance the implied author from the weaknesses of these victims. This hard-boiled register appears especially in the dialogue, descriptions of actions, and gendered performances of the antagonistic male characters in *The Acrobats*, like the German thug Roger Kraus in *Son of A Smaller Hero* through the language of Noah and Shloime, and in *A Choice of Enemies* in the opening scenes set in the German nightclubs:

The bar, cheap but not quite a dive, smelled of cooking fat. The tinsel decorations over the mirror were covered with dust. There were many salesmen and office workers and small businessmen about. Men with uniformly spic faces. There were a few more girls, but no other soldiers. Frank held his girl tight and she giggled and pushed his hand away from her breast—and all the men heard and watched.

One of the men, a big one with cold little eyes, came up to Ernst and pressed his arm. Ernst tightened and slipped his hand into his jacket. Malcolm watched.

“Get them out of here,” the big man said. “The girl is with us.” (*A Choice of Enemies* 16)

The losers in these early novels are men who cannot physically protect themselves or their lovers from the assertive antagonists like Kraus, or who are dominated by women: for example, André Bennett and Barney Larkin are victimized and bullied by both men and women in *The Acrobats*; or the weak and neurotically obsessive Theo Hall, the English professor in *Son of a Smaller Hero*, loses his wife to the more awkward yet virile attractions of the younger Noah Adler; and Noah Adler’s own father, Wolf, is dominated and abused by the patriarch grandfather, Melech, and by his own wife, Leah, who heaps scorn upon Wolf for being afraid of “his own shadow” (*Son* 27); and the ineffectual communist sympathizer, Norman Price, in *A Choice of Enemies*, who suffers a downward spiral in life. After serving as an RCAF pilot, he is forced to abandon his university teaching position due to his socialist ties in McCarthy-era America, then moves to London where he loses his girlfriend Sally to an East German refugee and disaffected Communist, Ernst Haupt, who has killed his brother, Nicky.

The consistent satiric targeting of these characters, and the narrative deployment of them as scapegoats who represent an emasculated and naïve aestheticism or political idealism, shape the early work of Richler. He becomes the literary executioner of the weak male idealist who, like Norman Price, cannot discern the enemy and act purposefully to defend his interests. Noah Adler, on the other hand, the protagonist of *Son of a Smaller Hero*, represents a nascent rejuvenation of assertive power, a re-masculinized Jewish son who will not, at the end of the novel, be thwarted by the cloying clutches of his mother, as he defiantly leaves for Europe to assert his mobility against her wishes. Noah’s growth and assertiveness prefigure the creation of an intriguing but ruthless new male survivor in Richler’s fourth novel, Duddy Kravitz. It is Kravitz who overshadows Richler’s previous creations, Kravitz who will become the triumphant survivor who will not leave Canada, but will undermine the forms of pacifist and condescendingly class-based, white civility represented by the Scottish Canadian high school history teacher, Mr. MacPherson.¹

The preceding overview has established Richler's preoccupation with allegorical sacrifices of the *Fallas* and I have argued that a compensatory masculinity underlies the author's own narrative self-fashioning. I will now turn to a closer, sequential consideration of the textual evidence by examining the nature of specific male victims in *The Acrobats*, *Son of a Smaller Hero*, *A Choice of Enemies*, and, finally, *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*. Several of these male victims are the descendants of a dominant Anglo-Canadian community that Richler regarded as insufferably conservative and soulless. André Bennett, for example, in *The Acrobats*, is a directionless, anarchistic Anglo-Canadian artist who has been granted more privileges than Richler ever knew in his own childhood: Bennett—known as “moneybags Bennett” because his father possesses a large industrial empire (122)—has been raised in Westmount where his father employs a chauffeur named Morton and his mother enjoys visits from a succession of French Canadian lovers. André is rejected at McGill by both the campus intellectuals and the “football-cocktail set” because he has refused a presumably masculinizing offer to join a fraternity. In establishing the maternally influenced, de-masculinized, and colonial milieu of the Bennett family, André recollects that his mother read him the poems of Bliss Carman while his father read the *Gazette*, or dozed off, or recited the poems of Kipling (*The Acrobats* 58). Borrowing lines that clearly echo the frequently anthologized poem of another McGill writer, F.R. Scott's “The Canadian Authors Meet” (published in 1927 in the *McGill Fortnightly Review*), Richler represents André as filled with loathing for the mediocrity of Canadian art.² The sardonic sketches of the virgin poetesses with their insipid passion and colonial attachments to British royalty, rendered in an infantilizing nursery rhyme scheme in F.R. Scott's poem, are echoed in similar images and bitterly ironic judgments in the observations of André, who clearly identifies with the satiric poet, depicted thus.

Far in a corner sits (though none would know it)
 The very picture of disconsolation,
 A rather lewd and most ungodly poet
 Writing these verses, for his soul's salvation.
 (Scott 407-08)

Bennett echoes Scott's sarcastic treatment of the “virgin poetess,” her “passions,” and the colonial adulation of traditional lyric forms and “imperial” icons that are “draped in the maple leaf”; he rages against the naïve Canadian patronage of home-grown artists and poets (*Acrobats* 77), including his own

potential benefactors who are interested in marketing his paintings in New York. His bitter impatience with both conservative Canadian poetry and trendy art results in his rejection of British and American patronage of his own work. All three national cultures are condemned in the mind of the cynical Bennett:

The Canadian artists! Mediocrity draped in the maple leaf! Sonnets by the ageing virgin grand-daughters of Tory tradesmen evoking the memories of rather un-Presbyterian passions, slick paintings by sophisticates with a shrewd eye turned towards New York. Kultchir, ladies! Step right up and get yur goddam Kultchir while it's real hot! Kultchir as celebrated by imperial favour annually consisting of fifty gold guineas for the horse that wins the King's Plate and an honorary award for either virgin poetess or pipe-smoking historian-novelist. (*Acrobats* 77)

Although André demonstrates the potential to rise above his milieu, having fled the mediocrities of Canadian culture to which he himself has contributed with his paintings, he finally cannot rise to the challenge of saving his Jewish lover, a fellow anarchist and member of the "Skeptics Club," from a lethal abortion. While the tawdry melodrama of the relationship between Ida and André is awkwardly rendered, their initial friendship puts into a play an allegory of the lost Jewish comic muse who functions as an outrageous and subversive form of the female rebel. Ida's perverse antics with the "Skeptics Club" included the writing of "neurotic letters to the college paper saying that Hitler hadn't killed off the Jews fast enough, or that the only way to settle population problems was to drop atom bombs on China and India every spring," and she also shows up in "black-face" to introduce a "negro unionist" to speak at one of the student meetings and is "promptly thrown out." At the party where André meets Ida, she "got very drunk and insisted that I do a pornographic painting of her" (*Acrobats* 122-23). While Ida is clearly reckless and silly, André loves her, and his failure to marry her or at least to help provide her with a safe abortion can be read in allegorical terms. Ida is a form of a lost anarchist muse, and she signifies the Jewish-Anglo inter-ethnic collaboration that could have been possible if André had been more assertive and resisted the Law of the Father that prohibits him from marrying her. Ida's condition, of course, is a different example of the Law of the Father that André cannot thwart so easily. His failure to protect Ida subsequently results in his awkward facing of the grief and anger of her parents after her death. André repeats this failure when he is unable to protect his new Spanish lover in Valencia, Toni, from the violence of the menacing German fascist, Roger Kraus. Failing to protect his lovers and

himself, André's demise at the hands of Kraus on the bridge in Valencia, on the night of the fiesta of St. Joseph, is a ritualized sacrifice of the victim who has set up the conditions of his own execution. Significantly, his Spanish friends Guillermo and Manuel debate whether André's death was murder or suicide (196-97). In symbolic and narratological terms, Richler kills a representative of a weak Canadian expatriate modernity and an Anglo-Canadian figure of failed artistic independence.

Early in the narrative of *The Acrobats*, the character Barney has his pronunciation of *falla* corrected by Derek: "Falya, not falla," (6) he says. The *Fallas* compel "correction" at many symbolic levels: they are present not just at the death of André, but are looming satirical effigies, ubiquitous grotesque mirrorings of the past and present society, and they provide a doubling of the characters right from the beginning of the novel and through to its ending. As the implied author observes,

Nearly every city block had undertaken to build a *falla*. The *Fallas* were made of wood and papier mâché and, although they varied in size, almost all of them were satirical. Favourites, every year, were the ones which caricatured bull-fighters and their managers. On each *falla* there were several figures filled with firecrackers. Every year the *falla* which won first prize was saved. All the others were burnt and exploded on the night of the *Día de San José*. (8)

Richler will continue to use a version of the satirical *falla* figure, a textual "effigy," or a literary surrogate for male victims that must not be imitated but mastered or killed, in his second novel, *Son of a Smaller Hero*.

In *Son of a Smaller Hero*, Richler shifts to Montreal and assumes a greater confidence in providing social interpretations of the city spaces, class divisions, generational conflicts, and barriers to inter-ethnic desire. The emasculated male in this novel is represented both by the protagonist's Jewish father, Wolf Adler, and by the English professor, a figure of white civility, Theo Hall. Both characters are also lampooned as failed "writers" who are victimized by stronger men. Wolf Adler is dominated by both his hypocritical father, Melech, who professes Orthodox values but secretly loves and supports a Polish gentile woman, and Wolf's wife, Leah Goldenberg. Wolf's diary in this novel represents a pathetically constrictive form of self-exploration and life-writing, as he neurotically measures and records his daily footsteps and the wasted time of his life in a secret code (*Smaller Hero* 173-174).³ This measuring of life's minutiae shows not only the emptiness of Wolf's life, but how the bare accounting of his life in terms of empty distances and wasted time is symptomatic of his powerlessness. In a similar

fashion, Theo Hall's fastidious ordering of his daily schedule reflects his fear of spontaneity. His inhibited nature, similar to Wolf Adler's, is attributed to a controlling female figure, in this case his mother, for "His days, from the very beginning, had been ordered. When he had been a small boy his mother had ordered them for him, just as she had ordered his father's days, hardly allowing him time enough for death" (*Smaller Hero* 69). Theo's rigidly ordered life and lack of spontaneity render him unable to recognize and cope with the disruptive energy of Noah's affair with Miriam, and the orderly state of his familiar home also affords no protection from the "ineffable terror" that he suffers and his feeling of "drowning" as he begins to sense the changing nature of Miriam's relationship with Noah (*Smaller Hero* 69). When faced with the physical evidence of Noah's adulterous love of Miriam, he meekly "swung back as though to hit Noah, shut his eyes, faltered, and collapsed on the floor"(102).

In contrast to both his father and Theo Hall, Noah Adler breaks away from the constrictive influence of the parent figures in his life and from his relationship with Miriam in order to start afresh in Europe. The suffocatingly Oedipal grip of his mother on Noah is broken; she declares, as he leaves, that his act is equivalent to matricide. In fact, it is the very act of "writing," unappreciated by Noah's mother as an important bridge of understanding, that is read by his mother as a murder weapon. Hence, in the last encounter between Noah and his mother, he declares, "I'll write you every week, Maw," and she counters with "Write, don't write. To put a knife into my back would have been kinder. Now go. Go. Be happy" (*Smaller Hero* 196).

The "knife in the back" motif appears again in the sacrificial dynamics of Richler's next novel, *A Choice of Enemies*, which allegorizes the sacrifice of the naïve, liberal self through the fatal stabbing of Nicky Singleton by Ernst Haupt, the East German refugee. The vulnerable naiveté of both Nicky and Norman is exposed in their initial trust of Ernst, even while they are warned about the possibilities of deception and betrayal by their friends. The character Sonny warns Norman against someone who has likely been in the Hitler Youth and stolen Norman's girlfriend:

Look, Norm, in this world you've got to make a choice of enemies or you just can't live. The boy stands for everything you and I are against. Haven't we suffered enough for our beliefs without bending over ass backwards to help the other side? (*A Choice of Enemies* 105)

A Choice of Enemies exposes the political naiveté of Norman and the expatriate North American community in London, the expatriates who "had

come to conquer” but remain isolated outsiders with no interest in building a more intimate connection with London and Londoners:

Instead they were being picked off one by one by the cold, drink, and indifference. They abjured taking part in the communal life. . . . Unlike their forebears, they were punk imperialists. They didn't marry and settle down among the natives. They had brought their own women and electric shavers with them. They had through the years evolved from communists to fellow-travellers to tourists. Tourists. For even those who had lived in London for years only knew the true life of the city as a rumour. (*A Choice of Enemies* 132)

Thus, the Canadian expatriates are unable to shed their limiting and provincial Canadian selves and transform their diasporic community in some vital connection with English society. They seem doomed to cultural isolation, decay, and extinction.

As a further demythologization of the family romance of migration, these Canadian expatriate writers do not invent the new masterworks of their home country, but become victims of drink or hack producers of commercial writing without any Canadian content. Thus the allegory of the fall of the naïve Canadian literary artist is extended even further to a whole national group of failed migrant writers. This is a mass decline that Norman links to the efforts of the Canadian literary agent Thomas Hale who has been supporting unproductive expatriate writers with seed money:

Hale came over every year like a kafka [sic] with office to mark you down either in the book of sales or the book of rejection slips. Again and again he discovered the would-be author of the Great Canadian Novel and shipped him off to London, often at his own expense, only to discover that his hopeful had taken to gin or television writing by the time he got round to him again. But Hale was indefatigable. He didn't know that the British didn't care a damn about Canada. (*A Choice of Enemies* 133)

Unlike the authorial framing of André Bennett in *The Acrobats* or Noah Adler in *Son of a Smaller Hero*, the voice of the implied author, the moral conscience of Richler, appears in *A Choice of Enemies* to synchronize itself with the inner thoughts of the central character Norman Price. Price's consciousness, while marred by amnesia, is still provided with conceptual clarity and social insights that are more sophisticated than those of André or Noah. The insights into the complexity of evil and the difficulty of discerning the enemy render the polarization of Norman's moral and political world problematic. Norman has been imprudent in too eagerly helping Ernst, but he has not been thoughtless, and he recognizes how his own idealism has provoked his misjudgements:

If there was a time to man the barricades, Norman thought, then there is also a time to weed one's private garden. The currency of revolution is invalid as long as both tyrannies bank big bombs. Each age creates its own idiom. . . . The enemy was no longer the boor in power on the right or the bore out of power on the left. All alliances had been discredited. The enemy was the hit-and-run driver of both sides. The enemy, no longer clear, could still be recognised. (*A Choice of Enemies* 215)

To sum up, then, these consistent murderous narrative patterns underwrite Richler's first three novels. Richler's *The Acrobats* murders the artist figure of André, and identifies the failed artist with the burned *fallas*, satirical effigies of the accumulated past, ritual victims that must be purged in order to make space for the future. These figurative *fallas*, or textual effigies, receive further development in the next two novels: *Son of A Smaller Hero* murders the father and frees the son to travel to Europe; and *A Choice of Enemies* sacrifices the figures of naïve political tolerance and communism respectively embodied by Nicky Singleton and Norman Price. These various murders of naive and ideologically constricted male selves enable the invention of Richler's great picaresque "pusherke," Duddy Kravitz. Duddy's figurative "fire" is challenged by the hapless teacher, John MacPherson, who will become the lampooned *falla*. While the earlier novels usually conclude with the destruction of the figurative *fallas*, Richler places the confrontation between the protagonist and the sacrificial victim in the opening section of the novel:

'Kravitz! Put out that cigarette immediately.'

'My father is aware that I smoke, Sir.'

'Then he's not fit to bring up a boy.'

'He's my father, Sir.' (*Duddy* 9)

The opening of *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* exquisitely turns the metonymic marker of the sacrificial fire, Duddy's transgressive "cigarette," which doubles as the fire of the absent but idealized Name of the Father, into a contest between teacher and pupil that will target MacPherson as the scapegoat of Duddy's devastating use of social ridicule. It is symbolically ironic if darkly fitting, then, that Duddy's compliant extinguishing of the lit cigarette is followed by a chilly snowball that catches MacPherson squarely in the back of his neck. As Duddy adds, "Nobody gets away with insulting my old man" (10). After dealing in an "icily" scorching fashion with one major public *falla* figure—MacPherson—in the first part of the novel, Richler's *Duddy Kravitz* arguably moves to a new narrative schema, scripting a complex picaresque narrative, that, in the words of Warren Tallman, is a breakthrough for Richler, an awakening from what he calls "a

sleep, a dream, a nightmare: but not the reality” (249) of the previous three novels. Richler, Tallman suggests, has finally arrived as a major talent in the creation of an intriguing picaresque hero who is stamped with an exuberant urban style that transcends the agonism of predators and victims, as Duddy dances between both roles, the tricked and the trickster, the attacked and the attacker. Finally, Duddy is the picaresque adventurer freed from paternal or cultural control:

. . . Duddy, who has ceased to care for appearances, sees people for what they are, himself included. And what he sees, he accepts—himself included. In an acquisitive world he is exuberantly acquisitive. When he is tricked, he weeps. When threatened, he becomes dangerous. When attacked, he bites back. When befriended, he is generous. When hard-pressed he becomes frantic. When denied, he is filled with wrath. From the weave of this erratic shuttling, a self struggles into presence, a naïve yet shrewd latter-day Huck Finn, floating on a battered money raft down a sleazy neon river through a drift of lives, wanting to light out for somewhere, wanting somewhere to light out for. (Tallman 251)

In *A Rhetoric of Motives*, Kenneth Burke writes that the narrative representation of murder or suicide partakes in a desire for general transformation, not simply destruction: to kill an opponent or the self in the form of a literary “effigy” (5) is “analyzable as a desire to transform the principle which that person represents” (13). Killing, as Burke dialectically adumbrates, also involves the key elements of “identification” and “division” (22). Richler identifies with figures of resistance and rebellion, and he begins by purging the narrative space of weak characters and scripting the endings of emasculated male figures. The killing of these weak figures, these satirical effigies, *las fallas*, is then dramatically followed by the invention of a new kind of hero, who turns the tables on his punitive teachers at Fletcher’s Field High School by figuring them as living versions of the *Fallas* highlighted in *The Acrobats*. The scapegoating of the weak male figure is narrativized through Duddy’s calculated defeat of the idealistic and condescending John MacPherson. This Anglo-Scots representative of institutional control is undermined and finally broken by Duddy’s defiance, a resistance issued in defense of Kravitz’s father’s name and Jewish identity. The hapless male victims in Richler’s first three novels prefigure MacPherson, whose defeat marks an important early stage in the development of Richler’s icon of misrule, Duddy Kravitz.

NOTES

- 1 At both the level of allegorical narrative, and as a publishing phenomenon, *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* represents Richler's inaugural institutional placement within the field of Canadian literature alongside the emerging 1960s Canadian canon, as identified in Warren Tallman's important essay, "Wolf in the Snow," in which Tallman included Richler along with Sinclair Ross, Hugh MacLennan, W.O. Mitchell, and Ernest Buckler in his 1960 survey. I would contend here that *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* represents Richler's own claim to a "plot" within the institutional landscape of Canadian literature.
- 2 Richler knew the writings and literary reputation of F.R. Scott, and, according to Charles Foran's *Mordecai: The Life & Times*, was a friend of John Sutherland's who hosted parties that were "attended by the likes of the elderly Stephen Leacock and the lawyer-poet F.R. Scott" (106). Richler's respect for Scott's opinion is clearly expressed in a 1953 letter, reproduced in Foran's biography, in which Richler solicits William Weintraub's help in asking Scott to read an early version of *The Acrobats*. Richler hopes that Scott, after reading *The Acrobats*, will be able to provide him with a letter of recommendation for a "fellowship application" (Foran 170).
- 3 The obvious parallels between Wolf Adler and Richler's father, reflected in their shared passive victimhood and peculiar journal habits, are clearly outlined in Richler's autobiographical essay, "My Father's Life," collected in *Home Sweet Home*.

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Room # 26: *Caesura largo*

Porchside, spare parts, a peeled orange
then desiccation.
roses for eyes, windsor knots and always goodbye
the I-apparition or supplication
small objects
move the day forward
fraught
embroidered slippers and forget-me-nots
longing at the tip of the road
breaking out of sight

swallows on grim walls
august grief and what you might not do
between supper and the ritual of tea

Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Saviour

Richler's Picaro Messiahs¹

Following his death, the work of Mordecai Richler can be treated as a complete, unified project and approached in new ways. A far-reaching backward gaze can now highlight Richler's Jewishness and place him in the long line of writers who drew their inspiration from religion. It is my conviction that the intellectual structure underlying what I consider to be Richler's two most accomplished novels—*St. Urbain's Horseman* (1971) and *Solomon Gursky Was Here* (1989)—is an ironic rendition of the messianic myth, itself a persistent motif in Jewish writing worldwide.

Mordecai Richler came from a family with a deeply ingrained religious sensibility. His maternal grandfather, Rabbi Yudel Rosenberg, originally from the Polish *shtetl* of Skaryszew, was known as “der Polisher rebbe” throughout Montreal, while his grandfather on the other side, Shmarya Richler, was exceedingly pious and knowledgeable about the Torah (Kramer 12-14). However, it may not be immediately apparent to a reader of Richler's work that the writer inherited a reverence for the tradition. On the contrary, traditional Judaism and its institutions were among the many things he was infamous for criticizing both in his fiction and his journalism. Furthermore, his personal life seemed to confirm this attitude. As a teenager, Richler wilfully rejected even the most rudimentary religious customs, such as observing the Sabbath. The writer would often connect his apostasy with his bitter disappointment in his ultra-orthodox grandfather, Shmarya, whom young Mordecai quickly came to see as a fraud (Posner 7, 16). Moreover, the writer married outside his faith twice and raised his children in an atmosphere that was virtually free of religious persuasion (“I'm okay, you're okay; no hangups, but no magic, either;

too bad,” Richler, *Broadsides* 13). The most ironic story of his estrangement from his native religion is perhaps the event that he relates, clearly ashamed, in his part-memoir, part-reportage, *This Year in Jerusalem* (1994). Having praised the Jewish cuisine to an American friend in Paris, Richler suggested that they visit a kosher restaurant. Finding the place empty, the two read a note on the door informing them that the restaurant was closed on account of Yom Kippur:

A sign in the window, which I took to be a personal rebuke—surely set in place by my paternal grandfather’s ghost, a *dybbuk* in quest of winter quarters—expressed the wish that all of the restaurant’s clientele would be written down for a good year in the Book of Life: *L’shana tova tikatevu*. (Richler, *This Year* 74)

The situation is doubly ironic, because *Yom Kippur* (The Day of Atonement) is perhaps the most important day in the Jewish calendar, a day on which many Jews attend the synagogue; also, the holiday entails a twenty-four-hour fast (Kameraz-Kos 47-53). Scouting for clues referring to Richler’s relationship with his troublesome past, one ought not to miss the grandpaternal *dybbuk*’s “personal rebuke”: a light-hearted joke with a sour, shadowy core.

I do not intend to suggest that Richler was, contrary to appearances, a religious man. Nevertheless—although one will find a number of glib, long-winded rabbis in his fiction—traditional Judaism, represented by the generation of his grandfathers, is frequently absolved of the all-embracing scorn that Richler could so easily muster. For instance, his breakthrough 1959 novel, *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, features two mirroring episodes concerning this generation: Bernie Cohen’s *bar mitzvah* ceremony and the surveying of the land by the Kravitz family. In both, the *Zeyda* (Yiddish for grandfather) is seriously disappointed with the behavior of his sons and grandsons, and exits the scene in gloom, possibly even tears, to wait it out in the car. The eldest Cohen does so because he insists that the new synagogue looks like a church and the entire *bar mitzvah* celebration in its new guise, complete with the film recording arranged by Duddy, feels alien to him. The eldest Kravitz, in turn, protests because he has just received information about the questionable ways in which Duddy acquired his land. Richler’s sense of farce is conspicuously absent from these fragments. They present not melodramatic, exaggerated exits, but rather quiet resolutions not to participate, which manage to evoke genuine sadness—a rare occurrence in Richler’s fiction.

In his unorthodox memoir, *Mordecai & Me: An Appreciation of a Kind*, Joel Yanofsky describes Richler as an “ambivalent Jew” (138) and suggests

that what the writer inherited from the Jewish tradition was a certain sternness and an inclination to moral outrage: “Richler may have turned his back on religion, but he was still the grandson of a rabbi, after all. If he was no longer orthodox in observance, he remained orthodox in temperament” (156). His long-time friend, the director Ted Kotcheff, stated that Richler was endowed with “an almost rabbinical sense of behaviour, of morality in the sense of commitments” (Posner 181). It is not a coincidence that in Richler’s sophomore novel, *Son of a Smaller Hero*, an angry relative tells the young, rebellious Noah Adler that he resembles the patriarch of the family, the stern, uncompromising *Zeyda* Melech, the very person against whose authority Noah imagines himself rebelling (84, 186).

Richler tirelessly described himself as an “unfrocked priest,” claiming that writing was a “moral office,” and insisting on the ethical ramifications of serious literature. “I write out of a kind of disgust with things as they are,” he maintained (Richler with Gibson 298). Various appellations that the writer acquired over the years speak for themselves: Donald Cameron suggested in the title of his interview that he was conversing with a “Reticent Moralizer” (Richler with Cameron 114), Margaret Atwood eulogized the writer as “the Diogenes of Montréal” (192), while Michael Posner titled his oral biography of Richler *The Last Honest Man*.

However, this deeply rooted sense of morality only accounts for one part of Richler the writer; the other—if we insist on a dichotomy—would be constituted by what Kerry McSweeney calls the “deconstructive energy” or “the dark, negating energy of Richler’s imagination” (12, 39), a fascination with mischief and disorder. His interest in the marginal and, to use Linda Hutcheon’s famous formulation, the “ex-centric” (3) manifested itself through a Bellovian relish in characters who were disruptive in one way or another (Blacher Cohen 21-24). Richler repeatedly admitted that his fancy was captivated by con men, people with huge appetites for life, who used their wits, often with a disregard for the law, to survive and prosper: the “inspired ruffians” (Richler, *Broadsides* 180; *Belling* 21) and the “hooligans of great appetite” (Richler with Bigsby 130). “Possibly” he once stated, “I celebrate certain aspects of human behaviour that other people would prefer not to know about” (Richler with Daniel Richler 19).

The literary term that captures the essence of these clever, unruly figures—best exemplified by Duddy Kravitz (Greenstein 146), Atuk, or Ephraim Gursky—is the picaro. The picaro, as defined by Ulrich Wicks, is a “protean figure” invested with “inconstancy—of life roles, of self-identity,” which

often implies an absence of ethical principles, or essential personality traits (“Nature of Picaresque” 243-47).² However, with the exception of the cartoonish, incurably self-centered Atuk, Richler’s picaresque figures seem, despite their somewhat villainous natures, to be concerned about others. Beginning with Duddy, who is driven by a combination of money-lust and a desire to vindicate the pride of his family, and whose concern for his blood relations is a redeeming quality to be reckoned with (cf. Wainwright), and finishing with Solomon Gursky, the arch-manipulator, “buying kikes,” i.e. bribing the deputy minister for immigration to allow European Jews into Canada, Richler’s picaros repeatedly demonstrate that more than their personal survival and victory is at stake (Richler, *Gursky* 343).

Perhaps it is the convergence of these two streams of Richler’s writing that accounts for the brilliance of novels such as *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, where the author’s own enthrallment with and repulsion from the protagonist are mirrored in the readers’ responses. The same mixture is responsible for what some critics and readers perceive as a disturbingly (or else refreshingly) double vision, the all-embracing Richlerian “ambivalence” (Ramraj 1). I would argue, however, that Richler was at his best when he attempted the seemingly impossible, namely a fusing of a sense of moral outrage and the picaro qualities within one and the same character (in contrast to *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, where the moral emphasis is placed outside the protagonist). He attempted this fusion twice, in a pair of long, ambitious novels with large casts and complex plots, separated by a span of almost twenty years: *St. Urbain’s Horseman* and *Solomon Gursky Was Here*. Both novels are, among other things, chronicles of one man’s obsession with another. In this sense, they may be said to belong to the genre of the elegiac romance, as defined by Kenneth Bruffee in a book of the same title (50-51). The obsession in question is already evident in the titles: rather than concentrate on the character who is the central consciousness of the given novel (Jake Hersh and Moses Berger, respectively) the titles focus on the object of the fixation, the haunting presence, i.e. Cousin Joey (the eponymous Horseman) and Solomon Gursky.

Jake Hersh, the protagonist of *St. Urbain’s Horseman*, is a middle-aged expatriate Canadian living in London with his non-Jewish wife and several children. He is a moderately successful film director who begins to sense that whatever praise he has won—sparse as it has been—was undeserved, and, as the years go by, he is less and less likely to create the masterpiece of which he has always believed himself capable. Furthermore, he is bursting with a

sense of injustice and anger, instilled in him by the excruciating history of his people. His *idée fixe*, which amalgamates these violent emotions, is his Cousin Joey, whom Jake believes to be a Nazi hunter, but whom the rest of the family considers a fraud and a bandit. As per Bruffee's definition of the elegiac romance (50), the work is contrapuntal: while the novel's past largely concerns Cousin Joey, its present involves a trial that Jake faces as a result of his alliance with the highly unpleasant, misanthropic Harry Stein. The trial has Kafkaesque reverberations and becomes the metaphor of the moral accounting which Jake has long awaited and feared (cf. Pollock).

Moses Berger, the protagonist of *Solomon Gursky Was Here*, is also middle-aged, a failed scholar and an alcoholic, living alone in the Eastern Townships. His life's work and mania is the unfinished—perhaps utterly impossible—biography of Solomon Gursky, the foremost member of a family who made their fortune in the liquor trade during Prohibition. Like Jake, Moses is filled with outrage at the fate of the Jews, and his temporary solution is also similar. Obsessed with Solomon Gursky, he intends to salvage his hero's name from the grime which has attached itself to the family's success story.³ Again, a temporal counterpoint is at work: the novel's present, which, as Barbara Korte notices, lasts a mere few hours (503), concentrates on Moses's search for a salmon fly; this second quest of the avid Gurskyologist-cum-angler appears to be a diminutive, parodic version of the larger one, especially given the phonetic association between the words salmon and Solomon.

The Horseman and Solomon Gursky are both missing and presumed dead during the narrative present. The reader's task—to accumulate the scattered shards of information about Joey and Solomon, and construct some semblance of a whole—runs parallel to the protagonists' respective quests. Indeed, Jake and Moses are inveterate questers, who have dedicated a considerable part of their lives to reconstructing the image of the elusive figure; while Jake's life, both public and private, is seriously hindered by his obsession, Moses's existence is practically paralyzed by his. In their quests, they follow a conspicuous agenda, searching for proof that, various malevolent rumors notwithstanding, Cousin Joey and Solomon Gursky were or are people of high moral standing and, indeed, establishing that they should be seen as beacons to others, the Jews in particular, rather than mere frauds, criminals, and parasites.

In both cases, this proves a difficult task. Faced with mounting evidence to the contrary, but reluctant to surrender their fantasies, Jake and Moses elevate the objects of their fascination to mythic status. While *Solomon Gursky*

Was Here, partly set in the Northwest Territories, also resonates with Inuit trickster tales, the central myths to which the protagonists refer are Jewish. Some are evoked explicitly, such as the Golem and the *Lamed vovniks* (the Thirty-Six Hidden Just Men) in *St. Urbain's Horseman* (cf. Cude). However, I am convinced that the central myth informing both novels, never actually verbalized in the context of the eponymous characters and rarely employed as a critical focal lens (excepting G. David Sheps' insightful study of *St. Urbain's Horseman*), is the myth of the Jewish Messiah.

It is almost a commonplace that the dissimilar perception of the Messiah constitutes the fundamental difference and matter of contention between Judaism and Christianity (Scholem 1). Julius Greenstone sees the messianic idea as "characteristically Jewish," perceiving the distinctive feature of the Jewish outlook in an orientation towards the future, "the end of days," rather than towards a mythical golden age situated in the past (21-23). The Hebrew word *moschiah* means "the anointed (one)": in its broadest sense, the term was originally applied to kings, patriarchs, prophets, and priests, i.e. those anointed with olive oil while assuming their duties, to mark the special favour bestowed on them by God (Dupkala 12; Lenowitz 9-14). David Berger provides the following pithy description of the messianic idea: "a king will arise from the line of the biblical David who will preside over a peaceful, prosperous, monotheistic world, with the Temple in Jerusalem rebuilt and the Jewish people—including at some point its resurrected dead—returned to its land" (23). However, as Norman Cohn observes, the concept underwent huge transformations: whereas the earliest versions of the notion foresaw a powerful king who was uncommonly judicious and fair, as the situation worsened, the Messiah assumed increasingly prodigious qualities (22). While Christians see the fulfilment of Biblical prophecies (e.g. Genesis and Isaiah) in Jesus, Jews are still waiting for their Messiah. Naturally, this expectation of final justice, of the ultimate defeat of the enemies of Israel, continues to inform Jewish writing.

I can think of no better literary example to illustrate the importance of the concept than a scene from Isaac Bashevis Singer's early novel *Satan in Goray* (published in Yiddish in instalments in the early thirties). The action takes place in seventeenth-century Poland and focuses on the cult surrounding a messianic pretender, Shabtai Zvi, one of many so-called false messiahs (cf. Lenowitz 149-65). In Singer's novel, the Jews of Goray, a Polish *shtetl*, are so certain that the long-awaited "end of days" is approaching that they stop attending to everyday chores:

Shopkeepers no longer kept shop, artisans suspended their labors. It seemed useless to complete anything. Now the people ate only food that did not need preparation and was easy to obtain. Since they were too slothful to gather firewood in the forest, they acquired the habit of heating their ovens with the lumber they had available. By winter they would be settled in Jerusalem. And so they tore down fences and outhouses for kindling. Some even ripped the shingles from their roofs. (*Satan in Goray* 120)

The messianic future, it seems, has finally blended with the present and it will no longer be necessary to say “next year in Jerusalem” during the Passover *seder*.⁴ The coming of the Messiah equals an end to injustice, an end to persecution and pogroms, an end to the Jewish plight, all of which lie at the heart of Jake Hersh’s and Moses Berger’s anger.

As already stated, in the novels under scrutiny the messianic myth constitutes a thematic undercurrent which rarely, if at all, surfaces on the level of actual narrative. Characteristically, when Richler invokes the myth explicitly, it is done for the purposes of comic effect. In *St. Urbain’s Horseman*, Cousin Joey’s father Baruch ridicules the entire Hersh family by saying that “they’ll bury themselves with twigs . . . so that when the Messiah comes they can dig their way to him” (170, 397).⁵ In *Solomon Gursky Was Here*, Ephraim, the founder of the Gursky dynasty and con man extraordinaire, prophesizes “the Second Coming of Christ in the Eastern Townships about the year 1851” in his spiel advertising the spurious Church of the Millenarians, with a view to seizing the gold-filled land from the naïve populace (162). Converting the Inuit to a bogus version of Judaism, he promises them that a Messiah will be born as his issue: “The Messiah, a descendant of Ephraim’s, would return their ancestors to them and make the seal and caribou so plentiful that nobody would starve again” (403). Eager expectation of the Messiah is also ridiculed in the figure of Henry Gursky, the wise fool who is building the second Ark and who regularly buys *The Moshiach Times* for his son, Isaac, but who is ultimately devoured by him. These scattered references can be read as distractions which, in their playfulness, divert the reader from the underlying theme by parodying it. Analyzed closely, they reveal tantalizing ironies: the name of the Horseman’s father, Baruch, means “blessed” in Hebrew; Solomon is “a descendant of Ephraim’s”; so is Henry, who saves the Inuit from death by starvation, thus fulfilling his grandfather’s fraudulent prophecy almost verbatim.⁶

If the two protagonists, Jake Hersh and Moses Berger, appear to be self-pitying rather than tragic figures, they possess something akin to the tragic flaw: namely, even after the disappointments of their idealistic youth, they

still “expect justice to be done” (Richler, *Gursky* 149). The passive voice—“to be done”—is crucial. Sheps observes that Jake Hersh’s defining quality is the “vicariousness” of his existence (83); in many respects, Moses Berger inherits this trait. In both cases, the protagonist’s inability to act is counterbalanced by fantasizing about someone who undertakes heroic deeds, challenging the stereotype of Jewish passivity. Cousin Joey and Solomon Gursky can both be described as “defiantly Jewish,” their “hackles raised” constantly (Richler, *Gursky* 373, 363). In both cases, their actions and attitudes become an “exacting standard” that the protagonists apply to their own lives, which they constantly find wanting (Richler, *Horseman* 311).

With his recurrent, accusatory question “What are you going to do about it?” (Richler, *Horseman* 136, 257, 261, 464) the Cousin Joey whom Jake retrospectively imagines is not “the type to let sleeping dogs lie” (266). In his Montreal days, during a surge of anti-Semitic sentiments, he frightens a gang of French Canadians away from Fletcher’s Field, ensuring that Jewish boys can once again play there in safety. He also forms a posse that takes violent revenge for an assault on a Jewish boy at the Palais d’Or. As Yosef ben Baruch, he takes active part in the Israeli War of Independence, siding with the most extreme factions. He collects photographs of prominent Nazis, and may be seeking Josef Mengele in Paraguay. Jake’s recurrent dream in which Cousin Joey extracts gold fillings from Mengele’s teeth can be viewed as a symbolic reversal of violence and an image of messianic justice, especially since Jake’s waking words are “He’s come” (Richler, *Horseman* 3).

Jake’s partly involuntary quest—visibly modeled on A. M. Klein’s novel *The Second Scroll* (Kramer 227-228)—is decisive in constructing his awareness of recent Jewish history: in its course, the protagonist encounters a paranoid survivor of the camps, investigates the “restored Jewish pride” in Eretz Yisroel (Richler, *Horseman* 252), visits the Munich Bürgerbräukeller (the cradle of the Nazi movement) and attends the Frankfurt trials.

Solomon Gursky, as perceived by Moses Berger, is similarly characterized by bold gestures that can be interpreted in terms of messianic promise. After his 1933 stay in Germany, instead of attending to the burgeoning business, Solomon follows the disquieting news from Europe and deals with “unsavory, shifty-eyed little strangers, wearing funny European-style suits” (Richler, *Gursky* 343), clearly arranging illegal transfers of Jews from the Old World to the New. He pays numerous visits to the deputy minister of immigration in Ottawa, Horace MacIntyre, attempting to convince the latter to allow the “nonpreferred immigrants” into Canada (344; cf. Abella and

Troper). Gursky also indulges in a Zionist fantasy on Canadian ground, an echo of Duddy Kravitz's dream. Namely, he purchases two thousand acres of farmland in the Laurentians, together with herds of cattle. In addition, he assembles a list of Jews who have declared their readiness to settle in that area (Richler, *Gursky* 348-349). After his feigned death and, in the postwar period, under the name Hyman Kaplansky, Gursky focuses his efforts on the Holy Land, which has once again become the hub of Jewish history. In 1946, Kaplansky's freighters are "caught trying to run the Palestine blockade," and two years later the dismantling of his small air force, ostensibly assembled for the purposes of a film, oddly coincides with Ben-Gurion's proclamation of the Jewish state. It is also suggested that, as Mr. Cuervo (one of Gursky's numerous raven-inspired pseudonyms), he influences the outcome of the 1976 raid on Entebbe.

Nevertheless, to overplay the heroic aspect of these characters and neglect their picaresque qualities would lead to a reduction of the novel's complexity. Describing the choice of the raven as Solomon Gursky's emblem, Richler emphasized that the character is "both the creator and the destroyer" (Richler with Bigsby 131), a clear instance of the "ambivalence" identified by Ramraj. Neither of the two messianic figures ever sheds the cloak of ambiguity that shrouds him. The narration of their exploits is necessarily fragmented and episodic. Like Uncle Melech in *The Second Scroll*, they are invariably portrayed as protean, assuming new names and identities with perplexing ease. Moreover, both have considerable acting skills, which are undoubtedly convenient for such reinventions. Their picaresque nature is further reinforced by their obvious intelligence and their frequent conflicts with the law. Their numerous similarities, however, ought not perhaps to obscure certain significant differences: in contrast to the surly, violent Cousin Joey, Solomon is a charming and likeable trickster, possessed of an "unquenchable itch to meddle and provoke things" (Richler, *Gursky* 507), not least the wild goose chase on which he sends Moses Berger.

The Richlerian ambiguity, clearly anchored in the picaresque element of both novels and emanating from it, appears to infect the copious religious allusions. Thus, the reader may be led to believe that Jake and Moses are to be seen as latter-day prophets or apostles, playing Rabbi Akiba or Nathan of Gaza to their respective Simon bar Kochba or Shabtai Zvi, even as the novel's contrary pull appears to present them as sadly deluded and alienated from life's actual sources. Jesse Hope, one of Cousin Joey's pseudonyms, may be read as alluding to the messianic prophecy concerning the "rod

out of the stem of Jesse”;⁷ however, it might simply be what it purports to be, a stylish name adopted for Joey’s persona as a country singer. When Moses is invited to an audience with Solomon (appearing at that moment as Hyman Kaplansky), the invitation is described as “the summons from Sinai” (Richler, *Gursky* 172) and the meeting culminates in an agreement that binds the two men, grandly suggesting a parallel with the covenant between God and the Biblical Moses;⁸ yet it is just as easy to read in the formulation the customary Richlerian ridicule aimed at illusions of grandeur.

However, in *St. Urbain’s Horseman*, Richler provides the reader with a clue that may lead the reader out of this maze of religious or pseudo-religious signification. In the novel’s finale he has Jake Hersh, who is contemplating his obsession with Cousin Joey, ask himself: “Who am I? . . . I’m Aaron maybe” (Richler, *Horseman* 465). The Biblical Aaron is Moses’s brother who, pressed hard by the Israelites during the prophet’s lengthy sojourn on Mount Sinai, agrees to the creation of the Golden Calf, thus incurring God’s wrath (Exodus 32).⁹ In an interview with John Metcalf, Richler himself suggested that the *Horseman* could be seen as a Golden Calf created out of despair (Richler with Metcalf 76), while one waits for the silent God to fulfill His side of the covenant.

If we extend this reasoning to *Solomon Gursky*—which seems legitimate given the many similarities between the two works—then we are able to read both texts as variations on a story of a would-be Moses who finally discovers his true identity as Aaron, a would-be prophet who fashions a Golden Calf. To that infamous idol, as the Book of Exodus informs us, the Israelites contributed their valuables—trinkets and jewelry.¹⁰ Likewise, Jake and Moses construct their image of the Messiah out of qualities which they respect (honour, dignity, courage) and perhaps some which they, like Richler himself, cannot help but admire (insolence and appetite). Wilfred Cude reminds us that Aaron, although chastised for the incident, was forgiven and went on to initiate the line of Jewish high priests (194-95). Similarly, Jake Hersh and Moses Berger can be pardoned for worshipping their own picaro messiahs, because ultimately what engenders these creations is a noble, moral impulse: a quixotic desire for justice and goodness.

NOTES

- 1 This article is a considerably altered and extended version of a paper entitled “We Want *Moschiah* Now’: A Religious Perspective on Two Novels by Mordecai Richler,” published in *Canadian Ghosts, Hopes and Values. Rémanences, espérances et valeurs canadiennes*,

- ed. Maciej Abramowicz and Joanna Durczak, Lublin: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, 2008.
- 2 According to the findings mentioned by Américo Castro in his book *Hacia Cervantes* (1960), the picaresque novel may have first arisen as an emanation of the Jewish convert's hatred of the society that refused to accept him despite the sacrifice of his faith. Castro quotes convincing evidence to the effect that both the anonymous author of *Lazarillo de Tormes* (1554) and Mateo Alemán, the author of *The Rogue, or the Life of Guzmán de Alfarache* (1599)—two early instances of *la novella picaresca*—were *conversos*, i.e. Jews who were pressured by the Spanish Inquisition to publicly renounce their faith and adopt Christianity. This would suggest that the prototypical picaro was Jewish, a suggestion that Richler would have relished (Wicks, "Picaresque" 977).
 - 3 Although Richler claimed that he had "made the Gurskys up out of [his] own head" (*Broadsides* 508), many readers saw the saga as a direct borrowing from the story of the Bronfman family. Asked directly during a question and answer period if the novel was about the Bronfmans, Richler replied indignantly: "I will not have seven years of my work reduced to gossip. Next question" (Yanofsky 218).
 - 4 The formula, *Bashana Habaa b'Yerushalaim*, uttered as the participants drink the fourth cup of wine, expresses the hope that they will all meet in Jerusalem during next year's Passover because the Messiah will have arrived in the meantime (Kameraz-Kos 55-63).
 - 5 Though mockingly, Baruch is alluding to an actual custom among *shtetl* Jews. I.B. Singer mentions the same detail in his stories, e.g. "The Destruction of Kreshev" and "Taibele and Her Demon" (Singer, *Collected Stories* 127, 139).
 - 6 The starvation motif in this case is Richler's jab at the celebrated quality of the Jewish *mitzvoth* ("commandments"), which, as a product of a diasporic people, are reputed to cover every contingency. The butt of Richler's joke here is precisely the custom that he himself forgot while in Paris: the Yom Kippur fast, which is supposed to be kept for a full twenty-four hours, from one sunset until the next (Kameraz-Kos 51). Obviously, come October and permanent night, followed after many months by constant daylight, the converted Inuit in *Solomon Gursky Was Here* find themselves facing a terrible dilemma.
 - 7 "And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots" (Isaiah 11:1, King James Version). Jesse is the father of King David, descended from Adam, and thus the stem of Jesse symbolizes royal ancestry (Ross).
 - 8 Interestingly, the same Biblical phrase is used to describe an earlier Gursky-Berger agreement, i.e. the indenture of L.B. Berger, Moses's obsequious father, as speechwriter to Bernard Gursky, the treacherous brother to Solomon (Richler, *Gursky* 18).
 - 9 Incidentally, the occasion of God's forgiving the Israelites for their impatience and presumptuousness is celebrated as Yom Kippur (Kameraz-Kos 47).
 - 10 "And Aaron said unto them, Break off the golden earrings, which are in the ears of your wives, of your sons, and of your daughters, and bring them unto me. And all the people brake off the golden earrings which were in their ears, and brought them unto Aaron" (Exodus 32:2-3).

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Galanterie

Les coulis du jour—
vertèbres des rêves
et rhododendrons qui tuent.

Voilà comment s'achève cette architecture onctueuse,
cette voûte de paroles dont les noyaux du sens
se répandent en arcs et ogives, en essaim d'abeilles dans des mots ébouriffés
par la pluie

et par leur mielleux et caressant contenu.

Le bocal d'or dans lequel je trouve des anciens amours épanouis
sous la lumière douce d'un daguerréotype
et l'éclosion des lettres soudaines
ainsi que des farouches adieux.

Adieux mon sire,
mon chasseur d'empires,
dont la lune guette les bornes infinies du désir
et des voyelles,

où toute expansion frôle le journal fou
des confessions un peu salaces et la pudeur de l'intervalle
qui nous sépare.

Consonnes, rimes, double entendre.

À tout grand conquérant qui règne infâme
dans la souffrance des rebelles paysages
on doit
la révérence sublime balancée dans le vide par des gestes des mimes frêles,
et la galanterie d'une strophe
qui se doit finale.

Marécages à Bruges

Le jour.

Une paroi de fer, sur laquelle jaillissent des traces des rivières
à peine abouties dans les sentiers de l'aube.

L'aube n'est que le revers d'un talant,
une petite monnaie orientale perforée d'un trou octogonal,
une monnaie mystérieuse, parfumée,
traversée par la lumière chétive d'une nouvelle jouissance des fontaines.

Ou de la pluie.

Qui s'en souvient d'une journée maussade, rouillée,
sous l'assaut sans trêve des grises et incessantes louanges des eaux à Bruges ?

Qui s'en souvient des balades sans aucun but suprême,
sauf que celui de naviguer des sournois canaux à travers l'éclat d'un ciel
orageux ?

Ce besoin de définir Bruges, tout en me définissant moi-même
—est-il la preuve d'une malsaine sincérité poétique ?

Je veux par contre rester en ombre,
bien cachée par mes émotions, par le miroir imparfait d'une lumière humide
qui s'efface

sans même un dernier regard vers les ponts de Bruges

où je m'amarre.

Writing the Triple Whammy

Canadian-Jewish-Québécois Identity, the Comedy of Self-Deprecation, and the Triumph of Duddy Kravitz

It is a truth universally acknowledged that a Jewish novelist must have a nice line in self-irony.¹ In *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*, Sigmund Freud defined “tendentious jokes” as those that frequently involve “rebellious criticism . . . directed against the subject himself, or . . . against someone in whom the subject has a share . . . (the subject’s own nation, for instance)” and went on to speculate that this “occurrence of self-criticism . . . may explain how it is that a number of the most apt jokes . . . have grown up on the soil of Jewish popular life,” finally expressing doubt over “whether there are many other instances of a people making fun to such a degree of its own character” (156-57). Had he spent any time in Canada, however, Freud would soon have become familiar with self-deprecating jokes that make Canada and Canadians the butt of their humour. Likewise, you don’t have to read too far into the history of Quebec before you become aware of what Callaghan in *Solomon Gursky Was Here* (1989) provocatively describes as the propensity of French Canadians to be “consumed by self-pity” (298), a manifestation of the inferiority complex, or “cultural cringe”²—often masquerading as fierce nationalist pride, as inferiority complexes are wont to do among disenfranchised minority cultures—that arguably lies at the heart of Quebec’s view of itself. Mordecai Richler, the person, then, was thrice cursed: he was a member of a despised minority, living in a province alienated from and marginalized by dominant national culture, in a country forever looking enviously, anxiously over its shoulder at its more illustrious, more powerful neighbour. For Mordecai

Richler, the writer and satirist, however, this triple whammy was not a curse but rather a blessing. This article will explore some of the ways in which Richler's status as a member of three different stigmatized groups provided material for the self-deprecating humour that characterizes his work. Whereas Michael Greenstein has argued that in Richler's work "the doubly displaced Jewish Canadian" hero "uses humour to challenge the authority" of the cultural centres of New York and London, "aveng[ing] [himself] on other interlopers through a series of practical jokes" (197, 198), I will argue that Richler's trebly-displaced protagonists, exemplified by Jake Hersh, tend to turn their comedy inward, punishing themselves for their perceived inferiority both to "other interlopers" and to the (non-Canadian) arbiters of culture. In contrast, I will suggest that Duddy Kravitz is Richler's greatest creation because he both embodies and transcends the comic stereotype of the Jew on the make, exploiting but finally rejecting the masochism and internalized anti-Semitism of his relatives and his peers.

In *Home Sweet Home: My Canadian Album* (1984), Richler describes Montreal as "a sequence of ghettos" (37), a divided city in which there was much mutual distrust and suspicion between the Quebecers and the Jews, reinforced by segregated education:

Under the confessional system, we went to one set of schools and the French Canadians to another. I'm sure many of them believed that there was such an order as the Elders of Zion and that the St Urbain Street Jews were secretly rich. On my side, I was convinced all French Canadians were abysmally stupid. (38)

Richler's candid, self-satirical confession of his own ignorant prejudice here balances his indictment of the superstitious anti-Semitism of the French Canadian "other" and hints at a certain synchronicity underlying the uneasy relations between the two groups. Indeed, although Richler remained throughout his life a fierce critic of the French separatist movement in Quebec, in particular what he saw as the absurd excesses of the *Parti Québécois* (PQ), he also recognized, and even identified with, many of the grievances of francophone Quebecers. Richler's greatest bugbear in his later work was the PQ's language legislation, Bill 101, which, among other things, called for the "francization" of all businesses, yet he acknowledged that its advent was the product of "the infuriating refusal of so many in high and influential places to learn French" and of the complacent, institutionalized racism of the WASP establishment that such monolingualism symbolized:

Through all the years of my boyhood here, hardly a French Canadian (or a Jew, for that matter) could be seen in the exclusive WASP dining and country clubs.

McGill University, an anglophone citadel, was insultingly indifferent to the French Canadian society that surrounded it, and maintained a quota on Jewish students. (Richler, *Sweet Home* 208)

This passage clearly implies that Jews and French Canadians had a common cause: Richler conflates the cultural exclusion of the two groups through the parenthesis in the first sentence, and the discrimination they suffered with the conjunction “and” in the second. Even at his most polemical, in *Oh Canada! Oh Quebec!: Requiem for a Divided Country* (1992), Richler’s self-identification as a Quebecer is unequivocal, as evidenced by his use of the first-person plural as follows: “The truth is, we have always done things differently in Quebec, our laws seldom being quite what they appear to be” (2).

To judge by two anecdotes from Richler’s work, one of the things that made Richler feel at home in Quebec is its tradition of self-satire, a tradition that unites the Francophone majority and the Anglophone minority in the province. On the dust-jacket of *Oh Canada! Oh Quebec!*, Richler recounts how “a popular French-Canadian singer explained to a TV interviewer, ‘We were raised in French and I want my children to suffer the same fate’” (n.p.). In *Home Sweet Home*, Richler tells the story of how his fellow Quebecer, the film director Ted Kotcheff, “who was driving a Peugeot in those days, was warned, just before he set off to meet a producer in Palm Springs: ‘What! Are you crazy? You can’t pull up in front of the Racquets Club in a little Peugeot. With a Quebec license plate! They’ll think you’re nobody’” (121). Although these are both examples of Québécois self-deprecation, the punchlines of these jokes depend for their impact on the audience’s familiarity with an inferiority complex that is national as well as regional.

Richler’s work is full of one-liners whose *donné* is that Canada is a backwater, characterized above all by caution and conservatism. Recalling his half-hearted adoption of the Bohemian lifestyle as a young man in France, Jake Hersh, the protagonist of *St. Urbain’s Horseman* (1971), anticipates Bill Clinton’s notorious defence of his youthful indulgence in narcotics: “Even in Paris, I remained a Canadian. I puffed hashish, but I didn’t inhale” (19). In *Home Sweet Home*, Richler subverts conventional ideas of teenage ambition, suggesting tongue-in-cheek that “[t]he Canadian kid who wanted to be a prime minister wasn’t thinking big, he was setting a limit to his ambitions rather early” (126) and he plays a variation on this theme in *This Year in Jerusalem* (1994), remarking that “[i]f the pre-World War I American boy, at the age of sixteen, was dreaming of how to conquer and market the rest of the globe, his Canadian equivalent . . . was already seeking

a position with an unrivaled pension scheme” (152). In this latter example, the prematurely middle-aged aspirations of the Canadian adolescent are thrown into relief by the grand scope of his American counterpart’s dreams, and of course it is always by the yardstick of their close neighbours that Canadians find themselves coming up short. Another anecdote of which Richler is very fond (in fact it crops up twice in his work, once in *St. Urbain’s Horseman* and once in *Home Sweet Home*) is that of the New York editor whose “list of twelve books with which to start a new publishing firm that was bound to fail” is headed by “a book titled *Canada, Our Good Neighbor to the North*” (Richler, *St. Urbain* 23; *Sweet Home* 30).

This American disdain for all things Canadian is a leitmotif running through all of Richler’s fiction. For example, the protagonist of *Barney’s Version* (1997), Barney Panofsky, remarks wryly that “Scribner’s had just sent back the first three chapters of my novel-in-progress with a flattering letter and a caveat. Alas, there was negligible interest in matters Canadian. Would you consider resetting your novel in Chicago?”³ (Richler, *Barney’s* 283).

Characteristically, Richler treats the plight of the Canadian author with a nice sense of self-irony, relating with relish the story of the final-year high school respondent to a “Canadian Awareness Survey” who, when asked to name any three Canadian authors, wrote: “Margaret Atwood, Margaret Laurence—never heard of them, so they must be Canadian” (Richler, *Jerusalem* 146). Far from being outraged, Richler congratulates the student for “redeeming himself with a quality distinctly Canadian— a self-deprecating sense of humor” (147). He also points out that the level of ignorance revealed by the test (sixty-one percent of respondents were unable to identify three Canadian writers) is in fact hardly a damning indictment of the thinness of Canadian culture or of its education system, since “I take it that less than five per cent of high school students in and around, say, Santa Barbara would know if Philip Roth was a delicatessen, Bernard Malamud a furrier, or Saul Bellow an orthodontist” (147). The fact that Richler identifies the three most eminent Jewish-American novelists of his generation to make his point that ignorance is a relative phenomenon, and that the gap between high culture and low is just as wide in the United States as it is in Canada, is of course not coincidental. For if Canadian authors have always tended to find themselves in the shadows of their American peers, Richler, as a Jewish-Canadian contemporary of Bellow, Roth, and Malamud, clearly felt himself to be in some sense in competition with this illustrious triumvirate from

across the border, situating himself in a tradition not just of Canadian and Quebec, but also, and perhaps most importantly, of Jewish fiction.

Diverse and wide-ranging as his *oeuvre* is, Richler's reputation is likely to rest principally on what might be termed his great Canadian-Jewish pentateuch—*The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* (1959), *St. Urbain's Horseman* (1971), *Joshua Then and Now* (1980), *Solomon Gursky Was Here* (1989), and *Barney's Version* (1997). In these five novels—spanning four decades—Richler creates his own Yoknapatawpha in the old working-class Jewish quarter of Montreal. From the shabby streets of St. Urbain and St. Jeanne de Mance, to the smarter enclave of Outremont, to the exclusive suburbs of Westmount, Richler maps the geographical, social, and psychological terrain traversed by his Canadian-Jewish protagonists.⁴ The figure of Duddy Kravitz recurs a number of times in this sequence of novels and I will devote the second half of this article to a discussion of the ways in which Richler dramatizes, in his representation of Kravitz and Jake Hersh—the protagonist of *St. Urbain's Horseman*—two radically different responses to being a Quebecer-Canadian-Jewish underdog.

Jake Hersh is a Canadian Jew by accident rather than design. Like Barney Panofsky's father in *Barney's Version*, Jake's family had wanted to immigrate to America but could only raise enough money for the passage to Canada. This was a familiar scenario among Jews of this generation, and although the sense of having had to settle for second best sometimes faded with time, more often than not it continued to rankle. In *Solomon Gursky Was Here*, Richler describes the sense of frustration (so near and yet so far) felt by many of this generation of Canadian Jews: "For them Canada was not yet a country but the next-door place. They were still this side of Jordan, in the land of Moab, the political quarterlies as well as the Yiddish newspapers they devoured coming out of New York" (11).

Among many second-generation Canadian Jews, too, America—and New York in particular, as the centre of Diaspora Jewish cultural life—symbolized freedom: an escape from the parochialism, marginalization, and displacement of the Montreal Jewish ghetto. As Richler recalls in *Home Sweet Home*, "We endured Montreal . . . but New York, New York was our heart's desire. The real world, the big time" (161). For Jake Hersh, "America . . . was the liberating knowledge which struck him one day at the university that he was not necessarily a freak. There were others, many more, who read and thought as he did, and these others were mostly in New York" (92).

Like many Canadian artists of Richler's generation, Hersh longs to reinvent himself as a New York Jew. As Richler himself did for a time, he

ends up instead as a Canadian expatriate in London. If Canada represented to Hersh's grandparents a welcome refuge from the persecution they had suffered in Eastern Europe but at the same time enforced a continued exile from their promised land—the US—then London likewise represents a compromise for Jake. It is a more cosmopolitan city than Montreal but lacks the glamour of New York, as Jake's best friend and rival, Luke Scott, is fond of reminding him: "A week in New York, Jake, and you'll wonder what you're doing in this city. In the end, we're Americans you know. You wouldn't feel like a foreigner there" (Richler, *St. Urbain* 172). Luke's reasoning here is somewhat disingenuous in two senses: firstly, because he conveniently conflates Canadian and American identities ("we're Americans you know"), and secondly, because he ignores Jake's ethnicity, which complicates his identification with both North American states and his status as an expatriate Canadian in London.

Early on in *St. Urbain's Horseman*, Jake reflects on the irony of his situation as a working-class Montreal-born Canadian Jew living in the genteel world of literary London: "As a St. Urbain Street boy he had, God forgive him, been ashamed of his parents' Yiddish accent. Now that he lived in Hampstead, Sammy [his son] . . . mocked his immigrant's twang" (13). Instead of finding a spiritual home, Jake has simply swapped one form of exile for another. Wishing to escape the stigma of his parents' Jewishness, he finds that in London his Canadianness continues to mark him out as conspicuously other. Moreover, Jake is tormented by a sense that his predicament is fundamentally inconsequential and mundane: a pale, stale imitation of those documented on innumerable occasions in the books and films written and produced by the Jews on the other side of the border:

Jake craved answers, a revelation, something out there, a certitude, like the Bomb before it was discovered. Meanwhile, he was choked with self-disgust. Given his *curriculum vitae*, orthodox Jewish background, emergent working class, urban Canadian, his life until now read to him like any Jewish intellectual journeyman's history. To begin with, his *zeyda* was a cliché. A gentle Jew. A chess player. His childhood street fights, the stuff of everybody's protest novel, lacked only one trite detail. Nobody had ever said to him, 'You killed Christ'. On the other hand, his mother actually said, 'Eat, eat.' . . . At fifteen he had been sufficiently puerile to tell his father 'The synagogue is full of hypocrites,' and two years later he had the originality to describe himself as . . . ghetto-liberated. (Richler, *St. Urbain* 251)

The amorphousness of Jake's desires here is reflected in the vague nature of the formulations Richler uses to describe them (Answers to which questions? What kind of revelation?) and the simile "like the Bomb before

it was discovered” obscures rather than clarifies the nature of his dilemma. As the passage proceeds, however, it becomes clear that the origin of Jake’s existential anxiety is in fact quite specific: it arises from his Jewishness, particularly from the fact that his Jewish experience seems to conform so closely to the experiences of other Jewish intellectual journeymen.

Jake’s frustration at his own lack of originality—at the familiar banality of his plight—might be read as an allegory for Richler’s own predicament as a Canadian-Jewish novelist perpetually in the shadow of his more renowned Jewish-American peers, Malamud, Roth, and Bellow. Bellow, in particular, is a constant and palpable presence in Richler’s fiction, from the allusions to Augie March in *Son of a Smaller Hero* (1955) to the moment near the end of *Barney’s Version* when Barney Panofsky hurls a copy of Bellow’s novel *Henderson the Rain King* (1959) at his fallen hero, Boogie, saying “Here, you want to read a real writer” (Richler, *Barney’s* 383). Beyond his aesthetic admiration for, and professional rivalry with Bellow, there lurks the fact that the Nobel Prize-winning novelist was born in Quebec before moving to the US, and therefore is, by birth, a Canadian-Jewish-Quebecer like Richler himself.

Characteristically, Richler turns his reverence for Bellow into a self-deprecating joke in *This Year in Jerusalem* (1994). Before setting off for Israel, Richler arranges to meet an old friend at Moishe’s, a Jewish steakhouse that he describes as “a Montreal institution” (67). Waiting for his friend to arrive, a waiter comes over “to chat about the old days when we all lived in the neighborhood” (67). The waiter reels off a list of “names recalled from the good old days,” finishing with “William Shatner, Captain Kirk of *Star Trek*” (68). Richler continues the anecdote:

Foolishly, I tried to trump that one. “Do you know who used to live right around the corner from here on Napoleon Street?”

“Sure. The Kushners. They were in footwear. Retail.”

“Saul Bellow,” I said, “right around the corner. When he was a boy.”

“Bellow?” the waiter asked, puzzled. “Now you’ve got me. What was his father in?” (68)

The punchline to this joke manages at once to belittle the parochialism of the waiter, cut Bellow down to size, and puncture the pretensions of Richler himself. As such, it is a fine example of the Freudian “tendentious” joke—that is, a joke that is not simply an end in itself but that serves a particular purpose. Here the purpose of the joke is to satirize both the cultural ignorance of the working-class Montreal Jewish neighborhood that Richler grew up in and the extent to which Richler has detached himself from his roots: a St. Urbain Street boy really ought to have known better than to try

to impress one of his peers with his knowledge of the biography of a writer whose fame is largely restricted to the literati.

Jake Hersh's attempts to become "ghetto-liberated" are themselves often made into the kinds of self-satirical jokes that Freud identifies as typically Jewish. Stepping out onto the terrace of a friend's villa in Ibiza after an unsuccessful attempt to participate in the orgy going on inside, Jake quickly shrugs off his humiliation and drinks in the scene in a spirit of self-satisfaction:

The Mediterranean sun. Spain. Grubby fishing boats were beginning to chug into the harbor. Gulls swooped hungrily overhead or bobbed on the shimmering green water alongside. Remember this, Jake thought, cherish it, and he felt very ghetto-liberated, very Hemingway, as he raised a bottle to his lips, drained it, and flung it into the sea. A moment later he was sick to his stomach. (Richler, *St. Urbain* 19)

In this passage, Richler evokes an idyllic picture-postcard panorama, before abruptly bringing the reader—and Jake—back to reality. Just as he had tried to persuade himself inside the villa that he was enjoying himself at the orgy ("This is living, Yankel", he thinks to himself) only to find himself nauseated as he becomes entangled in a ruck of sweaty bodies, so out on the terrace his attempt to impersonate the gestures of the hard-boiled, hard-living Hemingwayesque artist is pathetically short-lived (18). In both cases, Jake's failure to inhabit this role is implicitly traced back to his Jewishness, as is suggested the fact that he addresses himself at the orgy by a Yiddish pet-name ("Yankel"), that he empties a champagne bottle in a self-conscious attempt to prove to himself how far he has freed himself from the values of the "ghetto," and that he associates this act of self-liberation with a man with notoriously anti-Semitic views.⁵ In spite of the fact that the horseman of the novel's title is Jake's fictional avenging Jewish hero, the nemesis of the notorious Nazi doctor, Josef Mengele, Jake has clearly internalized some anti-Semitic attitudes himself.

Like Bellow and Roth, Richler tends to treat the subject of Jewish self-hatred comically, as an opportunity for satire: hence Jake's repressed Jewishness returns, causing him to vomit just at the moment when he is celebrating his escape from its confines. Canadian anti-Semitism, particularly virulent in Quebec, where the French nationalists identified the cosmopolitan, anglophone Jews early on as a threat to their ideal of a separatist francophone state, features in many of the novels, including *St. Urbain's Horseman*,⁶ and is scrupulously documented in *Oh Canada! Oh Quebec!*, but, as in the work of Bellow and Roth, the threat to Jewish identity in Richler typically comes not from without, but from within. Whereas Roth repeatedly invokes his

fictional alter ego, Nathan Zuckerman—who is, like Roth himself, a secular Jewish writer battling with accusations of betrayal and self-hatred from the Jewish community and even from within his own family—to explore this phenomenon, Richler returned to Duddy Kravitz: a self-serving, aggressively amoral Jewish businessman.

Duddy first appears as the eponymous hero of the novel that made Richler's name, *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*. Published in 1959, the same year as Roth's *Goodbye, Columbus*, Richler's book, like Roth's, was accused by some Jewish critics of perpetuating anti-Semitic stereotypes. Whereas in the title novella of his collection Roth satirized the values of the Patimkins, assimilated *nouveau riche* Jews, in *Duddy Kravitz* Richler focused his attention on a working-class, uneducated Jewish boy determined to make his fortune. Like a Canadian version of Sammy Glick (the hero of Budd Schulberg's 1941 novel, *What Makes Sammy Run?*, to whom Duddy is explicitly compared by his arch-enemy in the novel, Irwin Shubert), Kravitz is driven, relentless, restless.⁷ Duddy's French Canadian girlfriend, Yvette, observes, with a mixture of awe and irritation, that he is "always running or jumping or scratching" (Richler, *Duddy* 92). Even when unconscious, he is in a perpetual state of orange alert:

At ten the next morning Duddy came charging out of a bottomless sleep, unsure of his surroundings but prepared for instant struggle, the alibi for a crime unremembered already half-born, panting, scratching, and ready to bolt if necessary. (176)

Duddy's edginess—his readiness to react combatively or defensively at a moment's notice—reflects not only his temperament but also the way he lives his life. Forever scrambling to get ahead, lurching from one dubious enterprise to another, always with an eye on the main chance, Duddy does indeed conform in many ways to the anti-Semitic stereotype of the unscrupulous, exploitative, acquisitive Jewish businessman. Certainly, Duddy is guilty not just of phantom crimes that haunt his sleep but also of real ones that plague his waking conscience. When he discovers that the secret ingredient of the apparently miraculous dieting pills that he has been peddling is tapeworm, he hurriedly offloads his share of the business onto his unsuspecting partners. Later in the novel, his friend, the epileptic Virgil, is badly injured after succumbing to a fit while driving a truck for Kravitz, even though Duddy is aware of the risks involved.

Kravitz is accused by Jews and non-Jews alike of generating anti-Semitism. Of Duddy Kravitz, Irwin Shubert observes that "It's the cretinous little money-grubbers like Kravitz that cause anti-semitism" (68) and in *St. Urbain's*

Horseman, in which Duddy makes his second appearance in Richler's *oeuvre*, Jake Hersh's best friend, Luke Scott, "castigated Duddy because he felt that it was just this manner of unprincipled operator who undermined his passionate defense of Jews to his father and his bemused cronies at the Granite Club" (136). Yet these comments reveal more about the self-hatred of Irwin and the hypocrisy of Luke's liberalism than they do about Kravitz himself. Coarse and unprincipled he might be, but Duddy is also capable of great selflessness and generosity. He acts as the saviour of his family on more than one occasion in *Duddy Kravitz*: it is he, for example, who rescues his brother, Lennie, when he is persuaded by his WASP college friends to perform an illegal abortion and has to flee from college. In *St. Urbain's Horseman*, when Jake Hersh is at his lowest ebb (having been convicted of indecently assaulting a German au pair), it is Duddy who comes to his aid, impulsively writing him a cheque for ten thousand dollars.

Whatever else Duddy may be, he is completely unselfconscious and unashamed, and this makes him something of a rarity in the pantheon of tortured, compulsively self-analyzing post-war Jewish fictional protagonists. One of his more successful entrepreneurial schemes—a Canadian Jewish *Who's Who*—is born as much out of sincere pride in his identity as a Canadian Jew as out of an opportunistic desire to exploit the sentimental patriotism and vanity of others (Richler, *St. Urbain* 131-38). On one level, this venture is of course another one of those self-deprecating jokes about the paucity of Canadian culture and the parochialism of its Jews, but Duddy's part in it is treated only semi-ironically. At one point in *Duddy Kravitz*, Duddy asks his Uncle Benjy, a *Partisan Review*-reading, left-wing, assimilated Jewish intellectual, why he's never had any time for him: "Because you're a *pusherke*. A little Jew-boy on the make. Guys like you make me sick and ashamed" (Richler, *Duddy* 242). Duddy's response is the most impassioned speech he makes in the novel:

You lousy, intelligent people! You lying sons-of-bitches with your books and your socialism and your sneers. You give me one long pain in the ass. You think I never read a book? I've read books. I've got friends now who read them by the ton. A big deal. What's so special in them? They all make fun of guys like me. (242)

Duddy's scorn for books is hardly to his credit, and of course there is particular irony in his allegation that books by Jewish intellectuals "make fun of guys like me," since this was an accusation levelled at Richler himself on more than one occasion.⁸ Nonetheless, his identification of a strain of hypocrisy and complacency in men like Benjy is entirely accurate.

In a sense, Duddy is the absolute antithesis of his childhood friend, Jake Hersh, who is the epitome of the self-hating intellectual Jew. In *St. Urbain's Horseman*, Richler reveals Jake to be precisely the kind of writer who "make[s] fun of guys like [Duddy]" but who "shield[s] [himself] from ridicule by anticipating with derisive tales of [his] own," all the while painfully aware that he "had emerged . . . from a place that had produced no art and had exalted self-deprecation above all" (Richler, *St. Urbain* 162). If Richler ruthlessly exposes Hersh's hypocrisy, he nonetheless never romanticizes or idealizes Duddy. When he makes his final appearance, as a multi-millionaire in *Barney's Version*, his riches have neither ennobled him morally (halfway through the novel we learn that he has been indicted on charges of insider trading), nor made him socially respectable (he confesses to Barney that "his millions notwithstanding, never mind his donations to the Montreal Symphony Orchestra, the art museum, the Montreal General Hospital, McGill, and his whopper of an annual cheque to Centraid, he was still unable to crack Westmount society to his wife's satisfaction" (Richler, *Barney's* 200, 160). If Richler doesn't spare Duddy from criticism, he never patronizes him. Instead, he embodies him with an unapologetic, self-promoting dynamism, and a mischievous *chutzpah* that transcends the defensive self-critical humour that Freud saw as characteristic of Jewish culture and that is so ubiquitous in post-war Jewish fiction. Richler's triumph with Duddy is in fact to refuse the easy option of making fun of him but instead to take him seriously, to make a long-term artistic investment that reaps dividends not just in the vibrant presence of Duddy himself through a whole series of novels, but also in some of his other most memorable characters, such as Solomon Gursky and Barney Panofsky, both of whom are derived from the little *pusherke* from the wrong side of the tracks of a city in the wrong part of Canada, a country on the wrong side of the North American border.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the very helpful suggestions made to me by an anonymous reader of my submission, and by Margery Fee.

NOTES

- 1 For useful discussions of the tradition of self-deprecating Jewish humour, see Bleiweiss and Davies.
- 2 Originally coined by the Australian cultural critic, A.A. Phillips, to describe an

- “unthinking admiration for everything foreign (especially English) which precluded respect for any excellence that might be found at home” (vii), the phrase has in recent years gained wide currency in the fields of anthropology, sociology, and cultural studies to indicate any internalized sense of inferiority, usually as the legacy of colonial experience.
- 3 The suggestion of Chicago may not be arbitrary, since Chicago is the adopted home of the Canadian-born novelist Saul Bellow.
 - 4 In *Home Sweet Home*, Richler comments that his childhood “world was largely composed of the five streets that ran between Park Avenue and the Main: Jeanne Mance, Esplanade, Waverly, St Urbain, and Clark”, and much of his adult fiction takes place within this small area of Montreal (96).
 - 5 There are echoes of Jake’s ineffectual attempts to shed the legacy of his Jewish background in the description in *Solomon Gursky Was Here* of a group of Russian-Jewish immigrants in Canada:
 In principle the group endorsed racial brotherhood, burning both ends of the candle, free love, an end to private property and all religious hocus pocus, et cetera. But in practice they feared or scorned gentiles, seldom touched anything but apricot brandy, dreamed of owning their own duplex, paid Kronitz fifty cents a week for insurance policies from the Pru, and were constant husbands and loving parents. (11-12)
 - 6 See *St. Urbain’s Horseman*, 113-14.
 - 7 Daniel Golden’s review of the film version of *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* revived this comparison in its title: “What Makes Duddy Run?” To Michael Greenstein, Duddy’s perpetual motion suggests not Sammy Glick, but rather one of the archetypes of Judeo-Christian folklore: “Duddy, forever running, parodies the Wandering Jew” (198).
 - 8 In *This Year in Jerusalem*, for example, Richler tells of his meeting with members of the Jewish youth group Habonim (to which Richler himself belonged as a teenager), who accuse him of being “a Jewish anti-Semite” who “earn[s] big money writing novels that make fun of the Jews” (167). John Updike, in a favourable review of *Barney’s Version*, put it rather more delicately: “Not since the late Stanley Elkin and the early Philip Roth have I seen a writer take such uninhibited delight in caricaturing Jewish types, from ghetto Yiddish-speaker to superproper pseudo-Gentile, with all shapes of excessive energy in between” (333).

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Hydra



Heroic Imaginings

Judaism, Masculinity, and Compensation
in Richler's *The Apprenticeship of
Duddy Kravitz*, *St. Urbain's Horseman*,
and *Solomon Gursky Was Here*

Over the course of his eleven novels, Richler returns again and again to the boys of St. Urbain Street, their youthful hijinks and their very adult angst; this is so much the case that critics charge him with repeating himself (Naves 139). If there is repetition, though, there is also development, particularly with regard to his protagonists' experiences of masculinity. *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* (1959), *St. Urbain's Horseman* (1966), and *Solomon Gursky Was Here* (1989) feature increasingly ineffectual male protagonists who are preoccupied with the lives of very capable hero figures. In other words, the trajectory of these works follows an inverse equation: as Richler's protagonists fall further from the mark of ideal manliness, their fantasies about a paragon of masculinity become more vivid, ever-present, and all-consuming.

Richler criticism to date explores the pattern of hero worship in Richler's novels most fully as it relates to the Holocaust. Michael Greenstein's general study of Jewish Canadian literature explores the notion of "Almost Meeting," or *Vergegnung*, though his section on Richler's novels discusses the trope of running. In *Assimilation and Assertion*, Rachel Feldhay Brenner studies Richler's writing as a response to the Holocaust. She explores his earlier novels through a dichotomy of possible reactions to the post-Holocaust world: the impulse to assimilate the Jewish experience to the rest of humanity, or the desire to assert its uniqueness. Richler's heroes and their increasing presence in his novels, for Brenner, constitute a marked shift toward the latter.

Yet, Richler's protagonists are not only haunted by the ghosts of the past, but are also stalked by the new expectations of the present. Duddy, Jake, and Moses are contemporaries to the founding of the state of Israel, its remarkable success as a military power, and the change in the perception of Jewish men that these events brought about. In response, the protagonists of Richler's works imagine and revere heroes that embody these new expectations. A child of Montreal's immigrant Jewish neighbourhood, Duddy Kravitz idolizes the fabulously rich and powerful "Boy Wonder," Jerry Dingleman, the neighbourhood gangster. Living in the aftermath of the Holocaust, and more overtly touched by it than Richler's other protagonists, Jake Hersh casts his cousin Joey Hersh as the legendary Horseman of St. Urbain and imagines his Nazi-hunting escapades around the globe. In the midst of Watergate, Moses Berger dreams a family acquaintance, Solomon Gursky, into a hero of the North, a no-nonsense man of action in direct contrast to the big-government world of the novel's present. For all their grandeur, ferocity, and attraction, though, these heroes fail to compensate Richler's protagonists in any meaningful way. Indeed, while filling the role of mere acolytes, the three men are prevented from being the heroes of their own lives and for their own worlds.

The earliest example of this pattern in Richler's work appears in *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, where Duddy inherits, but later rejects, a larger-than-life hero. According to Grant McGregor's assessment, Richler's 1959 novel is one in which "the urban myth is delineated and lived out," and Duddy's father plays an important role in perpetuating it (132). In his paying profession as a cabbie, Duddy's father Max taxis myths through the streets of Richler's imagined urban ghetto. In his repertoire, Max's favourite tales involve the Boy Wonder, the proverbial neighbourhood boy made good. With young Duddy listening in, Max waxes poetic about the ingenuity and gumption of Jerry Dingleman to the slightly incredulous crowd that gathers daily at the local cigar and soda shop (Richler, *Duddy* 21). Star-struck by the wealth, seeming success, and virility of a St. Urbain Street boy who went from rags to riches, Max inadvertently positions the Boy Wonder as a hero for Duddy, who earnestly "wanted to be a somebody. Another Boy Wonder maybe. Not a loser, certainly" (Richler, *Duddy* 65).

Enter the Boy Wonder of reality, rather than legend. Indeed, in sharp contrast with the pattern of hero worship that Richler develops later in his career, the Boy Wonder inhabits the same physical and temporal setting as the protagonist in *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*. As a result, Duddy is unable to maintain the sustained idolization that later protagonists do

for their heroes. For the reader too, doubt is quickly cast upon Dingleman's gleaming figure. "And what is he now?" asks a fellow soda and cigar store patron and replies, "The gangster" (Richler, *Duddy* 21). The myth of the Boy Wonder has two faces. Like the other Richler heroes that follow him, the Boy Wonder excites extreme adoration on one hand, and extreme disdain and disparagement on the other. Unlike in the cases of Jake's relationship to Joey and Moses' relationship to Solomon, however, the aura around the Boy Wonder is quickly dispelled for Duddy, who abandons him as a hero, only to take him on as an adversary.

Just two years before the release of *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, Richler professed in an interview to be "looking for . . . the values with which a man can live with honour" (Cohen 38). This search seems almost to end before it begins, with the supremely intelligent and self-governing Noah in Richler's earlier novel, *Son of a Smaller Hero*. With honour already fully realized in Noah, Richler leaves himself no room for exploration, development, or objectivity in his chosen theme. The author's solution in his next novel comes in the decidedly unattractive form of Duddy Kravitz. With the reprehensible, though at times oddly lovable, hoodlum at the center of *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, Richler can freely explore how one conceives, and misconceives, of ideas of manhood without being restricted to a model of unencumbered manhood, as Noah at times appears to be. Yet, Duddy's reprehensibility causes problems of its own. The young man's lack of self-reflectiveness means that Richler is unable to show any of the overwhelming self-doubt and derision that so torments his older protagonists, nor the heavy reliance of these more complex men upon the half-imagined and half-real hero figures in their lives.

In subsequent novels, Richler divides the traits of Duddy and Noah between a protagonist and an idealized hero with whom the protagonist finds himself infatuated. Thus in *St. Urbain's Horseman* and *Solomon Gursky was Here* (both novels named for their heroes rather than their protagonists), protagonists are self-aware, conscious of themselves as world citizens, ethically paralyzed, and class-bound; they have strained relationships with their families, and share an encyclopedic urge. The compensatory heroes they imagine, by contrast, are not bound by class, geography, or history as most people are. They communicate through action rather than speech, they exhibit an insatiable sexual appetite, they shrug off their origins and traverse the globe. These heroes, at least so far as the protagonists are concerned, represent the epitome of male honour.

That the first novel to feature a sustained and embodied form of compensation takes place in 1967 is no coincidence. The year marked an unprecedented shift in both Jewish self-perception, and the world's perception of Jews. Just as our present-day knowledge of the Holocaust clouds our ability to imagine a time when that genocide went nameless, so too does the contemporary news media's continual coverage of the Israeli armed forces render it difficult to imagine a time when Judaism and machismo were thought irreconcilable. Unlike our contemporary consciousness of the Holocaust, however, perceptions of Jewish masculinity did not change gradually, but in a single year: 1967. That summer Israel launched a pre-emptive attack against Egypt. Israel's Arab neighbours, Egypt, Jordan, and Syria, responded with an all-out attack on the fledgling country, together with the support of Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Algeria. In what many have dubbed "Israel's military miracle," the young state emerged victorious a mere six days later.

Paul Breines, in *Tough Jews*, argues that the 1967 Israeli war and victory ushered in a new conception of Jewish masculinity that broke from all its earlier forms. The Six Day War, as it was later called, demonstrated beyond a doubt that though "they [Jews] can be pretty good with a fountain pen and a briefcase, they can also if necessary be pretty good with a rifle and tank" (5). By dint of the Arab-Israeli war of 1967, Jews could now be tough and, according to Breines, the makeover came at just the right time. In the wake of the Holocaust, the expulsion of Jews from Arab lands, the Soviet murders of prominent Jewish intellectuals, and reports of Arab assaults on Israelis, victimhood weighed more and more heavily on the shoulders of American Jews in the mid-1960s. According to Breines, North American Jewry easily read Israel's victory over a coalition of Arab forces bent on their destruction as a reversal of recent Jewish history (71). "The Holocaust could now be replayed in the Middle East," Breines states provocatively: "Only this time, and in merely six days, the eradication of Jews had been averted by the decisive military action of a wonderfully new sort of Jew" (71). Suntanned, battle-hardened, muscular, and tall, the new Jew is nearly unrecognizable to his Eastern European forefathers. Over the course of his quick victory, the new Jewish soldier and man is able to redeem Jewish history to the extreme satisfaction of his diaspora counterparts.

Having emerged from the rubble of the Arab-Israeli War, the new Jew entered the contemporary North American literary scene through a fictional subgenre that Breines terms "the tough Jewish novel" (9). He gathers over forty of these novels, of which his book analyses a selection (9). Included

amongst his finds are spy-thrillers, family sagas, and novels of historical intrigue set anywhere from ancient Israel to New York in the 1970s, all of which feature idealized, competent, tough Jewish protagonists (9). After 1967, the new Jew takes centre stage, bronzed and buff, confident and capable.

This new Jewish character does not, however, take the leading role in Richler's fiction. Within *St. Urbain's Horseman* and *Solomon Gursky Was Here*, the powerful new Jewish characters are instead displaced into the realm of the imagination. From there, they serve as surrogate figures of masculinity for lesser men. Richler's novels include the new physically and mentally tough Jew, but, unlike the novels in Breines's study, relegate him to unsubstantiated fantasy.

In part, Richler's unwillingness to write unmitigated "tough Jewish novels" is owing to an accident of history. The novelist and his protagonists Jake and Moses—all born around the same year—were already in their late thirties by the time the new Jew was popularized on the world stage through the Arab-Israeli War. As has already been seen, men such as Jake and Moses were raised according to very different ideals of manhood, ones that venerated the meek, the kind, the accepting, and the passive. Thus, theirs is a generation on whom the tables are turned: the standards they were trained to meet are no longer the standards that apply. In *St. Urbain's Horseman* and *Solomon Gursky Was Here*, Richler's protagonists cope by imagining the complete fulfillment of the new masculine Jewish ideal within the lives and bodies of another, to whose life they grant themselves complete imaginative access and, occasionally, seek out literal access. In Jake's case, fancy leads to incredible visions of what his cousin Joey is up to on his world travels. He imagines the older man as a crusader against all those who have historically wronged the Jewish people. For Moses, compensation for his own masculine deficiencies comes in the form of eccentric millionaire Solomon Gursky. Solomon is the artist that Moses cannot be; that is, he lives his life as though it were his *chef-d'oeuvre*. Each protagonist knows his hero from real life, but, on the basis of even the briefest of encounters, concocts larger-than-life adventures and traits for him. Consequently, much of what is known by the reader about Joey and Solomon is filtered through the force of the need of Jake and Moses to lionize—to find examples of male effectuality, entitlement, and capacity.

Some of the details of Joey and Solomon's lives are verifiable, however, and these help to explain what attracted protagonist to hero in the first place. For example, one can be relatively certain that both Joey and Solomon had unique beginnings. Unlike Jake and Moses, who are forever marked

by their urban Jewish upbringing, Joey and Solomon both hail from places well outside the ghetto walls. Joey, for instance, “was born in a freezing miner’s shanty in Yellowknife, with the help, if you can call it that, of a drunken Polack midwife while his father was out boozing somewhere” (Richler, *St. Urbain* 128). From the moment of his birth onward, Joey was exposed to the harsh realities of life, while his counterparts from Montreal’s immigrant Jewish community had coddled childhoods. Solomon’s formative years were also unusual, though slightly tamer than Joey’s. He and his two brothers, Bernard and Morrie, grew up in Fort McEwan, a small rural town in Saskatchewan (Richler, *Gursky* 35). As distinct from the majority of their contemporaries within the Jewish community, the Gurskys arose from the prairies and the homestead rather than from the city street and the tenement home. The two heroes’ atypical origins render them particularly attractive to the likes of Jake and Moses because their personal histories represent what the two St. Urbain Street men can never aspire to themselves: an identity undetermined and unclaimed by and separate from their origins. Like the romantic conception of the genius, Joey and Solomon seem detached from the fate and limitations of their communities, or of any of the communities they later enter into. The heroes are able to fulfill Noah Adler’s wish in *Son of a Smaller Hero*: that is, Joey and Solomon appear to have “the right to begin with [their] birth” (Richler, *Smaller Hero* 62), unburdened by the legacies of historical trauma or victimization.

The two heroes are also, according to the combination of the verifiable facts and embellished narratives of their family histories, unburdened by inadequate male role models. In fleshing out the details of their respective heroes’ lives, the protagonists are sure to endow Joey and Solomon with uncompromisingly strong father figures as a means of compensating for their own lack of strong male role models. Indeed, the desirability of their lineages lies precisely in the unwillingness of Joey’s father and Solomon’s grandfather to bow to the will of the majority, the complacent, or the placating. Generally, Richler places a high premium on dissent within his fictional universe, and nowhere is this more evident than in the tone of veneration that Jake and Moses adopt as they recount the sordid and defiant histories of Joey’s father, Baruch Hersh, and Solomon’s grandfather, Ephraim Gursky. Jake, for one, cannot conceal his admiration as he tells of Baruch’s refusal to take the easy, well-trodden route of the majority in favour of the loner’s path when he first arrived in Montreal. Baruch, Jake explains to his friend Luke one night, was only a week off the boat from Lodz, when he “cut loose,

he was transmogrified. He proclaimed himself a *shoimar-shabus* [one who keeps the laws of the Sabbath] no longer. Defiantly he ate non-Kosher food . . . His elder brothers disowned him” (Richler, *St. Urbain* 163). After shaking off his Old Country atavism, Jake continues, Baruch worked and lived in such far-flung places as Australia, the Cape, Japan, China, Tahiti, and the Yukon, before he worked as a whiskey runner and was shot in a gun battle near the Montana border (Richler, *St. Urbain* 163). Baruch’s wife, Hanna, tells Jake that when her husband returned to Montreal he would unabashedly heckle the Jewish neighbourhood from the streets; he would holler, “I’m here! Jews, it’s Baruch, your brother is home!” (Richler, *St. Urbain* 161). Baruch’s blatant individualism renders him an enviable male role model in Jake’s eyes. In opposition to Jake’s own father, who resignedly accepts his inconsequential role in society, as well as the derision of his family, Baruch is fiercely his own man and makes no concessions to community. This is not to say that Jake takes Baruch for a pillar of morality: Joey’s father, by all accounts, is an inveterate drunk with an incurable wanderlust and a frighteningly violent nature. Yet, while there is no denying Baruch’s waywardness, his rejection of the unreasoned acceptance of Old World conventions renders him admirable from Jake’s perspective.

In *Solomon Gursky Was Here*, Solomon’s grandfather Ephraim receives a much more intimate treatment from Richler than Baruch does in *St. Urbain’s Horseman*. Indeed, by dint of Moses’ uncontainable curiosity and imagination, the eldest Gursky threatens to overshadow his grandson, the title character, during the first half of the novel. As with Baruch, Moses is intrigued by Ephraim’s charisma and staunch non-conformity. At thirteen he ran away from his family’s traditional home in Liverpool, where his father was the cantor, and began work in a coal mine in Durham (Richler, *Gursky* 221). From this moment onward, Ephraim’s life constitutes a series of fantastic escapes and participation in some of the most boldly adventurous moments in history. He provides the Blackfoot Indians with alcohol and thereby inadvertently necessitates the formation of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police; he escapes from Newgate prison, then from Van Diemen’s Land, and finally from the terrible fate of the Franklin expedition; afterwards, he runs guns to New Orleans during the American Civil War, scales the Chilkoot pass into the Klondike, and works as a piano player in Dawson City (Richler, *Gursky* 143-46). As if to make up for the disappointingly small contribution of his own father, L.B. Berger, Moses revels in imagining Ephraim at every important historical moment in the

late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As opposed to Moses' father, Ephraim displays the lusty determination and spirit of the new, tough Jew. The idealization at play in Jake and Moses' reconstruction of Joey's and Solomon's family histories justifies the two protagonists' apathy. Heroes, their imaginings suggest, are men who come from and inherit greatness, rather than ordinary men who make their own greatness. Therefore, Jake and Moses, as the most ordinary of men, are justified in their inaction.

If their relative dearth of adequate male role models were not enough to keep Jake and Moses from being heroes themselves, then the apparent innateness of Joey and Solomon's heroism certainly would. Almost every character to come into contact with the two heroes is struck by their nearly superhuman disposition; in short, they walk a hero's walk. Solomon, at seventeen, "a squirt, a Jew, strode through the streets of the town as if he were a prince-in-waiting, destined for great things" (Richler, *Gursky* 346). Even Bernard, who dismisses Solomon's trek to the North Sea as exaggeration if not fabrication, is forced to concede that, regardless of what really happened, "Solomon had returned blessed with a certain grace, an inner stillness" (Richler, *Gursky* 343). The eldest of the Gursky brothers reveals in an instant of uncharacteristic self-awareness and insight that,

Watching him [Solomon] now, at ease with the wild mustangs, Bernard grasped that had he been the one to jump into the corral, probably stumbling in the dust, they would have smelled his fear and reared up their hind legs, snorting, looking to take a chomp out of him. Bernard understood for the first time that . . . he would have to scratch and bite and cheat to get what he wanted out of life . . . but that Solomon would sit, expecting the world to come to him, and he would be served. (Richler, *Gursky* 343)

Solomon is marked for greatness even before he does anything to earn it. He is destined for amazing things, and this can be read so clearly in his countenance that it is even legible to the envious, petty, and scornful Bernard. Scrawny though he may be, Solomon naturally exudes the entitlement of the new Jewish confidence and machismo that at once attracts and repels men such as Bernard, and even Moses. For, while they cannot help but be impressed by Solomon's strength of character, they must also sense its exclusivity: only once in a generation, Bernard and Moses must imagine, does a man of such charisma and unflinching confidence arise, and certainly neither of them is he.

Whereas Solomon exemplifies the tough Jewish attitude, Joey is the embodiment of the tough Jewish physique. When Joey runs away from home at the age of eighteen, he departs a sickly, pale, and frightfully thin boy with

a rasping cough (Richler, *St. Urbain* 125, 132). On his return six years later in 1943, though, Joey is a sight to behold. According to Jake, his older cousin's red MG "could have been a magnificent stallion and Cousin Joey a knight returned from a foreign crusade" (Richler, *St. Urbain* 132). Joey's new, tanned, and muscled figure sets him apart from his neighbours. What is more, his new-found heroism seems to come at the cost of his allegiance to the ghetto. Jake goes on to describe Joey as buff and cocky, "[s]triding down St. Urbain bronzed as a lifeguard, eyes concealed behind sunglasses, trousers buckled tight against a flat hard stomach, . . . he did not seem to be of St. Urbain any longer" (Richler, *St. Urbain* 132). Cousin Joey constitutes a brand of tough Jewish masculinity never before seen on Montreal's streets: he inspires—rather than feels—fear as he struts down the neighbourhood's major thoroughfare. Joey, the men of St. Urbain Street seem to intuit, will fight back. It is important to recall that both Joey's overt muscularity and Solomon's unflinching sense of entitlement appear to Jake and Moses as inherent. Thus, while Jake and Moses can and do admire these qualities, they feel they cannot aspire to them.

Nowhere is Jake and Moses' tendency to live vicariously through their heroes more evident than in the realm of sexual relations. With pride, the protagonists recount Joey and Solomon's sexual exploits. For instance, despite his Uncle Abe's charges that Joey was a gigolo, the young Jake is transfixed by the apparent sexual magnetism of his older cousin. For Jake, Joey is a man of bulging muscles and burgeoning sexuality; his physical strength is, ostensibly, matched by his sexual prowess. Women, even from Montreal society's upper echelons, congregate around the Horseman (Richler, *St. Urbain* 135). These are, to the pre-adolescent Jake's mind, "high-quality girls, who sipped martinis, their legs delicately crossed" (Richler, *St. Urbain* 135). Joey is irresistible and, according to Jake's naive and adoring perception of his most intriguing cousin, Joey seems a paragon of manhood.

Moses, likewise, seems to delight in Solomon's sexual aptitude. He assures readers of his hero's sexual capacity through a selection of diary entries from ladies of high society, which are reproduced in *Solomon Gursky Was Here*. One of these is from the diary of Lady Margaret Thomas, who encounters Solomon under the alias Sir Hyman Kaplansky. Under the assumption that Sir Hyman is homosexual, Lady Margaret records that,

Hymie wished he were capable of loving a woman as ravishing and remarkably intelligent as I was, he said . . . Poor, dear boy. . . . There was nothing for it but to take him in my arms, my intention being to console. Soon we arrived at a state *deshabillé* . . . And then, eureka! (Richler, *Gursky* 498)

Not only is Solomon potent, the entry reveals that he is artfully so. Another society lady, who grades her lovers from delta-minus to alpha-plus in her diaries, scored Sir Hyman “ALPHA PLUS followed by four exclamation marks” (Richler, *Gursky* 499). In a novel where Moses’ impotence provides comic relief, Solomon’s strong libido and cunning give the protagonist reason for pride. Solomon, the rascal, seems to more than make up for Moses’ own inadequacies: he provides the younger man with a slew of sexual conquests through which to live vicariously.

The incredible artistic license that Moses and Joey take with the lives of their heroes is made possible by their absence. Indeed, Joey’s incredible geographic mobility and Solomon’s incredible social mobility always seem to leave both heroes somewhere just outside the frame. As a result, they are rarely present either to verify or contradict Jake and Moses’ hypotheses about their lives and personalities. Both heroes are incurable globetrotters and to be found in the most unlikely places. Purportedly Joey flits between Argentina, Israel, Germany, and England, among other countries. Solomon is spotted in such far-ranging locations as Berlin, Munich, Moscow, London, Entebbe, and Zurich. Richler further emphasizes Joey’s panache for travel by his animal avatar, the horse, and his usual means of transport, the red MG. The heroes’ incredible mobility means that the protagonists are free to project their dreams onto their heroes unchecked. Rather than develop real, meaningful, relationships with these older men, Jake and Moses use Joey and Solomon as blank slates upon which to write their own unfulfilled dreams and desires.

The other form of mobility evinced by the two heroes offers their protagonists imaginative and literal access to the sectors of society that they can enter only with much discomfort and insecurity. Joey and, especially, Solomon are able to move outside the class that has indelibly marked Jake and Moses. Joey, for instance, passes as a Sabra and a cowboy. He fully defies the stereotype that diaspora Jews are unfit for the harsh life of Israeli pioneers and soldiers, because their attachment to their “Momma” is too strong (Richler, *St. Urbain* 253). Solomon, however, is a true chameleon. Like the raven with whom Richler associates his later hero, he is a trickster able to shape-shift through the ranks of society. While musing about Lucy’s decision to become an actress, Morrie Gursky reveals that he is unsurprised by her choice, for

That’s what Solomon [Lucy’s father] really should have been. A stage actor. . . . When we were kids he was always dressing up, writing little plays for us to perform. He could do accents. It was amazing. . . . He did a Chinaman, even

walked like one. The German butcher. The blacksmith, a Polack. He could do anybody. (Richler, *Gursky* 297-8)

Solomon can be anyone, anywhere: an English aristocrat, a dealer in Kikuyu and Masai antiquities with a gallery on Rodeo Drive, the son of an early settler in Australia, a South African, a Swiss financier. Moses' hero moves freely throughout the world, unchained by the signifiers of class and ethnicity that hold ordinary men back.

The heroes that Jake and Moses revere evoke the Jewish Messiah, first, through their absence from the protagonists' lives, and, second, through the protagonists' expectations that their heroes are capable of doling out justice, in contrast to their own confoundedness within the modern, ethically convoluted world. The yearning for a time when true justice will be achieved indicates, however, at once a deep-seated dissatisfaction with one's present, and the inability to alter its conditions for oneself. The promise of a future redeemer is the cold comfort of the powerless. Likewise, the Golem, who resonates particularly strongly with Joey's role in *St. Urbain's Horseman*, is a figure of retribution for a people who are unable to exact revenge for themselves. Even the comic book hero, whose freedom of movement throughout the world and society, as well as whose superhuman capabilities, find their match in Jake and Moses' conceptions of Joey and Solomon, is also firmly tied to both Jewish history and forced paralysis when circumstances call for action. Indeed, the American comic book hero grew out of the frustrated desires of American Jews to aid their suffering European counterparts during the late 1930s and early 1940s when the United States was determined upon an isolationist policy (Gordon 137-39). In the face of powerlessness, young, and creative American Jewish men imagined supernaturally powerful heroes who were able to right all the world's wrongs single-handedly. Taken together, the forerunners of Jake and Moses' heroes reveal themselves and their ilk to be expressions of unrealized justice, thwarted vengeance, and the inability to act.

The irony of Richler's harkening back to these older heroic tropes, though, is that no actual barriers exist between Jake and Moses and the fight for justice. Thanks to the creation of the state of Israel and the appearance of a new post-1967 version of tough Jewish masculinity, Jake and Moses have options for how to be Jewish that were unimaginable in the time of their fathers and grandfathers. Nevertheless, the persistence of Old World values in the two men, coupled with apathy and self-pity, hold them back. They fail to take meaningful action in their own lives and fall into complex fantasies

about the lives of other men. Thus, instead of overcoming the disappointments of their fathers, Jake and Moses imagine the strength of Joey's father and Solomon's grandfather. Rather than cultivating their own sense of self-worth and physical health, the protagonists imagine the lives of men who are marked for greatness both in their attitudes and physical prowess. Jake and Moses avoid dealing with their own sexual dysfunction by living vicariously through the exciting and impressive sexual lives of their heroes. Finally, while the two ordinary men feel ensnared within a community and a community mindset they do not respect, Joey and Solomon, they imagine, are able to move beyond this community both in the actual terms of distance and mobility, and also in terms of their psychological autonomy. Jake and Moses are torn between two opposite ideals of Jewish manhood. Thus, while they can imagine the tough Jew, their generation is not yet ready to adopt his way of being in the world in their own lives. Instead, they take the intermediary step of venerating the new tough Jewish values, but not the subsequent one of enacting them.

The developing pattern of hero worship present in *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, *St. Urbain's Horseman*, and *Solomon Gursky Was Here* reveals at once a preoccupation with honour and a deep-seated sense that it is inaccessible to the men of Richler's generation. Instead it appears, in the three novels under scrutiny, to be a burden—an unrealizable expectation, which fascinates but also belittles. On the one hand, Duddy eschews honour entirely in his quest to become "somebody," while Jake and Moses, on the other hand, displace their yearnings onto their mostly imagined counterparts. In all cases these Jewish men fail to live out the fantasies of masculine honour they harbour. This failure to act is exacerbated by the accidents of geography and history that place Richler's protagonists far from opportunities for honour. The struggle against Fascism in Spain, the Second World War, the Holocaust, the founding and subsequent successful defence of the state of Israel were all taking place during Richler's and his protagonists' lives. Yet, all these events took place well beyond Canadian borders, and even beyond the realm of the imaginable for most Canadian Jews. Thus, honour is never thrust upon Duddy, Jake, and Moses the way it might have been for their contemporaries elsewhere, and with their mettle untested, the men go through life uncertain of their own capability and handicapped by self-doubt.

Even as they portray it, Richler's novels speak out against this pattern of deflecting decisive action onto another. For example, escape into the adventures of Joey Hersh does not help Jake in either his work or his ongoing

trial. Likewise, Moses Berger's retreat into fantasies of Solomon Gursky does not improve, and in fact worsens, his hermit-like existence. Duddy Kravitz, the only effective protagonist, is also the only one to move past being merely the acolyte of another man. Richler the satirist serves up the tales of these men with irony, rather than approval. In so doing, he shows that contrary to the glory and grandeur, hero worship is a dysfunctional and personally stunting refuge of the cowardly.

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Review Essay: Richler's Biographers

Ada Craniford

Mordecai Richler: A Life in Ten Novels. iUniverse
US \$16.95

Charles Foran

Mordecai: The Life & Times. Knopf \$39.95

Reinhold Kramer

Mordecai Richler: Leaving St. Urbain. McGill-Queen's UP \$29.95

Michael Posner

The Last Honest Man: Mordecai Richler: An Oral Biography. McClelland & Stewart \$22.99

M.G. Vassanji

Mordecai Richler. Penguin \$26.00

Reviewed by Glenn Deer

Few critical monographs on Mordecai Richler have appeared since his death in 2001, but various forms of biographies have proliferated. Early critical books by George Woodcock (1971), Victor Ramraj (1983), and an edited collection by Michael Darling (1986) have served far too long as the strongest book-length examples of literary analysis, with Woodcock and Ramraj also providing helpful but now outdated biographical sketches. Norman Ravvin's *A House of Words: Jewish Writing, Identity, and Memory* (1997) provides a partial exception, with a very fine chapter on Richler's *St. Urbain's Horseman* and the Holocaust. Richler's work clearly deserves continuing critical engagement, which this special issue of *Canadian Literature* partly seeks to address, but at least the shelves

are well-stocked with works that take a biographical approach: these include Joel Yanofksy's witty and self-reflexive study of literary obsession and celebrity culture, *Mordecai & Me: An Appreciation of a Kind* (2003); Ada Craniford's *Mordecai Richler: A Life in Ten Novels* (2005), a literary guide-book on parody and Richler's embedding of his life in fiction, addressed especially to high school and undergraduate student readers; Michael Posner's *The Last Honest Man: Mordecai Richler: An Oral Biography* (2004), a valuable tapestry of oral memories from both Richler's supportive family members, friends, and literary colleagues and his rivals and detractors; and most recently, novelist M.G. Vassanji's elegantly compact *Mordecai Richler* (2009) in Penguin's *Extraordinary Canadians* series, edited by John Ralston Saul. Vassanji deliberately reads against the grain of the well-known Richlerian "gruff caricature," treating anecdotes with caution, aware that Richler's memorializers might "use memory to embellish, reinvent, settle scores" (7).

Charles Foran's *Mordecai: The Life & Times*, winner of the 2011 Charles Taylor Prize, towers above most of the earlier slender biographies of Montreal's lusty contrarian, but clearly competes with Reinhold Kramer's equally comprehensive and meticulously documented *Mordecai Richler: Leaving St. Urbain*, honoured by the 2008 Gabrielle Roy Prize: the strikingly similar design of the front jacket covers of both might perplex the uninformed browser, since both feature dustjackets with white

lettering on a red background, and black-and-white photographs of Richler wearing reading glasses—Kramer’s book foregrounding one unflinching eye (as if the satirist were already situating the “viewer/reader” as a “target”), while Foran’s provides a full-face portrait with a cigarello.

Foran, a novelist, journalist, and memoirist, illustrates Richler’s dynamic enmeshment with the historical and cultural geographies of North America, Europe, and England and with the rambunctious hard-drinking and driven personalities of the post-war Anglophone writing and publishing world, tracking the fierce discipline of a writing career anchored by the support of his wife, Florence. Foran professes not to hunt for correspondences between Richler’s fiction and his life, since such an approach is “reductive” and in his opinion “incorrect” (xii). Foran thus does not analyze the fiction extensively, which liberates him to illustrate with evocative detail the crowded and bustling Jewish enclaves of Montreal, and delve more extensively into the social class tensions and infidelity that destroyed the marriage of Richler’s parents, Lily Rosenberg and Moses Richler. Foran narrates the *Bildungsroman* of Richler’s self-invention as a writer during his formative sojourns in Europe and England, and chronicles his lifelong romance with his beloved Florence. The book offers detailed accounts of Richler’s life in Paris, Ibiza, London, and his trans-Atlantic oscillation between Montreal and London in his later years. Armed initially with a typewriter and a new overcoat, fueled by cigarettes and a cocky confidence in his self-conducted literary apprenticeship, Richler pushed himself to complete the raw manuscripts of the unpublished *The Rotten People* and then his first novel, *The Acrobats*, before he was 22.

Richler was precociously savvy about the politics of publishing and the necessity for self-promotion, and Foran’s judicious use of correspondence and his skilled historical

sleuthing paint a fascinating history of post-war print culture, and the roles of editors and publishers like Diana Athill, Joyce Weiner, and André Deutsch, and later, Jack McClelland, Sonny Mehta, Robert Gottlieb, Louise Dennys, and Ken Whyte. While Richler’s established daily routine at the typewriter, tapping out reams of fiction, letters, reviews and essays, was highly solitary, his career depended on personal and professional support from dozens of friends in literary circles, including Ted Allan, William Weintraub, Brian Moore, Mavis Gallant, Bernard and Sylvia Ostrey, Ted Kotcheff, and other central allies in the formative 1950s and during the rest of his fifty-year career. The narrative is not entirely rosy, documenting Richler’s social failures as well as his public victories, and noting that “[f]or a writer possessing limited social graces and less small talk, casual encounters could be difficult. . . . Things didn’t always go well. A few outright disasters are on record” (xiii). And Richler did not always have the upper hand in interviews, though he was known as a hard case. His son Daniel Richler interviews him on the television show *Imprint*, pointedly questioning him about the sexist descriptions of women in *Solomon Gursky Was Here* and his tendency to satirize weaker opponents who lack the ability or willingness to respond. Daniel pins his father down, extracting admissions of his “old fashioned” (561) attitudes and his confession that “maybe I am a bit of a bully” (562).

Foran modestly notes that even this 738-page account is not exhaustive: no biography can make such a claim. However, it will be difficult to surpass Foran’s work as a standard chronicle biography (Leon Edel’s term, 125) of Richler. It is close to definitive, and those who follow will need to uncover other leads. Over one thousand letters in a restricted archive at the University of Calgary Richler Archives were briefly opened with permission of the Richler

Estate in 2008, and Foran was able to consult this new source. From it, he reprints a long and emotionally explosive letter, dated August 4, 1976, from Richler to his mother, Lily Rosenberg, that takes up the entire sixth chapter of Part IV (454-60).

While Foran's epic biography benefitted from unrestricted access to private documents not yet available to the public, Florence Richler insisted that it be an "unauthorized . . . 'warts and all portrait'" (718). Extensive interviews with Florence Richler, who provided corrective feedback, and candid recollections by Richler's children support the narrative. Supplemented with dozens of rare photographs from the Richler family's private collections, the book concludes with a moving account of his final days. I have only two quibbles: first, the book would benefit from clear endnotes or attribution of sources, a weakness that is not fully compensated by short bibliographic essays. Notes arranged by line and page will be available at Charles Foran's website (currently a work in progress), but this makes for an awkward divide between the book and the online bibliographic apparatus. Second, I find Foran's pre-emptive claim that "reading Richler's life into his books and his books into life" is "reductive" and "incorrect" as strategically heavy-handed (Kramer's competing biography works precisely with this assumption), especially since Foran does comment on the dramatic impact of these convergences on Richler's own family. For example, he writes, "Scarcely a single childhood experience or grievance remained unaired in *Son of a Smaller Hero*" (199). He also notes that some relatives "never forgave him for offering a fictional version of his grandfather's cheating in *Son of Smaller Hero* (707). Given that Richler used his literary talent to discursively skewer his family antagonists, tracing the links between Richler's life and the rhetorical and social effects of his writing seems a productive rather than an "incorrect" way to proceed.

In fact, Richler was his own cunning *autobiographer*, conjuring the raucous vivacity and seething class antagonisms of Jewish Montreal, not only in his fiction but also in brilliant satiric essays written for magazines and republished in collections like *Hunting Tigers Under Glass*, *Shovelling Trouble*, and *Home Sweet Home*. Richler's Orwellian "Why I Write" serves as the most cogent literary self-portrait of Richler at mid-career, while broaching two contradictory impulses which represent the implicit stand-off between Foran's biography and Kramer's. On the one hand, Richler innocently claimed, "I fervently believe that all a writer should send into the marketplace to be judged is his own work; the rest should remain private. I deplore the writer as personality" (19). In the same paragraph, he admits, "I can bend my anxieties to subversive uses. Making stories of them." Yanofsky hits the mark in *Mordecai & Me* when he states, "Richler wrote incessantly about himself and incessantly denied that he did. . . . He was always writing about himself, even when he claimed not to be" (21).

Instead of delicately stepping around the congruence of Richler's life and art, Kramer illuminates this correspondence at every turn: "Richler's fiction often verges on autobiography" and the evidence clearly shows the "foundations [of his novels] were almost always *roman-à-clef*" (6). As Kramer convincingly demonstrates, Richler "sublimated his considerable anger into stinging books" (263), but it is the literary skill of this sublimation that is the primary object of Kramer's meticulous analyses. Narrating many of the same family conflicts and developmental episodes in the writerly apprenticeship as Foran, Kramer is bolder in identifying the *roman-à-clef* connections—in the chapter on *Son of a Smaller Hero*, he provides a list of the characters in the novel, and also the "original" counterparts, and discusses the political nuances of this "harsh allegory" that is simultaneously

“historical and intimately personal” (112).

Kramer goes well beyond simply providing a comprehensive reading of the congruence of Richler’s life and literary craft; he is certainly Foran’s equal at providing a history of an emerging literary cosmopolitanism, and in adumbrating the details of how Richler cobbled together writing and reviewing employment. As one example, Kramer documents how Richler’s literary connections and his work as a book reviewer for the Book of the Month Club provided him with an important source of income, with contacts in the important New York literary establishment. In this role he wrote independent and tough-minded assessments of other Canadian writers. Richler was not above taking appointments with institutions that he had previously scorned, provided the money was sufficient and he was free to vent his opinions unmuzzled: “Praising a book, Richler wrote pedestrianly, but damning a book, he was brilliant” (247). Richler said of Hugh MacLennan’s *Rivers of Canada* that it was “Polonius on a canoe” (246); and of Hugh Garner: “He has all the faults of Nelson Algren, but none of the virtues, which is to say, he doesn’t write very well” (247).

Professor Kramer writes with wit, challenging Richler’s cunning subterfuges where necessary, and adding his own distinctive voice, reminding us that during a visit to “Brandon, Manitoba—which Canadians more sensitive than Richler recognize as the spiritual centre of the nation—Richler spoke of his western trip as a foreign experience” (240). Challenging Richler’s surly attitude to academia, teachers, and Canadian Literature courses, Kramer points out that Richler would conveniently forget “how much the sales of his later novels depended upon teachers championing *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* one class at a time” (152). (Here at UBC, the bookstore reports that 400 copies of *Barney’s Version*,

80 copies of *St. Urbain’s Horseman*, and 70 copies of *The Incomparable Atuk* have been used as course texts in the past four years, refuting the popular misconception, voiced recently by John Barber in *The Globe and Mail*, that Richler is being ignored in current university curricula.) Kramer tends to elide the complexities of Richler’s reactionary attitudes to identity politics, feminism, racism, and gay rights, unfortunately allowing Richler to float as a “temporizer”: “when the times frowned, he frowned; when the times loosened up, he loosened up . . . uneasily” (282-83). The problem of Richler and identity politics is clearly in need of further scrutiny and debate, along with an analysis of the construction of Richler’s particular masculinities and homosocial literary spaces: To reframe Daniel Richler’s question, cited by Foran (561), why do women occupy consistently subservient or merely supporting roles to the men in his novels?

These questions aside, Kramer is scrupulous in providing a clearly organized set of hundreds of endnotes. His lively prose and assured scholarly precision make *Mordecai Richler: Leaving St. Urbain* not only an insightful biography but also the most accomplished and sustained work of literary criticism on Richler thus far.

However, one substantive critical question remains: Why does Kramer discount the lingering effects of Lily Rosenberg’s affair? He asserts that “one cannot say Richler was haunted by the affair very far into adulthood. In his new circles it was rather a feather in one’s cap to have had a mother living on the edge” (99). But if Richler saw this as edgy behavior, worthy to be a “feather in the cap,” why did he continue to express his resentment? Kramer refers to the “nasty letter[s]” (255) exchanged between the two much later, letters that express Richler’s unmitigated adult anger about Lily’s affair.

Leon Edel, the great scholar of life writing

and the biographer of Henry James, wrote that “if we were to measure the hours of work and the reward, it would be discovered that biography is the costliest of all labors on this earth” (33). Serious scholars of Richler will need to reckon with the groundbreaking and synthesizing labors of Foran and Kramer: their reward will also consist of our continuing dialogue with the historical, personal, and literary formation of “Mordecai Richler,” a cultural site now substantially revived and reshaped by their biographies.

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Community Spaces

Robert Amos and Kileasa Wong

Inside Chinatown: Ancient Culture in a New World. TouchWood \$44.95

Reviewed by Marie Lo

Inside Chinatown: Ancient Culture in a New World by Robert Amos and Kileasa Wong is a unique combination of coffee table art book, Chinese Canadian history, and directory of organizations and institutions located in Victoria’s Chinatown. Written in both English and Mandarin, the book showcases the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association of Victoria and its various member associations, offering a portrait of the kinds of civic, political, economic, and cultural organizations that animate Chinese Canadian life.

The CCBA of Victoria, which was formed in 1884, is the oldest in Canada. Founded in response to increased anti-Chinese hostilities, the CCBA united over thirty different Chinese groups from different clans and regions to fight against discriminatory legislation and to advocate for Chinese labour rights. It also oversaw other aspects of life in Canada, functioning as a governing body to adjudicate internal conflicts and to implement educational and welfare programs.

Inside Chinatown’s structure is loosely akin to a directory; rather than providing an overall narrative arc, the chapters are organized primarily around individual associations. Opening chapters focus on meeting halls in Victoria, a brief history of Chinese immigration and the CCBA, and some notable cultural institutions such as the Chinese Public School, The Palace of Saints, and the Dance Group and Drill Team. The bulk of the book focuses on the associations of the CCBA, giving readers rare access to private clubs and spaces that are generally not open to the public.

While the title of the book, “Ancient Culture in a New World,” replays the

Orientalist binary that pits “ancient” Chinese traditions against a “new” and more modern Canada, the rest of the book disrupts Orientalist expectations. Through descriptions of each association’s history as well as some of their current members and leaders, Amos and Wong both capture the heterogeneity of the Chinese Canadian community and the sense of intimacy that demystifies rather than exoticises.

Though the written text serves as a useful guide, it is the photographs that really distinguish the book. *Inside Chinatown* offers a dynamic visual representation of how assimilation, cultural identity, and hybridity are manifested and embodied by physical spaces of ritual and community gatherings. The photographs are stitched together to create panoramas of building fronts and interior spaces. Rather than sweeping views of natural landscapes or city skylines, they are photocollages of quotidian moments such as a Saturday evening rehearsal of the Gum Sing Musical Society or Yue Shan Society members playing cards and drinking coffee on a weekday morning. Shrines are presented from a variety of wide shots that are then assembled, creating a fragmented stylized perspective that denies the transparency of documentation.

Inside Chinatown provides an intimate portrayal of the spatialization of Chinese Canadian identity. It is a valuable visual archive of how communities preserve, adapt, and transform culture not just through time, but also through space.



High Notes

Jancis M. Andrews

Walking on Water. Cormorant \$21.00

Raymond Fraser

The Grumpy Man. Lion’s Head \$20.00

Alix Hawley

The Old Familiar. Thistle-down \$17.95

Reviewed by Dorothy F. Lane

All three of these collections squeeze the most piercingly high notes from the most unlikely characters and circumstances; through their recurring focus on so-called “low life,” they elicit humour, pathos, and glimpses of truth. While geographical locations and characters vary, the creative energy seldom wanes.

Jancis Andrews, born in England, is now established on the Sunshine Coast of British Columbia. Her own story is fascinating, including adolescent escape from an abusive family, military and domestic service, and abandonment by her husband in Vancouver. In 1992, she published her first collection of short fiction titled *Rapunzel, Rapunzel, Let Down Your Hair*; *Walking on Water* is her second collection. Beginning with the autobiographical “Country of Evil,” this deceptively small book holds a breadth of stories with lines that resonate and images that remain with the reader long after the book is closed.

Each of the ten stories focuses on a distinct character and challenge, and many of these narratives suggest messiness in human relationship and interaction, as well as a reclaiming of spirit. For instance, in “Big Girl,” the adolescent main character grapples with her own ambivalent relationship to her aunt and her changing body; in “Gift for Michael Mooney,” repressed anger and fear in a salesman finds its avatar in a seahorse he glimpses from the deck of a ferry—“a celebration of pearl and silver in the moonlight . . . weaving and diving between the fog patches, light streaming from its body and tail;” in “Johnny, I Hardly

Knew You,” the chance reunion of a man with a former neighbour jogs his failing memory encapsulated in the song, described as “a lament for things lost and gone forever.” Some stories are less successful in articulating the both strange and wondrous results of disappointment, anger, grief, and sadness: for instance, “Moon Calf” and “Balancing” depict circumstances with great potential that fizzle out by the endings.

Most haunting are stories such as “The Hour of Miss Frith” and the title story, “Walking on Water,” which portray elderly female characters struggling to reclaim their dignity in the face of public discredit: Miss Frith is notified that the department store to which she dedicated her life is being taken over by a major corporate entity, and decides to go down fighting; Lucy Gustavson is passed over as soloist at the royal visit to her life-long church, and finds herself singing “full-throated . . . reaching for one triumphant note before soaring to another” in the deserted mountains near her home. These endings are Andrews’ forte, from Miss Frith’s descent on the store’s elevator to Michael Mooney gripping the mane of the seahorse.

The short stories collected in Alix Hawley’s *The Old Familiar* are akin to those of Andrews in their dredging up of the most unlikely characters and situations for moments of revelation and atonement. Hawley’s first collection demonstrates a deft handling of narrative, image, point-of-view, and dialogue. The variety of perspectives itself is impressive, from the second-person narration in “Chemical Wedding” to the third-person narration in “They Call Her Lovely Rita.” Similarly, Hawley does not shy away from a challenging character or plot, and her opening sentences are as gripping as Andrews’ closing lines. For instance, “They Call Her Lovely Rita” begins with the two sentence catch—“Adultery. He dreamed of it chronically, and he wasn’t even married.” Situations include the dabbling in incest of a brother and sister, while their

grandmother leaves them notes stating “I know what you’re going to do” and “Bad.”

These stories are unpretentious and oddly redemptive. The disastrous dinner party in “Chemical Wedding” concludes with the main character’s link to a rebellious teenage daughter; “Yes, the People are Nice” describes the awe on the faces of nursing-home residents as they are taken to see the Christmas lights; even the difficult grandmother, almost a grotesque figure, is allowed dignity and respect as the narrator tells us “more about her.” “Have You Seen the Ghost of John” shifts our focus from elderly, infirm, and working-class characters to the diverse “tweens” and their counselors at a summer camp. The imaginative range of Hawley’s writing is remarkable and inspires our enthusiasm for the birth of her next collection. While Hawley’s academic specialization is nineteenth-century and interdisciplinary studies—she completed her doctorate at University of British Columbia and now teaches at Okanagan College—her eclectic interests and fascination with backgrounds of big pictures shine through in surprising, sometimes alarming, but often uplifting narratives.

While both Hawley and Andrews are fairly new to the literary scene, Raymond Fraser enjoys the reputation of a short-listing for the Governor General’s Award for Fiction, the Lieutenant-Governor’s award for High Achievement in English-Language Literary Arts in New Brunswick, and numerous publications in various genres. His rich life experience, including time spent in Montreal, infuses his writing in this collection, *The Grumpy Man*. The book itself defies generic definition, incorporating short stories organized in mini-collections—The Carnival, The Grumpy Man, The Commissionaire, The Sage, and the Playboy—and the novella *The Quebec Prison*. The stories focus on so-called “low-life” though many of the main characters, unlike Hawley’s, appear semi-autobiographical: like Fraser himself,

these characters are male, university-educated and literate. They also often struggle with addiction, loneliness, and destitution. These first-person narrators are unsympathetic, avoiding intimacy and connection in both friendships and romantic relationships. For instance, “Wrong Side of the Street” focuses on a student who almost lands in jail after being arrested for walking on the wrong side of the road; he refuses to pay the fine because he is convinced of his innocence, but finally relents when he is taken to see the prison and imagines living there. Fraser has a finely-tuned ear for verbal irony and a terseness that is oddly compelling. *The Quebec Prison* skillfully describes the way the narrator spends his fourteen days in prison for putting sugar in gas tanks, with such highlights as the discovery of library books.

While these stories are well-crafted and insightful, they do not resonate as strongly with the reader as the stories of Hawley and Andrews: Keith Garebian has described Fraser as “a roaring tide battering the literary shore,” but the energy seems to waver a bit through this book. In fact, the most engaging story is the anecdote explaining a cure for depression, in which the celebrity being interviewed explains that one can conquer this condition by flying to Paris and staying in an expensive hotel room for two weeks. The narrative, replete with exclamation marks, but balanced with the ironic commentary and footnotes of the narrator, evokes both laughter and insight:

You can imagine the reaction this produced, the vast numbers of people out there in TV land who were hiding in their beds or dragging themselves to the bathroom for another pill or sitting in rented rooms contemplating suicide. Some no doubt were engaged in fastening the rope about their necks when they heard this news and paused before kicking over the chair.

It is this gift for drawing humour and redemption out of “low life” and low

notes—for inspiring empathy with the most outrageous characters and situations—that marks all three remarkable books.

Échos démultipliés

Hubert Aquin

Les sables mouvants : Shifting Sands. Ronsdale
19,95 \$

Agnès Whitfield, dir.

*L'écho de nos classiques : Bonheur d'occasion et
Two Solitudes en traduction.* David 33,00 \$

Compte rendu par Patricia Godbout

Dans l'univers bourgeois, le Livre de Sable est ainsi nommé « parce que ni ce livre ni le sable n'ont de commencement ni de fin ». L'infini, dans ce qu'il a d'évanescents et de monstrueux, on le retrouve aussi dans la nouvelle *Les sables mouvants* d'Hubert Aquin qui nous fait remonter aux sources de l'écriture aquinienne hantée par la quête de la figure fuyante de soi et de l'autre. « Tout semble s'échapper de moi, écrit le narrateur en pensant à la femme qu'il attend. J'essaie de garder l'odeur âcre de son corps et le parfum grisant de son ventre. J'essaie de garder le poids de ses seins nus, mais tout glisse, il reste du sable. »

Cette nouvelle d'Hubert Aquin datant de 1953 est présentée ici en édition bilingue, avec en regard la version originale française et la belle traduction anglaise de Joseph Jones (dans laquelle on repère cependant de petites incorrections). Jones signe aussi un essai critique intéressant sur cette nouvelle qu'il rapproche avec à-propos d'autres œuvres comme *Le portrait de Dorian Gray* d'Oscar Wilde.

Dans *L'écho de nos classiques*, ouvrage publié sous la direction d'Agnès Whitfield, près d'une vingtaine d'auteurs se penchent sur les traductions en de nombreuses langues de deux œuvres majeures de la littérature canadienne publiées toutes deux en 1945 : *Bonheur d'occasion* de Gabrielle Roy et *Two Solitudes* de Hugh MacLennan.

Dans un texte important sur la traduction américaine de *Bonheur d'occasion* par Hannah Josephson, qui paraît en 1947 à New York chez Reynal and Hitchcock, Agnès Whitfield se demande pourquoi le dialogue a été aussi « défectueux » entre Gabrielle Roy et Josephson, qui fut également traductrice d'auteurs français comme Louis Aragon et Philippe Soupault. Whitfield examine avec soin les tenants et aboutissants de cette « erreur fatidique de la poudre-rie »—québecisme confondu avec le mot *poudrière* et traduit par *powderworks* par Josephson—afin de mettre en lumière pourquoi on a voulu faire porter tout le poids de celle-ci à la traductrice.

Les circonstances de l'attribution du prix Femina à Gabrielle Roy en 1947 sont également examinées dans un chapitre très intéressant signé par Margot Irvine. Une part non négligeable de *Lécho de nos classiques* est par ailleurs consacrée aux traductions de *Bonheur d'occasion* et de *Two Solitudes* dans le monde communiste. Le lecteur y apprendra, par exemple, que *Bonheur d'occasion* a été traduit en slovaque en 1949, version pour laquelle le traducteur Fedor Jesenský peine à traduire le français québécois des dialogues en fabriquant « pour l'occasion » une langue qui ne s'écarte pas beaucoup de la norme. Ce roman ne sera donné en tchèque que trente ans plus tard. C'est sans doute le contenu social du roman de Roy qui est à l'origine de la décision de le traduire.

Dans le cas de *Two Solitudes*, c'est la version tchèque qui paraît la première, en 1948, un an avant que l'éditeur Bohumil Janda ne soit contraint de fermer boutique par le régime communiste. Le choix de traduire cette œuvre s'expliquerait notamment par l'intérêt qu'on a alors en Tchécoslovaquie pour cette cohabitation ethnique dans un État moderne multinational, cohabitation dont MacLennan tire la matière d'un roman porteur—comme le note Reet Sool—d'une dualité (étymologique) dans son titre même. Quant à la traduction slovaque du

roman de MacLennan, lorsqu'elle paraît en 1984, il s'agit alors d'un titre choisi comme classique de la littérature moderne.

Bonheur d'occasion sera aussi traduit en roumain en 1968 et quatre ans plus tard en russe. Comme l'explique Anna Bednarczyk, la publication de cette traduction est rendue acceptable dans le contexte soviétique des années 1970 par l'accentuation de la problématique sociale de l'œuvre au détriment de sa spécificité linguistique et culturelle. Il faut dire que ce n'est pas facile de rendre « aller aux sucres » en russe. La stratégie ciblisme généralement retenue par les traducteurs se manifeste en outre par la domestication des toponymes et des noms propres, y compris celui de l'auteure de *Bonheur d'occasion* elle-même, qui devient par exemple « Gabrielė Rua » en lituanien.

Avec quel étonnement on apprend d'autre part que les traductions de *Bonheur d'occasion* en suédois et en norvégien ont été faites à partir de l'anglais! Dans un texte très fouillé, Cecilia Alvstad explique, pour la version suédoise parue en 1949, que non seulement celle-ci a été traduite à partir de la version anglaise, mais encore qu'elle a été abrégée à la demande de l'éditeur, vraisemblablement pour des raisons financières. La perception qu'a le lecteur suédois des personnages de ce roman s'en trouve modifiée. De plus, comme il n'est nulle part fait mention de la traductrice Hannah Josephson, cela donne l'impression que ce roman a été écrit en anglais par Roy. Comme le montre pour sa part Bente Christensen, la version norvégienne, qui paraît en 1950, est une autre traduction « d'occasion » faite à partir de l'anglais, sans coupures, cette fois, et qui connaîtra un succès mitigé en Norvège.

Si les stratégies traductives sont pour l'essentiel domesticantes, Madalena Gonzalez décèle quant à elle une approche d'écriture défamiliarisante dans *Two Solitudes*, œuvre qui emprunterait par là des traits aux littératures mineures (selon la définition qu'en donnent Deleuze et Guattari). Pour

Gonzalez, cet anglais inhabituel est la marque d'un Montréal divisé, que MacLennan a voulu explorer dans son œuvre romanesque et que l'essayiste Sherry Simon s'est attachée à parcourir plusieurs décennies plus tard dans son *Translating Montreal. Episodes in the Life of a Divided City*.

A Continuing Dystopia

Margaret Atwood

The Year of the Flood. McClelland & Stewart
\$32.99

Reviewed by Leonard Bond

Margaret Atwood's latest novel *The Year of the Flood* takes a speculative look at a quickly approaching, and astonishingly bleak, future existence. Essentially a work of cyberpunk fiction, this novel is closely related to, though not exactly a direct sequel of, her preceding fictional work, *Oryx and Crake*.

In it, the waterless flood—a widespread pandemic brought about by scientific research—quickly wipes out the majority of humankind. This leaves the novel's central female characters, Ren and Toby, along with several other secondary characters, in a struggle for life in the flood's lonely and frightening aftermath. Those who are isolated have the best chance of survival, and this includes God's Gardeners, a strange religious sect (of which Ren and Toby are members). The Gardeners not only fully expect the waterless flood, but they also spend their entire lives preparing for it.

Employing an experimental and interesting narrative form, Atwood's novel is not linear in its delivery. While it begins in year twenty-five—the year of the flood—it quickly reverts to an earlier time, unfolding considerable backstory from the years leading up to year twenty-five. We also find that Ren's chapters are narrated in the first person, while Toby's are given in the third-person-omniscient form. There are

also various sermons (delivered by the Gardeners' leader, Adam One) interspersed throughout the novel, along with a number of Gardener hymns. Though poetic in nature, these hymns reveal the often strange and disturbing beliefs of the Gardeners. One hymn, for example, promotes a wish for serpent wisdom, as the wisdom of the serpent is highly valued by the Gardeners.

Atwood's novel is also filled with Biblical allusions. The Gardeners are both religiously inclined and deeply conscious of the environment around them. A mixture of misfits from all walks of life, many are highly intelligent individuals with vast scientific knowledge. Moreover, several of the adult members are known as Adams and Eves. Each Adam's or Eve's name is followed by a meaningful number; the group's leader, for example, is known as Adam One. Each subsequent Adam and Eve plays a specific and important role in the group according to his or her number. Eve Six, for instance, is something of an alchemist, providing the Gardeners with natural remedies to everyday ailments. She even serves as a kind of "death angel" for terminally ill Gardeners.

Atwood's dystopian world is full of evil and oddity. One such example is the evil corporate police force known as the CorpSeCorps, which controls most aspects of everyday life and rules society with an iron fist. This includes taking a piece of the many mob-run businesses (such as Secret Burgers and the legalized brothels). CorpSeCorps officers wield absolute power with the aid of "spray guns" and other violent force. An organization not to be crossed, the CorpSeCorps makes it imperative that groups like the God's Gardeners keep a low profile to avoid its unwanted attention. The Gardeners, who value peace and the natural order of God's creation above all else, serve as a contrasting force to the greed and corruption of the CorpSeCorps.

Another interesting aspect of the novel is the presence of bizarre genetically engineered

animals. In Atwood's world, entirely new species have emerged through the scientific process of gene splicing. Such species as rakunks (raccoons crossed with skunks) and liobambs (lion/lamb mixes) roam the land, as do genetically enhanced pigs infused with human brain tissue, making them nearly as intelligent as their human cousins.

By the end of the novel, the world is forever changed, and so too is humanity itself, thanks to seemingly limitless genetic experimentation.

At once inspirational and frightening, Atwood's novel is certainly worth a read. Whether one takes Atwood's word as a warning for a troubled future, or instead chooses to find inspiration in the strength of her characters, is up to each individual reader. Is this novel a cautionary tale? Or is it instead a futuristic version of that age-old story of the human will to survive? Whatever the answer, some of Atwood's characters do survive, and this ensures that the novel's outcome upholds the author's own earlier *Survival* thesis. If you wish to know which characters do or do not survive, or whose survival remains in question at the end of the story, you will simply have to read the book. Highly recommended.



A Persevering Presence

Margaret Avison

I Am Here and Not Not-There: An Autobiography.
Porcupine's Quill \$27.95

Margaret Avison

A Kind of Perseverance: Two Essays. Porcupine's
Quill \$12.95

Reviewed by Deborah C. Bowen

In editing the unfinished manuscript of Avison's autobiography and reissuing her 1993 Pascal Lectures on Christianity and the University, Stan Dragland and Joan Eichner, Avison's long-time friend and editorial assistant, have provided a fascinating journey through the allusive prose of a strong and private poet. Having worked with Avison on her autobiography before her death in 2007, they continued thereafter to prepare the text for publication, adding various essays, letters, and interviews to round out the picture. The title, "I am here and not not-there," comes from Avison's response at the Vancouver Poetry Conference in 1963 to a question about what makes a poet's language distinctive. But in the Pascal Lectures, Avison uses this same phrase to describe a Christian trying to live out her faith empathetically but honestly within a secular environment: "The true believer's problem: how to say 'I am here,' and still be saying 'I am not not-there.'" The notion of presence is a paradoxically fruitful one as a guide through these books. Like T.S. Eliot, Avison was an anti-Romantic who believed that poetry is not the expression of personality but an escape from personality. And the Christian faith, to which she came in a dramatic conversion at the age of 45, also called her to a kind of self-effacement: Eichner writes that Avison "would often say that it's the poetry that matters, not the poet; similarly, it's the person of Christ who matters, not the person talking about Him."

The Pascal Lectures at the University of Waterloo are Avison's most overt reflection

on the relationship of faith to academic study. In talks entitled “Misunderstanding is Damaging” and “Understanding is Costly,” one of her key propositions is that “the growing process is dangerous, and essential.” Avison argues that growth in faith and growth in academic learning must struggle with one another: “We are of our time, not outside it; we are in the miasma of this violent, headlong, desperate, fragmenting world,” but “[t]he more we listen to each other across the seeming barriers . . . the more our categories and distinctions dwindle, if a search for God’s truth is our concern.” By a deft sleight of hand, Avison asserts that it is those who evade Christ and who ignore the Bible who are in the greatest danger of misunderstanding. The metaphors of scripture spill out into the metaphors of her poetic voice: the great paradox is that “when Christ delivers a person, it is a jail-break out of lawlessness into freedom.”

Her lectures, then, begin with propositions and grow into poetry. The writing in the autobiography is different—a picaresque sharing of moments in shorthand rather than the sustaining of a particular argument. Though the poems are seldom the focus of the writing here, there are many mentions of contexts within which a poem arose: everything from jotting down lines on the bus when returning from work at a downtown mission (for *sunblue*) to reflecting on the daily life of her last home in a seniors’ residence (“Ramsden Park,” “Dividing Goods,” “Balancing Out,” and many others). The narrative follows Avison’s development from a happy childhood in the family of a Methodist preacher, to a “gloomy” early adolescence and three months’ hospitalization for anorexia, through the discovery as a student of the vital reality of poetry, and on to supporting her writing by various kinds of work—though never “the dreaded career-status,” since this would have undermined the

centrality of the writing. Here we meet the introverted young woman who recites Rilke in German as her defence against the assault of a group of unknown boys on Bloor Street; the so-often solitary woman who yet is unnerved by the “palpable” presence of silence on a cottage vacation; and the woman who “hanker[s] to venture,” but is concerned after eight months in Chicago on a Guggenheim Fellowship not to stray too far afield, since she “sensed that further ‘travel’ would frustrate discovery. My own city . . . is still undiscovered.” Elsewhere Avison speaks disparagingly of her inability to create narrative, and it is true that at points there are sudden disconcerting jumps with apparently no substantive links between disparate memories. More intriguingly, because more reliably attributable to the sensibility of the author rather than to the truncated revision process, on occasion the laconic, bare-bones narrative paragraphs expect an emotional response that the reader has not anticipated.

Avison spent most of her long life in Toronto and knew it in ways that few do. She walked everywhere and talks fascinatingly about the parallel disciplines of walking and writing poetry. She lived in scores of different rented rooms in the downtown area, and even as writer-in-residence at the University of Western Ontario in the early 1970s she rented a simple apartment above a store, because from there she could “live an everyday life, enjoying the neighbours [she] met in the nearby Laundromat.” Of course she related to figures in the literary world too: “Norrie” Frye, E.J. Pratt, Miriam Waddington, A.J.M. Smith, William Empson, and Allen Ginsberg, to name just a few. Though she could read four or five languages, she never considered herself a scholar, and she lived so spartanly that, on her mother’s death, friends had to provide enough teacups for even a handful of guests. She was more at

ease washing soiled laundry for Evangel Hall than receiving her Governor General's Awards at Rideau Hall in Ottawa. In fact, to read this autobiography is to appreciate the sense of disequilibrium that led Avison to say, on winning the prestigious (and lucrative) Griffin Prize for poetry, "This is ridiculous!"

Despite some frustrations, then, including the lack of an index, these books are treasures. Reading between and below the lines, we encounter Avison as a woman whose life was extraordinary, not because she travelled to far-distant places or had heroic adventures, but because she identified with the lives of the poor and disadvantaged in her own city, lived in extreme simplicity, and delved deeply into the wellsprings of her faith and her poetry.

La souffrance des exilés

Edem Awumey

Les pieds sales. Boréal 18,95 \$

Compte rendu par Jorge Calderón

Le roman *Les pieds sales* raconte l'histoire des nomades qui entre l'Europe et l'Afrique sont condamnés à l'errance. L'intrigue est centrée sur Askia, un Africain qui essaie de fuir et d'oublier à Paris son passé de paramilitaire. En France, il rencontre Olia, une femme d'origine bulgare. Ensemble, ils tentent de retrouver la trace de Sidi, le père d'Askia qui a un jour abandonné son fils et sa femme. Edem Awumey entrelace dans son récit une histoire d'amour et une série de réflexions sur la figure du père, sur le racisme, sur la guerre, et la mort, ainsi que sur l'histoire.

Si l'exil d'Askia et d'Olia est vécu dans le malaise existentiel, la mémoire de l'histoire est à la source d'une souffrance qui ne peut pas être dépassée. Au cours du roman, il devient évident que l'origine d'Askia et d'Olia est confuse, car ils sont tous les deux des nomades. Quant à leur destination, elle

est également inconnue, car leurs voyages prennent plutôt la forme d'une dérive. La vie est ainsi représentée comme une expérience sans amont et sans aval au centre de laquelle il y a une absence de signification.

Askia et Olia font partie d'une communauté humaine liée entre elle par la seule expérience de l'errance : « Les informations évoquaient des embarcations de clandestins africains qui avaient échoué aux Canaries. À Santa Cruz de Tenerife, ces hommes et femmes venaient chercher le salut. Demain, [Askia] rallumerait son poste et il y aurait d'autres embarcations et une nouvelle histoire de fuite, après-demain aussi un autre chapitre avec des personnages en fugue, et les jours, les semaines, les mois suivants, jusqu'à l'usure des pieds et la fin du ciel nomade . . . » À l'expérience de ces damnés répond celle d'Olia qui écrit dans une lettre qu'elle envoie à Askia après l'avoir quitté : « Déjà, à Sofia, nous étions les Tsiganes, des étrangers aux cheveux noirs et sales, à l'univers diffus et au destin vendu aux dieux de la caravane . . . »

Awumey illustre dans *Les pieds sales* le conflit des cultures qui est vécu aujourd'hui en France, mais aussi en Allemagne, en Italie, en Espagne, et aux États-Unis. Les pays riches de l'Occident font face à une immigration massive qu'ils ne peuvent pas contrôler. Malgré le fait que les frontières sont protégées avec violence, des millions d'immigrants illégaux réussissent néanmoins à les traverser. L'adaptation, l'intégration, et la réussite dans le nouveau pays sont problématiques, sinon impossibles. La prise de conscience que le paradis occidental est en fait un mythe frappe soudainement les immigrants. Confrontés au racisme et même au fascisme, par exemple de groupes de skinheads, les *damnés de la terre* savent qu'ils ne peuvent ni continuer leur chemin ni revenir en arrière. Le récit d'Awumey évoque une vision sombre de l'expérience de l'immigration qui s'inscrit dans la tradition des romans qui traitent de la souffrance des exilés.

Lyric Translations

Elizabeth Bachinsky

God of Missed Connections. Nightwood \$17.95

Susan Holbrook

Joy is So Exhausting. Coach House \$16.95

Chus Pato; trans. Erin Mouré

m-Talá. Shearsman/Buschek \$22.95

Angela Carr

The Rose Concordance. BookThug \$18.00

Reviewed by Janet Neigh

The Galician poet Chus Pato declares “Farewell, Lyric!” in her recently translated book *m-Talá*. In *The Rose Concordance*, Angela Carr claims, “There is no I.” However, in both of their collections, as well as in the new books by Elizabeth Bachinsky and Susan Holbrook, although transformed and often fractured, subjectivity is alive and well. These four recent collections indicate that reinventing the lyric remains a vital project in contemporary women’s poetry.

In Bachinsky’s *God of Missed Connections*, the personal becomes plural, as she merges individual and collective history to explore the relationship between identity, ethnicity, and nationality. She brings a poetic lens to history, offering a cultural memory of the Ukrainian diaspora in Canada often missing from official national narratives. Bachinsky finds this history through research in “the barbed wire of internment camps in what is now Canada’s national parks system” and through familiar relationships, symbolized by objects such as her mother’s red Ukrainian dance boots. Her torque on the lyric form to explore the politics of genealogy is reminiscent of late-twentieth-century Asian Canadian poetry that unfolds ethnic difference into a Prairie landscape, such as Fred Wah’s *Waiting for Saskatchewan* and Rita Wong’s *Monkey Puzzle*.

In one of her opening poems, “Goddess of Safe Travel,” addressed to her sister, Bachinsky asks, “Why bother with history?”

and then she provides several persuasive answers that convey a personal urgency for connecting the present to the past: “Because to plough it you’ve got to own it;” “Because these questions may never be answered in the way you or I might need;” and lastly “Because I love you.” The lyric address is multiple, calling out to a goddess, her sister, and history itself. History forms the overwhelming missed connection searched for throughout these poems. Bachinsky looks at such topics as a healing folk ritual called a wax ceremony, the 1932-33 famine in Ukraine, Holodomor, and more recently Chernobyl. In the illuminating postscript, Bachinsky explains how this project required her to “locate my self, my gaze, my story.” However, what is most compelling about this book is the refraction of the “I” through a disjointed Ukrainian history.

In *Joy Is So Exhausting*, Susan Holbrook explores not the past but the vivid experiences of everyday life. Her poems are populated by a diverse array of objects, people, texts, and voices, among them Federico García Lorca, home inspection reports, petsmart.com, babies, chocolate, kittens, tampon instructions, dogs, and Gertrude Stein. One can feel the influence of Stein’s lesbian domestic themes and pleasurable insistence on Holbrook, who is a professor at the University of Windsor and a notable Stein scholar. Despite the title, the form and content of these poems are anything but tired, bursting with energy, humour, and originality. The poems, many of which incorporate source texts, remind us not to take language and life too seriously, as in her mocking apostrophe, “To Chocolate,” which begins, “You are hunky. Dessert is not the same without you.” Building on the disorienting potential of language to *Misled*, the title of her first book, these poems celebrate the materiality of language to reorient our everyday desires.

The most compelling piece in Holbrook’s collection is the concluding ten-page prose

poem, "Nursery," which embodies breast-feeding and writing simultaneously as forms of exhausting joy. The intensity and endurance of this poem challenge the assumption that one cannot get any writing done as a new mother. Holbrook's playful sentence fragments move from left to right to enact the continuous present of nursing: "Left: Lift. Right: Tuft. Left: Loved. Right: Lift her. Left: Richter. Lift her wrote her wrought her daughter laughter lifter sitter safe her light left on her." Holbrook takes on breast-feeding and motherhood, certainly under-explored topics in contemporary experimental poetry, to transform the isolated lyric "I" into a warm embodied relation through the mother-child dynamic.

In Angela Carr's second collection, *The Rose Concordance*, the lyric "I" disappears in a surrealist building made of corridors, fountains, sleep, water, mirrors, barrettes, fire escapes, and emergency exits. Through repetition, fragmentation, and translation, Carr makes texts, bodies, and buildings pliable. "Slipping into non-being, slipping off the / very end," the poems enact the sensuality of abstraction. The book is a creative response to the allegorical dream vision in the thirteenth-century poem *Roman de la Rose*. By blending writing and translation, Carr builds on Canadian women writers from the 1980s *Tessera* collective such as Barbara Godard, Nicole Brossard, and France Théoret, who explored translation as a feminist politic for understanding difference. Carr, who makes her living as a translator in Montreal, reorganizes and rewrites lines from the keyword index of this piece of medieval courtly literature on the art of love to reveal the rose not only as a symbol for the female love object but also for a subversive feminine sexuality—as in the provocative lines from the poem "Barrette." "Perhaps the barrette is the ungendered fingers of a second body. Perhaps a claw, a clasp, a clip, a cunt." Similar to Holbrook, Carr pursues

Gertrude Stein's pleasure of insistence as a space/time of feminine desire to open Stein's enigmatic phrase, "a rose is a rose is rose," into postmodern hallways, corridors, and fountains.

Chus Pato's *m-Talá*, recently translated by the Montreal poet Erin Mouré, transforms lyric poetry into a disorienting dialogue. Her unique poems take shape as radio interviews, letters, diary entries, newspaper columns, and dramatic scripts. The opening lines form the title of each poem so that "it's impossible to tell middle from beginning or end." Pato's striking phrase, "out of the fog, every morning, a huge Moebius strip," aptly describes the experience of encountering the multiple voices in her text. As Mouré puts it in her introduction, "Pato refuses to maintain the illusion that the lyric 'I' is the personal voice of the poet. She refuses the singularity of poetic voice altogether, taking on voices till she *is* these voices, these pantonymic heteronyms." Conversations unfold among an array of different personae, including Shakespeare's Cordelia, the "author," Mephisto, Agape, a radio announcer, and a woman named Brenda.

This is Mouré's second translation of the renowned Galician poet, and those familiar with Mouré's multilingual poetics will sense that one of the most intimate conversations occurring throughout this book is the exchange between poet and translator. In Spain, Pato is famous for her commitment to writing in her native language Galician, which has managed to survive despite centuries of internal Spanish colonization, most recently under Franco's regime. As Pato reminds readers, "IT'S NOT ONLY LANGUAGE THAT'S UNDER THREAT BUT OUR VERY LINGUISTIC CAPACITY, regardless of the idiom we speak." Mouré's lyric translation of Pato's *m-Talá* continues to resist the homogenization of our linguistic capacity by using poetic language to pluralize and share voices across languages and cultures.

Collecting Bodies

Jean Rae Baxter

Looking for Cardenio. Seraphim \$18.95

Dave Carpenter

Luck. Great Plains \$19.95

Jacques Godbout; trans. Patricia Claxton

Operation Rimbaud. Cormorant \$21.00

John Moss

Still Waters. Dundurn \$11.99

Reviewed by Judith Leggatt

Four recent mystery novels by Canadian writers are connected not only through genre but also through a focus on collection. In each case, a desire to possess rare and valuable objects precipitates much of the action, and collection is linked to the body count, suggesting the darker nature of acquisition and ownership. The desire to achieve status through material goods reaches its zenith with collectors, who construct their self through their possessions, and the collection and pursuit of rare objects in these novels shows how the fetishization of material goods is a symptom of larger problems with the collectors and their societies.

Dave Carpenter's *Luck* has the most usual combination of collection and murder. The objects in this case are coins, which link Saskatoon numismatist Bill Shmata, the investigating detective, to the murder of two wealthy men in Vancouver, and a murder in Banff in 1951. There is, however, a marked difference between Shmata, whose interest in coins comes from intellectual curiosity, and the villains, who are interested more in the value of the coins. The rare coins, with their high value, stand in for the class systems of Canada, where the rich can get away with murder, sometimes for decades. The "luck" of the title is ironic, showing how money makes luck for those privileged by birth, but the coins present a curse to those who attempt to wrest them from the hands of the upper classes. Carpenter's sympathy is definitely with his lower class

characters, whom he draws with a fine eye for detail that makes each character into a believable individual. The reader is left hoping that luck has finally changed for these characters.

In Jean Rae Baxter's *Looking for Cardenio*, the object in question is a lost manuscript of a play by Shakespeare. In actuality, the lost play was likely a collaboration between Shakespeare and Fletcher, but Baxter leaves Fletcher out in order to give the object of desire added value in the eyes of her readers. Baxter's protagonist, Dr. Deirdre Gunn, hopes that acquiring this manuscript will earn her tenure at the university where she has just been dismissed from a limited term appointment because of an indiscreet affair with an attractive student. Ironically, this novel focused on academics is the least scholarly of the four. Unlike the depictions of academic sex and intrigue in the work of David Lodge, Baxter's novel is pleasant fluff, a guilty pleasure that has little intellectual weight. The inaccuracy of the depiction of the tenure process is one of several places where the academic reader finds herself feeling as a medical doctor must feel watching *House*. Although it is in the present day, the novel opens at "The Learned Societies Conference," where Deirdre is giving a keynote address on the vague subject of "imagery in *The Tempest*." Despite her lack of believability as an academic, Dr. Gunn's obsession, together with that of the murderer, suggests the ways in which academic enthusiasms can easily shift from the desire to increase knowledge for the benefit of humanity to the desire for one's own material comfort and fame.

In Jacques Godbout's *Operation Rimbaud*, newly translated by Patricia Claxton, Michel Laroche, a Jesuit secret agent, is engaged by the Ethiopian government of Haile Selassie to secure the original tablets of the Ten Commandments and to smuggle them out of the country in the face of an expected coup. Laroche has an ongoing crisis of faith,

and the physical manifestation of the Ten Commandments, central tenets of his religion, becomes more an object of monetary and political value than a religious icon. In his attempt to bring the Commandments out of Ethiopia, he breaks most of the rules written on the stones themselves. The implication here is twofold and contradictory. It would be easy to infer that breaking the commandments to save the physical tablets places the objects and the message in the wrong order of importance, and that the message is similar to that of the song “One Tin Soldier,” but Godbout’s depiction of Laroche as a man who has lost his faith yet remains moral complicates this. It is equally possible to read the contradiction as suggesting that the solidity of the physical object can provide a certainty that the words cannot.

In a similar ambiguity, the title of John Moss’ *Still Waters*, the first in a planned series of Quin and Morgan mysteries, refers not only to the deep undercurrents of psychological and family tensions and memories that lie at the heart of the mystery, but also to the victim’s fish pond, and his priceless collection of ornamental Japanese koi. While the koi are—so to speak—a red herring in the mystery, the answer to the puzzle of the novel lies at the bottom of their pond. Here the collection is an organic one, and the link between the “compulsive hoarding of beauty” and “the psyche of a rapacious voyeur” suggests a direct connection between collecting animals as trophies and collecting and dehumanizing people. As in *Luck*, shared collection and obsession link the investigators to the crime. Morgan has been reading about koi, and Quin shares the victim’s academic interest in semiotics. The coincidences do not end there, and sometimes strain credulity, but the linguistic play of the novel and the subsequent questioning of meaning let Moss get away with otherwise unbelievable connections. The novel is at once playfully intellectual and grittily realistic.

While each of the novels depicts collection as questionable at best and reprehensible at worst, none is overly didactic in this depiction. *Operation Rimbaud* and *Still Waters* are more intellectual than the average mystery novel or spy thriller, but all four novels have the interesting characters, action, and plot twists expected in their genre, and all are recommended reading.

Réformistes ou nationalistes?

Éric Bédard

Les Réformistes: Une génération canadienne-française au milieu du XIX^e siècle. Boréal 27,95 \$

Compte rendu par Michel Ducharme

Dans son ouvrage, Éric Bédard reconstruit la pensée des réformistes canadiens-français qui ont dominé la scène politique au Canada-Est dans les années 1840 et 1850. Après avoir replacé ces hommes dans le contexte des grandes transformations sociales, politiques, économiques, et culturelles qui ont marqué ces deux décennies, l’auteur analyse leurs principes politiques, économiques, et sociaux. L’ouvrage se veut néanmoins bien davantage qu’une simple description de l’idéologie articulée par les leaders réformistes canadiens-français après les rébellions de 1837-1838. Il vise plus fondamentalement à réhabiliter ces hommes politiques malmenés par les historiens au cours des quarante dernières années en les présentant comme de véritables nationalistes. C’est en effet leur fidélité et leur dévouement à la cause nationale canadienne-française qui trouvent grâce aux yeux de l’auteur.

Bédard discute d’abord de la vie politique au Bas-Canada dans les années 1830. Il en profite pour présenter les futurs leaders réformistes. Il revisite ensuite leurs prises de position dans les décennies 1840 et 1850 et leur redonne leur cohérence. Il démontre alors que la primauté que les réformistes

accordaient à la nation, à son développement et à sa prospérité justifiait leur volonté de maintenir l'unité politique des Canadiens français, leur préférence pour l'agriculture comme activité économique, leur position par rapport à la pauvreté et la déviance, leur alliance avec l'Église et leur rapport au passé.

L'interprétation de Bédard se démarque de l'historiographie québécoise récente, en ce qu'elle minimise la part de libéralisme dans la pensée réformiste. L'auteur ne nie pas que les réformistes aient adopté certains principes libéraux, pensons aux principes de l'économie politique développés par Jean-Baptiste Say, mais il justifie toujours leur adoption par des considérations nationalistes. Bédard renoue ainsi avec l'historiographie nationaliste canadienne-française traditionnelle, tout en contestant l'influence de l'Église sur ces hommes politiques. De fait, l'auteur ne présente pas les réformistes comme les valets de l'épiscopat catholique. Il leur donne plutôt l'initiative dans la mise en place de cette alliance et affirme qu'ils en ont dicté les termes, selon leurs intérêts.

L'analyse est érudite et rondement menée. L'absence de discussion théorique concernant les idéologies nationaliste, libérale, et conservatrice est un peu regrettable dans la mesure où une certaine ambiguïté demeure quant à l'utilisation de certains concepts. Néanmoins, ce que le texte perd en clarté, il le gagne en accessibilité. Dépourvu de tout appareillage théorique lourd et de jargon spécialisé, l'ouvrage est instructif tout en étant très agréable à lire. Le premier chapitre est un peu superficiel toutefois. La volonté de l'auteur de mettre en valeur la continuité dans la pensée des réformistes avant et après les rébellions de 1837 l'amène à interpréter certains documents et déclarations datant des années 1830 à la lumière de sa grille d'analyse développée pour les années 1840 et 1850. Le résultat n'est pas toujours convaincant. Ceci dit, les chapitres suivants sont beaucoup plus solides.

L'ouvrage deviendra sans aucun doute un incontournable pour quiconque veut mieux comprendre la période de l'Union au Canada et l'évolution de la pensée nationaliste au Canada français après les rébellions.

De l'égard pour l'ordinaire

Paul Bélanger

Répit. Noroît 16,95 \$

Compte rendu par Marc André Brouillette

Dans son plus récent recueil, le poète québécois Paul Bélanger poursuit sa quête d'un lieu—celui du poème—dans lequel l'existence puisse atteindre sa plénitude. Cette recherche, sans cesse présente depuis la parution de *Projets de Pablo* (1988), se manifeste dans des textes qui partagent une tonalité introspective faite d'observations et d'interrogations personnelles. L'écrivain y réitère son rapport vital avec les mots qui, chez lui, font plus qu'apporter du sens. En effet, la parole constitue une véritable manière d'être et de s'inscrire dans le monde : « Je noircis le blanc de tous ces cahiers qui sont ma maison sur terre ».

Chez Bélanger, l'écriture habite et fait habiter le sujet, à l'intérieur d'un mouvement menant constamment celui-ci sur les seuils précaires que sont la marge, le retrait, et l'oubli. Quelle que soit la forme qu'ils empruntent (vers libre, prose, dialogue), les textes font surgir en creux des sursauts de conscience, formulant ainsi les fondements d'une existence qui se caractérise ici par ce qui échappe au sujet ou menace ce dernier de disparaître : « j'entre en chacun des moments que les mots / remontent de leurs sources comme s'ils savaient / capter le sillage de leur oubli. »

Par ailleurs, cette parole poétique nourrit le désir d'une temporalité qui puisse inscrire le sujet dans le réel et ne pas se limiter au seul exercice du souvenir. Tout au long du recueil, la question du temps se matérialise par l'intermédiaire d'une tension entre

continuité et fragmentation : « j'ai appris à vivre à l'infini / le moindre éclat du monde. » L'écriture permet au poète d'accéder à cette forme d'« infini » qui, à l'instar de la spirale ou du labyrinthe, insuffle un mouvement non linéaire à son existence. C'est à l'intérieur de ce mouvement, souvent interrompu dans les poèmes par des actions du quotidien, que le sujet cherche notamment à se dégager d'une « mémoire [qui] se confronte à trop d'obstacles ».

Grand lecteur de Pessoa, dont la figure et l'univers sont omniprésents dans ce recueil, Bélanger recourt à divers pronoms pour désigner des sujets qui semblent ne former qu'une seule entité, celle d'un être qui « poursuit l'auscultation » de ce qu'on pourrait nommer son ordinaire existentiel. En effet, la parole cherche à apprivoiser le retrait et l'oubli, qui apparaissent ici comme des modalités inéluctables pour atteindre un certain état de présence, de plénitude. À la manière des hétéronymes chez Pessoa, l'alternance des pronoms participe de cette démarche où le sujet, pour tenter de se saisir en entier, adopte plusieurs postures énonciatives.

Cette question de la présence se manifeste aussi par l'intermédiaire de la notion de paysage, véritable leitmotiv traversant les quatre sections du recueil. Le paysage ne renvoie pas à la contemplation, mais à une saisie intime et globale qui, tel un pressentiment, se répercute dans l'espace qu'occupe le sujet. C'est à ce *Répit*—mot qui a d'abord désigné l'égard et la considération—que nous convie Bélanger dont la voix rigoureuse prolonge une œuvre, certes discrète, mais simplement nécessaire.



L'Élan et le décours

Robert Berrouët-Oriol

Poème du décours. Triptyque 16,00 \$

Michael Delisle

Prière à blanc. Noroît 15,95 \$

Compte rendu par Nelson Charest

Michael Delisle est le récipiendaire de l'édition 2010 du Prix des Terrasses Saint-Sulpice qui, malheureusement, n'a pas été accompagné d'une bourse cette année, pour des raisons qui demeurent obscures. Son recueil présente bien une écriture *blanche*, qui s'insinue dans l'esprit modestement, sans crier gare, et se tient à mille lieux de la déclamation pompeuse. Divisé en quatre parties qui semblent se refermer sur elles-mêmes pour mieux mimer le cycle de la vie, le recueil présente d'abord des « Blasons » qui chassent le sérieux de la vie et produisent un fétichisme souriant, avant que la plume ne prenne son « Élan » dans des poèmes d'une forme particulièrement réussie, où trois vers brefs cognent d'abord un appel à l'attention avant qu'une longue période profère tout son allant et son dynamisme. La troisième partie marque l'apogée du recueil en poursuivant « l'élan » précédent dans une forme maintenant plus rassise mais en même temps plus confiante et tranquille, comme si le patronage de James Sacré permettait un retour à soi d'une voix qui n'a plus la pression d'assurer son crédit. La dernière partie, « Ruine en temps réel », titre qui rappelle pour sa part la mémoire de Robert Dickson, est beaucoup plus modeste; c'est la voix qui s'éteint lentement et retient ses effets, fin de la représentation.

Par moments le poète pratique une écriture de l'hiatus, tant syntaxique que sémantique, et tombe dans la parataxe et la simple juxtaposition des substantifs, ce qui s'inscrit certes dans une esthétique contemporaine, mais qui commence à s'essouffler et révèle davantage une paresse de l'écriture. Par ailleurs, le « blason » perd de son

efficace lorsqu'il marque un retour à soi et se coupe ainsi de la générosité qui accompagne l'observation des êtres et du monde extérieurs. Au contraire, les deux parties centrales, par leur élan, raffermissent les relations et s'accompagnent nécessairement d'une exploration mobile, aventureuse, et courageuse.

La quatrième de couverture du recueil de Berrouët-Oriol indique candidement que « *Poème du discours* propose une inédite et magistrale entrée sur le territoire de la prose poétique ». Or avant de chercher ce que peut avoir d'inédit et de magistral une telle « entrée », il faut d'abord se demander où se trouvent la prose et la poésie. Une suite de mots sans majuscule ni ponctuation ni structure syntaxique, placée en blocs, ressemble certes à des paragraphes; mais est-ce de la prose? Pour ce qui est de la poésie, elle se limite ici à une surenchère d'adjectifs, à une structure binaire reconnaissable partout et à l'invention lexicale.

On apprend que l'auteur est « linguiste-terminologue » et qu'il vient de remporter le Prix du livre insulaire d'Ouessant 2010.

Arcadia under Glass

Stephanie Bolster, Katia Grubisic, and Simon Reader, eds.

Penned: Zoo Poems. Signal \$21.95

Harry Thurston

Animals of My Own Kind: New and Selected Poems. Signal \$18.00

Richard Greene

Boxing the Compass. Signal \$16.00

Reviewed by Nicholas Bradley

In *Landscape and Memory* (from which my title comes), Simon Schama observes that the establishment of zoological gardens in Victorian Britain depended on then-modern technological developments. “Industrially heated piped water and plate glass made it possible for the exotic and the savage to be imported right into the midst of city life,”

with the result that urbanites could gaze upon animals avidly and without inconvenience: “Nothing, in fact, could keep them away.” Poets were no more immune than ordinary citizens to the fascination of zoos, and the zoo poem became a twentieth-century staple, a type predicated on the observation of animals at close quarters and on responses to their confinement. Rilke’s “Der Panther” remains the paradigm.

Penned demonstrates the persistence and variety of the zoo poem. The anthology’s editors have included quintessential examples (Marianne Moore’s “The Monkeys,” Ted Hughes’ “The Jaguar,” Randall Jarrell’s “The Woman at the Washington Zoo”) as well as some pleasant surprises, including Stephen Burt’s “At the Providence Zoo,” with its witty, eyebrow-raising first lines (“Like the Beatles arriving from Britain, / the egret’s descent on the pond / takes the reeds and visitors by storm”). The same principle applies to the volume’s Canadian poems; I was pleased to reread Irving Layton’s “At the Barcelona Zoo,” Al Purdy’s “In Cabbagetown,” and Margaret Atwood’s “Dreams of the Animals,” and I was delighted to discover Brian Bartlett’s “Hutterite Twins Tropical” and A. F. Moritz’s “Zoo Keeper.” The editors, in my view, have made a fine selection.

In their introduction, Stephanie Bolster, Katia Grubisic, and Simon Reader propose that zoos and anthologies are analogues: “Before the work of the poet or the anthologist begins, the zoo is already a literary place, and an anthology of sorts. A system designed to make nature readable, the zoo offers representative examples of species and even entire ecosystems.” The introduction cogently establishes the editors’ rationale for compiling the volume. Less clear is the intended audience. Who will read an anthology of poems pertaining to zoos? (Zookeepers? Zoo aficionados? Only scholars of zoos?) I do not mean that the book is uninteresting or unengaging—the opposite is true—but *Penned* is so highly

focused that one wonders about the breadth of its appeal. Perhaps the points that it registers most forcefully are that the zoo represents a perennial occasion for the poet and that the zoo poem is now a venerable poetic convention, a chance for poets to test themselves against tradition: *Penned* is finally a book about poets as much as about other strange beasts.

Beasts and birds are the recurring subjects of *Animals of My Own Kind*, an excellent gathering of Harry Thurston's poems from six collections published between 1980 and 2007. A dozen new poems appear as well. A recurring theme is the omnipresence of the non-human world—"we are never alone," he writes in "Sanctuary"—and the poems frequently compare the writer to other creatures. In "Ring-billed Gull," for instance, the speaker suggests that he is like the worm-picking bird, "Loafing, waiting / for something to turn up, to swallow it whole." But Thurston elsewhere resists the idealization of nature. In "Going to the Woods Alone," he offers a retort to Robert Frost: "Neighbours agree: no man should go to the woods alone." *Animals of My Own Kind* is a meticulous selection, but it perhaps errs on the side of stinginess: Thurston's poetry deserves a longer volume. I was moved and impressed by *Animals of My Own Kind*, and it is no criticism to note that Thurston's collected poems will be a welcome book.

In the new poems Thurston engages, with an elegiac strain, two important American influences: Elizabeth Bishop and James Wright. Similar border-crossings occur in Richard Greene's *Boxing the Compass*, his third collection, in which the ghostly presence of Robert Lowell can be felt well before the American poet is finally summoned, in an epigraph drawn from "For the Union Dead" (which follows one from Allen Tate). Lowell and Tate are hardly fashionable touchstones, but Greene puts their examples to good use in *Boxing the Compass*, writing personal (but not private) poems that

demonstrate a sophisticated control of free-verse techniques. The example of *Life Studies* is palpable in poems such as "Martin Royackers," a commemoration of an acquaintance who left Canada to join a religious community in Jamaica and was there murdered. Greene finds in this odd story a means of reckoning his own life: "I lost him long ago, / though the years seem an eyelid closed and opened." "Whaler" offers another account of the poet's past, a tracing of what remains of his "Great-grandfather, / whaler out of Nantucket": "What I have of him / is my father's reverence for / his silence, / a sense that pain will kill you / if you speak of it." His subjects often betray academic interests and so the poems risk seeming somewhat *recherché*, but Greene deals sensitively with esoteric material: *Boxing the Compass* is an interesting and carefully worked collection.

Narratives and Ethics

Deborah C. Bowen

Stories of the Middle Space: Reading the Ethics of Postmodern Realisms. McGill-Queen's UP \$59.95

Reviewed by Lydia Forssander-Song

In *Stories of the Middle Space: Reading the Ethics of Postmodern Realisms*, Christian professor Deborah Bowen continues her exploration of postmodern narratives and ethics which previously culminated in a collection of essays entitled *The Strategic Smorgasbord of Postmodernity: Literature and the Christian Critic* that she edited and published in 2007. In an engaging conversational tone, Bowen begins her latest book with "A Christian Apologia." This prologue calls on George Steiner, Jacques Derrida, Stanley Fish, Roland Barthes, Mikhail Bakhtin, Michel Foucault, Richard Rorty, Richard Kearney, Albert Borgmann, Paul Ricoeur, and Terry Eagleton to make a space for the other which for Bowen can also include a transcendent Other (in

particular, the Christian God) and what she calls “a *relational ethics*” (emphasis hers). She frames her own argument as a rudimentary triangle with “the transcendent” at its apex and “word” (language) and “world” (“reality”) as the two points at its base. She dubs the space in the triangle the “middle space” of relational Christian postmodern realism. In her introduction, Bowen outlines the history of literary ethics beginning with Victorian humanism. She focuses on Emmanuel Levinas’ “relational ethics where responsibility to the other always takes primacy over the self” and Mikhail Bakhtin’s “ethics of *grace before responsibility*” (emphasis hers).

Building on the theoretical groundwork clearly and carefully laid out in the prologue and introduction, Bowen subsequently successfully demonstrates the following four modes of postmodern realism as each relates to the ethics of “personal and social accountability” and “readerly responsibility” in the next four chapters of her book: historiographic metafiction in A.S. Byatt’s “Sugar,” Joy Kogawa’s *Obasan*, Penelope Lively’s *Moon Tiger*, and Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*; magic realism in Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*, Jeanette Winterson’s *Sexing the Cherry*, and Jane Urquhart’s *Away*; parodic myth in Thomas King’s *Green Grass, Running Water*, Julian Barnes’ *A History of the World in 10 1/2 Chapters*, and Timothy Findley’s *Not Wanted on the Voyage*; photographic co-optation in Roland Barthe’s *Camera Lucida*, Michael Ignatieff’s *The Russian Album*, Michael Ondaatje’s *Running in the Family*, and Carol Shields’ *The Stone Diaries*. The fifth chapter effectively conflates the historiographic, the magical, the mythoparodic, and the photographic in a study of A.S. Byatt’s “The Djinn in the Nightingale’s Eye.” Although Bowen acknowledges Byatt’s stance as an anti-Christian, in view of Byatt’s use of Christian myth, Bowen concludes that her story “cannot be closed into

post-Christian stasis, but carries within it a living ethico-religious framework in which it continues to mean.”

In her epilogue, Bowen cites Valentine Cunningham on the importance of the Christian tradition not just “for understanding past literature and our relationships of responsibility to it” but also “for the *existence* of both past and contemporary texts” (emphasis hers). Bowen would argue that ignorance of the Christian tradition that intersects with the history of Western literature is “ethically culpable.” However, she highlights “a new kind of middle space, a bridge between the believer and the non-believer, which avoids the impasse of creedal statements”: “if God’s existence is to be understood *as story*, as the biblical narrative, then there is a sense in which all responsible relationship is potentially traced through by God and every narrative is potentially the story of that trace” (emphasis hers). Bowen concludes that “though . . . it is in the middle space between world and word that true stories are still and always created, there is a sense in which they are not really true, nor even really created, until they are read, and received, and *engaged*” (emphasis hers).

Apart from distracting typographical errors such as a missing period (“ . . . shalom “Shalom” . . .”) in the Prologue, a spelling error (“commom grace”) in Chapter Two, and a missing article (“In interview . . .”) in Chapter Four, Bowen, through her thoughtful investigation of narratives and ethics, makes a convincing argument that the term “Christian postmodernist” is not an oxymoron. She claims that “[a] Christian postmodernist stands consciously in this middle space . . . a space where she or he is aware of perspectival limitation and a historically situated immanence that is traced through the Transcendent and filled with possibilities for discursive creativity.” Consequently, her argument, although friendly, accessible, and useful to all readers/critics, is most helpful for a Christian

audience learning how to read in a post-modern age and/or anyone who seeks a theoretically informed position that conflates the subjective and self-conscious postmodern self with the ethical dynamic of the other/Other. Finally, in order to add to “a new kind of middle space, a bridge between the believer and the non-believer,” Bowen needs to further explore the connections (if any) between the understanding of “common grace” in mainstream/conservative Christian theology and the sense of common humanity in liberal humanism.

Des écrits poétiques

Katia Canciani

Lettre à Saint-Exupéry. Fides 22,95 \$

Suzanne Lamarre

À pieds joints dans les flaques. David 12,95 \$

Carmen Leblanc

Fragments de ciel. David 12,95 \$

Compte rendu par Paul Genuist

Dans *Lettre à Saint-Exupéry*, Katia Canciani invite Saint-Exupéry à prendre un verre à la terrasse d'un café d'Aylesford, en Nouvelle-Écosse, le 5 juin 2007. Ce court ouvrage est illustré de fort belles aquarelles de l'auteure; le papier et la mise en page rappellent les premières éditions du *Petit Prince*. La conversation est en fait un monologue car Saint-Exupéry n'ouvre pas la bouche même s'il est présent à travers les nombreuses références à ses livres qui illustrent cette lettre imaginaire que l'auteure écrit à celui dont elle admire l'œuvre qu'elle connaît à fond.

Katia Canciani établit une correspondance sur deux points entre sa propre vie et celle de l'auteur. Elle est en effet pilote de brousse professionnelle et écrivaine. Elle met en parallèle le pilotage et l'écriture qui sont sources de découvertes et d'aventures. La maternité a mis fin à sa première occupation mais lui a fait découvrir la seconde pour le plus grand plaisir des lecteurs. Écrit

dans un style simple, poétique, intimiste, ce livre plein de charme est très attachant.

Les haïkus sont certainement les poèmes les plus brefs puisqu'ils s'écrivent sur trois lignes et ne doivent pas dépasser dix-sept syllabes. Deux auteures québécoises, Carmen Leblanc, native de Sept-Îles, et Suzanne Lamarre, qui se définit nord-côtière de cœur et d'adoption, ont publié deux ouvrages de ces poèmes d'origine japonaise dont la popularité ne cesse de croître auprès des poètes contemporains.

Pour Suzanne Lamarre, composer un haïku, c'est « présenter avec une petite étincelle de beauté qui le prolonge dans l'éternité, ce que le regard a capté ». Dans ce premier recueil, *À pieds joints dans les flaques*, les images sont tirées de la nature, mer, plage, rivières, scènes d'automne ou d'hiver. Certains sont empreints de sérénité « fin de l'orage / suspendues à la corde / des gouttelettes d'eau » ou « crépuscule / un huard solitaire/bercé par les vagues, » d'autres ont une valeur descriptive « petite brise / le soleil en mille morceaux / sur la mer, » intimiste « sur la plage / sous un ciel étoilé / la lune dans tes yeux » et même ironique « Internet / de jeunes sédentaires / voyagent à l'écran. »

Pour Carmen Leblanc, qui en est à son deuxième recueil, ce minuscule poème qu'est le haïku « réussit à souligner le quotidien, le vrai, le beau, le vivant, l'intense. » Dans *Fragments de ciel* l'auteure s'efforce de créer des liens entre les images urbaines et celles de la Côte-Nord. Ses poèmes traduisent avec aisance un souvenir momentanément révélé : « ce souvenir / au bout de mes doigts / ton visage, » une image saisie dans l'instauranté de la perception « brise sur l'étang / une libellule se pose / sur un nénuphar, » une association d'idées « musée d'art moderne / les branches enchevêtrées / de l'orme centenaire, » une simple sensation « fraîcheur du soir / dans l'herbe humide / mes pieds nus » ou même de l'humour « jour de canicule // sur l'affiche du Subway: / manger frais. »

Aussi brefs soient-ils, les haïkus composés par ces deux auteures évoquent toute une gamme de sensations fugitives.

Voix du fleuve

Nicole V. Champeau

Pointe Maligne. L'infiniment oubliée : Présence française dans le Haut Saint-Laurent ontarien. Vermillon 30,00 \$

Compte rendu par Emmanuel Bouchard

Nicole V. Champeau n'en est pas à sa première publication sur le Saint-Laurent et les lieux qui le bordent dans sa partie ontarienne. En 1999, puis en 2004, elle a fait paraître *Mémoire des villages engloutis*, un ouvrage qui porte sur les conséquences de l'aménagement de la Voie maritime et des rapides du Long Sault dans les années cinquante entre Mille Roches et les Mille-Îles. Ont paru également, en 2001, une pièce de théâtre intitulée *Moulinette*, qui a mérité le Prix du livre d'Ottawa, puis, en 2002, le livre de poésie *Ô Saint-Laurent*. Le fleuve à son commencement (2002), finaliste pour l'obtention du Grand Prix du Salon du livre de Toronto.

Lauréat en 2009 du prix du Gouverneur général dans la catégorie « Essais et études », *Pointe maligne* est un livre atypique qui allie la rigueur scientifique à la sensibilité poétique. Son projet : retrouver et faire revivre la mémoire d'un lieu oublié à travers les sources historiographiques disponibles (et parfois difficilement accessibles); retrouver cette « présence française » engloutie en même temps que nombres de villages. Une préoccupation identitaire marque donc cette entreprise qui, d'entrée de jeu, n'hésite pas à dresser des listes de toponymes français et amérindiens retrouvés sur des cartes des XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles (« *La grosse roche Isle Tonti Pointe au Baril Pointe au Diable Fort de Cataragui Fort de la Présentation Isle aux goélands Pointe à la Corne* »),

comme si la reconquête de l'espace et de soi devait d'abord passer par la dénomination. Devant le silence relatif des historiens sur les lieux qui l'intéressent et qu'elle affectionne, l'auteure a senti la nécessité de dépouiller elle-même les sources (Maurès de Malartic, le comte de Frontenac, les jésuites des *Relations*, Bacqueville de la Potherie, Rémy de Courcelles, François-Xavier de Charlevoix . . .) et de les rendre aux lecteurs, jusque dans leurs irrégularités orthographiques et typographiques, pour « qu'il leur soit loisible de saisir l'esthétique d'un autre temps », mentionne-t-elle en introduction. Parmi les figures historiques convoquées, celle de Pierre-Esprit Radisson est certainement la plus importante. Nicole V. Champeau ne se contente pas de faire revivre les aventures de ce voyageur téméraire et de tracer les grandes lignes de la controverse entourant ses écrits (l'attribution des textes et leurs traductions); elle dresse de lui un portrait nuancé, s'exerçant à analyser et à comprendre notamment « [sa] dépossession, [sa] crise d'identité sociale, [son] isolement . . . et [son] déchirement ». Elle ne s'en cache pas : ce personnage, dans sa complexité, « ranim[e] pour [elle] le débat identitaire » qui est au cœur de son projet. Voilà certainement ce qui explique qu'elle lui accorde un chapitre complet de son ouvrage.

D'ailleurs, c'est précisément dans cette capacité d'appropriation de l'histoire que réside la force du livre. Le recours à l'historiographie s'inscrit dans un discours personnel, voire poétique. Sauf dans de rares passages où le collage des citations manque un peu de naturel, l'érudition ne semble pas constituer la fin de ce travail, mais se subordonne à l'expérience de la mémoire qui y préside. La variété des formes et des tons en est certainement le témoignage le plus clair : le récit historique côtoie un souvenir de jeunesse de l'auteure; la description d'une anse, un poème sur

leau; les débats de spécialistes, l'éloge d'un auteur ou d'un ouvrage contemporain. Un livre nécessaire, écrit de manière intelligente et sensible.

Quelques décalages

Francine Chicoine, Terry Ann Carter, Marco Fraticelli, dir.

Carpe Diem : anthologie canadienne du haïku/ Canadian Anthology of Haiku. Éditions David, Borealis 18,95 \$

Patrice Desbiens

Décalage. Prise de parole 13,95 \$

Mansel Robinson

Roc & rail : trains fantômes : suivis de Slague : l'histoire d'un mineur. Prise de parole 13,95 \$

Judith-Louise Thibault

Le Groupe des huit : huit poètes anglo-québécois. Noroît 24,95 \$

Compte rendu par Nicole Nolette

La poésie et la traduction s'offrent dans ces quatre ouvrages à la métaphore du décalage, mais surtout, à celle de son absence. Cette métaphore est déployée explicitement dans le recueil de poèmes *Décalage*, qui s'ajoute à l'œuvre considérable de Patrice Desbiens. Dans ce recueil, le poète part à la recherche de Jack Kerouac (« Jack where's Jack ») à Québec, puis de lui-même à Timmins et à Sudbury. Au fil des poèmes, les décalages du temps et de l'espace qui séparent le poète des objets de ses recherches s'effacent, si bien que le narrateur se perd : « Je ne sais pas qui / il est. / Je ne sais pas / qui je suis. / Je ne suis qu'un passant ». Entre les funérailles de Kerouac et la collection de souvenirs du poète, « [i]l n'y a pas de décalage, » que des rapprochements clignotants et des moments d'errance teintés tant d'humour que de tragédie. Les bribes de vie évoquées par Desbiens se collent au carnet et au crayon, les deux lieux où se rencontrent les mots de Kerouac et du narrateur, hésitants et migrants, troublés par la mise en mémoire et l'acte du recueillement.

Dans ce sens, *Trains fantômes*, de Mansel Robinson, marque aussi, dans la forme dramatique, des espaces de remémoration et de migration. À la veille de la mort de son père, Danny lui fait revivre les histoires de son passé de cheminot en évoquant toutes les odeurs de sa locomotive : « la vapeur, l'acier, le diesel ». Les souvenirs ainsi évoqués tracent le parcours géographique du père du personnage principal sur les rails du Nord de l'Ontario. Dans cette œuvre dramatique où « on est tous en transit sur notre départ vers là-bas ici quelque part », les voyages à bord de « trains fantômes » font trembler « tout le bouclier canadien » et frissonner « tout le Nord ». La traduction du dramaturge Jean Marc Dalpé fait transiter la langue de Robinson vers la sienne, traçant son relief fantôme dans les mêmes lieux, tel un décalage. Si Danny, dans *Trains fantômes*, tente de se réappropriier les mots de l'histoire de son père, le rapport familial se renversera dans *Slague : l'histoire d'un mineur*, du même auteur : Pierre ira à la recherche du pardon et de la justice suite à la mort de son fils dans un accident de mine. Et si *Trains fantômes* s'étend, dans sa géographie tentaculaire, à l'horizontale, *Slague* fait appel aux profondeurs verticales de la mine et du roc émotif qui pèse sur Pierre, mettant en relief les dimensions spatiales et temporelles du décalage mémoriel chez Robinson.

Dans l'anthologie *Le Groupe des huit*, Judith-Louise Thibault choisit et traduit huit poètes anglo-québécois rencontrés autour du collègue John-Abbott : Stephanie Bolster, Michael Harris, Eric Ormsby, Robyn Sarah, Norm Sibum, David Solway, Carmine Starnino, et Peter van Toorn. Le travail d'« amour » de Thibault a pour visée de transcender le décalage de la langue par une troisième langue : celle de la poésie. L'anthologie est ainsi un plaidoyer pour les rencontres, celles entre la langue française et la langue anglaise en traduction, celles entre poètes franco-québécois et anglo-québécois : « une telle histoire nous apprendrait que les poètes ont

compris depuis longtemps que le poème ne vit pas enfermé et qu'il est souverain de lui-même, en même temps qu'elle mettrait en évidence la genèse d'un métissage qui continue d'opérer. » Dans cette édition bilingue, les poèmes anglais s'opposent aux traductions françaises, conversent avec elles, tout comme leurs auteurs entrent en dialogue dans le monde de la poésie québécoise. Si un tel partage sous-tend le projet, Thibault affirme tout de même en préface que « ces voix ont en commun la recherche de leur singularité, de leur autonomie ».

Enfin, *Carpe Diem* s'oppose radicalement au décalage. Plutôt, cette anthologie canadienne de haïkus invoque la fonction de cette forme poétique particulière : « observer et nommer l'instant présent. Au tour du lecteur de rêver, de croire à l'écriture et de saisir cet instant. » Cette troisième anthologie du haïku, publiée vingt-trois ans après l'ouvrage bilingue *Haiku : Anthologie canadienne/Canadian Anthology*, rassemble pour la première fois quarante poètes francophones et quarante poètes anglophones. Seules les textes liminaires sont traduits, alors que les 320 haïkus (quatre de chaque poète) apparaissent dans la langue d'écriture. Le format non-traduit de l'ouvrage offre à lui seul une occasion de saisir, de « cueillir » le jour sans le décalage de la traduction. Alors que certains des haïkus demeurent très près du regard de l'instant présent, de la nature, et de la forme traditionnelle (5/7/5), d'autres s'en éloignent pour tisser des formes hybrides et des observations liées à l'intime.

Disparates, ces ouvrages ouvrent la poésie et la traduction à l'image du décalage, dans ses écarts temporels et spatiaux, comme « défaut de concordance entre deux choses », entre les points de vue, entre les langues. Cette ouverture donnera toutefois aussitôt lieu tant à des concordances qu'à une « troisième langue » par laquelle, là où « il n'y a pas de décalage », il est possible d'écrire les rapprochements du sensible au-delà des différences.

Les Limites entre la fiction et la réalité

Francine D'Amour

Pour de vrai, pour de faux. Boréal 22,50 \$

Compte rendu par Catherine Khordoc

Le titre de ce recueil de nouvelles par Francine D'Amour ne renvoie pas, comme c'est souvent le cas, au titre d'une des nouvelles. Ce titre met plutôt cartes sur table, dans le sens où les enjeux au cœur des nouvelles mêmes, mais aussi du principe qui en guide la compilation y sont dévoilés. Ces nouvelles sont-elles alors des œuvres de fiction ou des œuvres autobiographiques? Un peu des deux. Mais si dans beaucoup d'œuvres littéraires, les éléments empruntés au vécu de l'auteur sont tissés dans la toile fictive discrètement, Francine D'Amour nous présente des nouvelles groupées en deux ou trois, où l'une fait le récit d'un événement « vécu » et l'autre en serait la « version fictionnalisée » de manière à mettre en évidence le jeu entre fiction et réalité. Évidemment, nous ne pouvons savoir avec certitude si les récits qui comportent la qualification d'« Apostilles » dans leur titre sont vraiment autobiographiques, mais tout porte à le croire : des références à l'auteure même, qui se nomme explicitement; des commentaires sur l'événement qui aurait suscité la nouvelle accompagnatrice; un « moi » qui se veut insistant, comme si D'Amour essayait de nous dire qu'elle nous parle *vraiment* d'elle-même. Cette manière de faire côtoyer récits et nouvelles suggère d'ailleurs la génétique de ces nouvelles.

À propos des nouvelles plus précisément, l'auteure s'inspire de ses élèves de littérature, à qui elle demande justement de rédiger une composition de style « narratif », une « histoire, vraie ou inventée », dont ils se plaignent (dans « Préambule au bouchon »). C'est la composition de « Jérémie » donc qui se trouvera étoffée et fictionnalisée, dans la nouvelle, « Le Bouchon ». D'autres nouvelles

relèvent davantage de l'intime et, lorsque l'on saisit qu'il s'agit de nouvelles issues d'événements vécus par l'auteure, elles deviennent encore plus émouvantes. Les six dernières nouvelles (incluant les « Apostilles ») évoquent les traitements contre le cancer qu'a suivis la narratrice/l'auteure. « Le Labyrinthe » est une nouvelle particulièrement bouleversante : elle ne contient ni ponctuation ni majuscule, et raconte le cauchemar que fait la narratrice d'un hôpital où tout le monde est mort, mutilé de manière atroce. Un peu plus loin, dans l'« Apostille au Labyrinthe », dernier texte du recueil, l'auteure nous révèle qu'elle a « vraiment fait cet horrible cauchemar », ce qui pousse le lecteur à relire « Le Labyrinthe » qui, tout d'un coup, n'est plus une simple œuvre de fiction.

Un recueil de nouvelles qui tisse habilement fiction et non-fiction, imposant au lecteur un nouveau mode de lecture et une réflexion sur ce que veulent dire « le vrai » et « le faux » dans la littérature.

It Is All in the Details

Nitin Deckha

Shopping for Sabzi: Stories. TSAR \$18.95

Nila Gupta

The Sherpa and Other Fictions. Sumach \$18.95

Reviewed by Sharanpal Ruprai

In *Shopping for Sabzi*, the debut collection of short stories by Nitin Deckha, the characters are anxious and eager to please not only themselves but others as well. In “Enterprising Widow,” Kamala, Harish’s Indian widowed mother, explains how she does not want to “be like one of those grandmothers on the plane, staring at those stupid movies . . . your father is dead, yes, it’s true . . . his life ended, but not mine. Somehow everyone seems to forget that.” These characters are rich with dialogue, and the readers get a sense of that eagerness to please. The Indian widow, who struggles

with Indian social expectations, returns in “Who Auntie Hai Yahan,” when Kusum, a widow, takes up Bollywood dance lessons. These stories about widowed Indian women are in contrast to stories about the complications and cultural struggles of young professional South Asians living in North America. In “Shopping for Sabzi,” Pushpa, a South Asian woman, explains to her one-night stand Amol, “We’re both shopping for sabzi. It’s a phrase my dad uses to talk about our generation. We’re always on the hunt for the next great guy . . . trying them out for size, seeing how they measure up against the previous one, and if they don’t we drop them like a bruised tomato.” These “shoppers” are searching not only for love but for approval as well. Deckha’s use of quick plot lines, vague connections, and lack of detail can leave the reader bewildered. In the stories “Will Model for Food” and “Diva Desperada,” the narrative arc is fractured while the many typos and strange use of idioms break the narrative flow. In “Cheese Guru Kiss” and “Edmund Square, N1,” old flames come back to haunt and taunt the main characters, and the conclusions are satisfying. While Deckha’s debut collection adds to a body of South Asian narratives, it could have benefited from more precision and crafting.

Nila Gupta constructs short stories that engage the reader, and we follow these characters and their lives through artful storytelling. Gupta transcends borders within the collection; for example, in “The Boy He Left Behind,” we read a first-person narrative of a young man returning to India to arrange his mother’s funeral. When he realizes that his one-way ticket to Canada is really his father’s way of rejecting him, the young man “[sinks] into Canada and . . . Canada [is] an accommodating beanbag chair, politely rearranging its shape for [his] comfort.” In a story about finding home and love, this description is fitting. Each short story gestures towards the next story, and there is a poetic element to Gupta’s writing.

I don't want to give away the ending of "Honeymoon in Kashmir," but I will say that my first thought upon finishing was, "Is that true love or a twisted obsession?" Gupta manoeuvres the reader around cultural traditions of marriage, and the reader understands more clearly the cultural patriarchy that still exists around these traditions. Gupta skillfully navigates the reader from one character's inner thoughts to the next in the story "In the House of Broken Things." Moving from an aging schoolteacher who takes in students, Ms. Kamla Vati, to the inner thoughts of her former charge, Mohammed, to a broken-hearted Irish woman, Molly, we understand the complexities of returning to a homeland. When the story ends we turn the page to the final short story, "The Tin Bus," where we are hanging upside down in a bus on the side of a mountain stuck in a landslide. That same bus Ms. Kamal Vati awaits in the previous story. At the conclusion of the final story I am reminded of the first story, "The Sherpa," and the collection completes a full circle. These stories are intricate circles; Gupta understands what it means to craft not only a single story but also a whole collection. Her skill at writing and storytelling is showcased throughout this collection. All the characters, the locations, and content are intriguing, complex, and genuine. This is a collection that one could read in one sitting if only to then have the enjoyment of rereading it all again.



Storied Images

L. James Dempsey

Blackfoot War Art: Pictographs of the Reservation Period, 1880-2000. U of Oklahoma P US \$45.00

David Bouchard and Pam Aleekuk

Long Powwow Nights. Red Deer \$24.95

Reviewed by Blanca Schorch

In *Blackfoot War Art: Pictographs of the Reservation Period, 1880-2000* L. James Dempsey has compiled a comprehensive and critical volume examining pictographic robes, war teepee covers, liners, doors, and panels. This thorough analysis of Blackfoot pictographs shows how the art functions as a mode of cultural representation, highly symbolic and intimately connected to Blackfoot history and narratives that emphasize Blackfoot warrior culture. The art, as Dempsey clearly shows, is both highly personal, reflecting the exploits of individual warriors and chiefs, and simultaneously communal and collective. It reflects the lived experience of an entire people, illustrating the narrative events of history from a distinctly Blackfoot perspective.

According to Dempsey, the stylized images are not simply art in a purely aesthetic sense; rather, the pictographs function to communicate historical information. As in many Indigenous storytelling traditions, the "art" of the visual representation is not separable from its meaning or function within a particular cultural and historical context. Blackfoot visual art, as Dempsey shows, contains narrative. And, as with other forms of culturally restricted discourse, one must "already know something" about the story in order to understand what is being depicted. Thus, rather than depicting events realistically, Blackfoot pictographs evoke the historical and narrative meaning lying behind these events. The pictographs thus quite literally "draw" on the narrative memories of individuals. Consequently, Dempsey catalogues

each pictographic “artifact” in terms of its storied history. The contextual history that this book provides adds significantly to earlier scholarship and narrative resources on Blackfoot literature. Events recounted in George Bird Grinnell’s *Blackfoot Lodge Tales* and J.W. Schultz’s *My Life as an Indian*, both from the turn of the last century, as well as the more recent historical novel *Fools Crow* by Native American writer James Welch (1987), are brought to life in the pictographs illustrated in Dempsey’s text.

Though not intended to be exhaustive, Dempsey has nevertheless catalogued the largest study of Blackfoot art to date, and the numerous colour plates as well as black and white illustrations effectively bring together visual image and narrative history. The author has done a remarkable job in terms of tracking down sources from a variety of places; much of this art lies in private collections and/or museums and contextual information is frequently missing. Dempsey consequently interviews witnesses and other key players wherever possible; in other instances he draws on archival sources to fill in the gaps in information. One must be cautious, he observes, in interpreting any art from the perspective of one’s own cultural experience. In the case of the Blackfoot, the symbols may be generic, but only those who created the pictographic robes, teepee covers, liners, and door panels, might actually know the stories behind them. Some of the art works, however, remain unidentified; it is not always known to whom the pictographs belonged nor whose exploits are recorded. In other cases, stories have been recorded and preserved for pieces that have themselves gone missing. These examples reveal the gaps in an Indigenous history that colonization has not fully managed to erase.

In contrast to Dempsey’s encyclopedic compilation, David Bouchard’s and Pam Aleekuk’s *Long Powwow Nights* speaks to a very different audience. Intended for children, the book is a lavishly illustrated,

bilingual text written in English and Mi’kmaq, with an audio CD to accompany it, including music by Buffy Sainte-Marie. While Dempsey’s book speaks to the cultural specificity of Blackfoot war art, *Long Powwow Nights* draws instead on pan-Indigenous tradition. The authors and illustrators seem less concerned with tribal and cultural affiliations than with the notion of a common Indigenous identity, and pride in that identity. As such, powwows have evolved into a pan-tribal experience that speaks to the common identity of Indigenous peoples across North America. As a children’s book, *Long Powwow Nights* illustrates how the relevance of powwows today lies less in their authenticity in terms of local history and culture, and more as part of a larger community identity. Concerns around cultural representations in this book, however, lie in its potential audience: a young Indigenous person is sure to recognize him/herself here, but I am not so convinced that non-Indigenous children would move beyond the stereotype of the Plains Indian as representative of all Indigenous peoples in North America. While the book is sure to appeal to its young audience, I personally would have preferred some discussion of tribal and cultural specificity, even if in a glossary at the end of the story itself.

Ce que révèlent les lieux environnants

Pauline Dugas

Fragment d'eau. Perce-Neige 14,95 \$

Carmen Leblanc

Nid de brindilles. David 12,95 \$

Compte rendu par Ariane Tremblay

Fragment d'eau, premier recueil de l'artiste visuelle Pauline Dugas, dévoile une poésie du désir, où les sens occupent une place indétrônable. L'écriture de l'auteure nous dévoile un univers clos, où la sensualité

cohabite avec le spectacle émouvant des saisons. Entre le « commencement », cet « espace magenta troué d'herbes jaunes / l'automne », et « l'été terminus », le recueil laisse défilier les quatre saisons qui reviennent, cycliques. L'auteure évoque, dans cette poésie du paysage, le va-et-vient qui habite le règne naturel, mais aussi les blessures discrètes—à peine murmurées—de l'humain.

La poésie de Dugas lie habilement le silence des lieux à celui des êtres. Le poème « Exécuté paysage » traite en effet de « silences baroques / ces fleuves étranges qui coulent là-haut », tout comme « Lumière de l'œil » évoque « le grand pin mort . . . silence après silence après silence » ; de nombreux textes dévoilent parallèlement un décryptage du réel à travers les sens, surtout par les yeux (« Au loin », « Voyage », « Lafléchée », etc.). Parcourir le désir, donner forme à l'indicible, saisir l'infiniment petit, voilà entre autres ce à quoi s'adonne le magnifique recueil *Fragment d'eau*.

À l'instar de Dugas, Carmen Leblanc publie, avec *Nid de brindilles*, son premier recueil. Ce regard émerveillé et juste sur la nature environnante que posait Dugas, on le retrouve également chez Leblanc. L'œuvre mêle les haïkus de la poète à certains fragments écrits par sa mère, ce qui n'empêche cependant pas le texte de conserver toute son homogénéité.

La poésie de Leblanc tend à saisir ces moments spécifiques qui forment l'existence : ses haïkus, brefs et concis, ont cette rare capacité de révéler le quotidien. *Nid de brindilles*, à l'image de *Fragment d'eau*, met en scène les saisons qui, dans leur déroulement, permettent aux beautés de la nature de se transformer. On passe en effet d'un printemps où « gazon humide / deux merles se partagent / un dernier ver » à un « matin de juillet / des aigrettes de pissenlit / au gré du vent ». Plus tard, « dans la neige / l'empreinte de l'homme / en pattes d'ours ». Les images simples, d'une douceur infinie,

défilent donc dans cette œuvre où les mots justes permettent à une réalité rurale de se profiler.

Growing Pains

Deborah Ellis

We Want You to Know: Kids Talk about Bullying.
Coteau \$21.95

Kate Scowen and Peter Mitchell

i.d.: Stuff That Happens to Define Us. Annick
\$24.95

Reviewed by Gisèle M. Baxter

In examining children's/"young adult" fiction treating social problems, I often ask myself, who reads this? People actually experiencing the problems, or people viewing them from the outside? Recently, in reviewing the Tamakis' superb graphic novel *Skim*, I observed that reading it as an adult and knowing that many growing pains do end must be quite different from reading it as an anguished teen in the midst of their anguish. Two recent collections of anecdotes address significant problems many children and teens face in growing up, from the point of view of people who are with few exceptions still very young, their memories still raw.

Deborah Ellis is renowned as an author of fiction and non-fiction examining the lives of young people in a variety of global settings, promoting a global awareness of the issues they face. *We Want You to Know* compiles a series of prose passages derived from open-ended interviews with a number of young people in southern Ontario who are affected by bullying, mostly as victims but in some cases as perpetrators. Several are in their teens, others are around ten years old. Their stories are followed by open-ended questions aimed at readers, and are interspersed with sticky-note style boxes offering concise thoughts on bullying by children and teens around the world.

Kate Scowen is a social worker who, in

collecting the stories for *i.d.*, had them transcribed and illustrated by Peter Mitchell in a style that echoes Ralph Steadman's exaggerated perspective. These stories cover a range of issues, including body image, culture and ethnicity, abuse, depression, sexuality, and gender identities. They are followed by conventional text summaries of responses to interview questions concerning the aftermath and consequences.

The stories in both books are often heart-breaking, even the simplest of them, especially in the straightforward, colloquial tone of their narration. It is a relief to find resources listed at the ends of both texts, so that readers identifying with these issues from experience (or who know people in these situations) will realize there are places they can contact for help. While *i.d.* seems to assume a teen audience, and so more or less lets the teen voices speak for themselves, *We Want You to Know* does seem to assume some intermediary, probably a teacher, who would use the questions for class discussion exercises. The questions could often use a few more prompts, as they sometimes seem to assume "right or wrong," "yes or no" answers, and the global comments need a little more context, as they often beg disturbing questions (one girl refers to bullies being severely punished at two levels of school administration: what does this mean? what might the implications of this approach be?).

The aims of Ellis' book are straightforward, its perspective optimistic. It largely presents children who see bullying as preventable (although the book makes clear it is pervasive). Perhaps this arises from its assumption of a fairly young, teachable audience who then will seek to make this change (so that it would benefit from addressing the context issues identified above). *i.d.* sometimes suggests that the consequences of that defining stuff might linger; this is disturbing, but also true, and food for thought both for teens and the adults they eventually become.

Exorcising Demons

Marina Endicott

Open Arms. Freehand \$23.95

Des Kennedy

Climbing Patrick's Mountain. Brindle & Glass
\$19.95

Reviewed by Brandon McFarlane

The troubled young woman who narrates her own story is becoming a common figure to Canadian literature. Colleen in Lisa Moore's *Alligator*, Nomi Nickel in Miriam Toews' *A Complicated Kindness*, and now Bessie Smith Connolly in Marina Endicott's *Open Arms*. Bessie is just as troubled as her literary contemporaries, yet she shares her problems with a cast of equally unsettled mother figures. Sensational hardships abound, characters constantly cry, and self-conscious melodrama ensues. The plot can only be insufficiently summarized: Bessie, upon her grandfather's death, moves from Nova Scotia to Saskatoon to be reunited with her aging, divorced, indie-rocking mother, Isabel. The two live with another mother-daughter couple, Katherine and Irene, who are the products of Bessie's father's (Patrick) second failed marriage. The first third of the novel details Bessie's awkward reunion with Isabel. The middle portrays Bessie and Irene visiting Vancouver to see Patrick, who has seemingly abandoned a third wife, Colleen, with twins due any moment. The two young women help Colleen deliver the babies. In the third section, Bessie's grandmother arrives in Saskatoon hoping to speak to her daughter, only to discover that Isabel has disappeared. They chase Isabel across the prairies, always one step behind, as she tries to rest her demons once and for all. To further complicate matters, Bessie realizes she is pregnant; the father is her "true love," with whom she recently broke up, and she fears that she may have HIV, potentially spreading the disease to both former lover

and future child. The novel is significantly plot-driven.

From a formal perspective, Bessie is further burdened with the responsibility of narrating her family's story. The abundance of adversity certainly offers the potential to aesthetically experiment with psychological realism, but this project seems not to have interested Endicott. Rather, the first-person narration is flat. Bessie lies and represses memories, but perhaps due to the elaborate plot, Endicott underscores the novel's mysteries with some blatant foreshadowing. She does, however, exploit Bessie's abrupt switches from blasé to tears for comedic effect. Bessie can shrug off some pretty heavy drama and yet regularly succumbs to weepy bouts. During the more ridiculous scenes, Bessie often self-consciously comments on her life's tendency toward melodrama.

Des Kennedy's *Climbing Patrick's Mountain* follows Patrick Gallagher, a misanthropic but renowned rose-gardener who decides to serve as a celebrity host for a garden tour in Ireland. He doesn't really want to go on this trip because he dislikes people and he fled Ireland twenty years earlier, stealing his family's savings, stealing from the IRA, and abandoning his newly pregnant teenage lover. But he reluctantly accepts the gig as a desperate attempt to save his rose garden from being developed into a subdivision. Thus he accepts the job hoping to find a rich Irish patron to support his garden.

Climbing Patrick's Mountain is a funny book. Patrick is the bad boy of the rose world—he creates stunning hybrids that are notorious not only for their unparalleled beauty, but for their names inspired by famous female body parts: Jennifer's (Connelly) Jewels, Nicole's (Kidman) Knickers, and Michelle's (Pfeiffer) Mischief. Kennedy relies upon a series of clashing opposites to create much of the novel's comedy: the crude, angry Patrick leading a group of pretentious flower-lovers. Or,

conversely, the rose expert becoming caught up in criminal intrigue while simultaneously playing the police, the IRA, and a third group that remains ambiguous. The plot shies toward the ridiculous.

Kennedy uses an interesting narrative perspective that shifts throughout the novel. At times, he focalizes the characters to fully exploit the verbosity and pretensions of the floral community. Similarly, the third-person narrative often enters Patrick's consciousness to incorporate some Irish dialect (most often various forms of *Jesus!*). The device is stylistically humorous, but its overall success is diminished by the novel's conclusion. As Patrick's various Irish demons return to reveal his life of sin, the novel jarringly enters the mythic realm. In the final chapter, Patrick re-enacts St. Patrick's summit of *Croag Padraig* to expel his personal demons. The scene is rather ambiguous as it is difficult to tell if Patrick's brief quest becomes a profound catharsis or another form of ironic humour. Rejected by civilization, Patrick's final vision is of an exposed female rose awaiting his fertilization: "His demons were fled; his spirit was at peace. Even as the darkness intensified and the spectral figures crowded in around him, he felt no fear. At the very moment of emergence, he had a sudden beatific vision of a parent rose, stripped of its petals and anthers, naked, awaiting the kiss of life-bearing pollen." Depending upon one's reading, the climax becomes a final ridiculous joke or a dismal gesture toward significance.



Marian Engel's Last Novel

Marian Engel

Marian and the Major. McGill-Queen's UP \$85.00

Reviewed by Janice Fiamengo

"Elizabeth and the Golden City" was the working title of the autobiographical novel that Marian Engel left unfinished at her death in 1985, parts of which have now been edited and introduced by Christl Verduyn in a handsome volume by McGill-Queen's University Press. Engel's novel was inspired by the life of Major William Kingdom Rains and the two Doubleday sisters, his wards, with whom he traveled from England to Upper Canada in 1830. Abandoning his wife and most of his children in England (they later traveled separately to Upper Canada but did not join him), Rains came with Frances and Elizabeth Doubleday first to the shore of Lake Simcoe and later to St Joseph Island, near Sault Ste Marie, where he fathered nineteen children with the two women, built a series of substantial homes, and gained some notoriety by his living arrangements. Anna Brownell Jameson mentions him disapprovingly in *Winter Studies and Summer Rambles*, reporting the rumour that his domestic partners were Native women; despite or because of the family's reputation, little is known about their everyday lives. Engel had been fascinated by the story since learning of it in 1969, and Major Rains, whom she suspected to be a "charming bastard," was the model for the book-collecting Colonel Cary in her novel *Bear*.

In "Elizabeth and the Golden City," Engel updated and re-imagined Rains' life (calling him Major Arthur Silliker) from the perspective of one of the sisters, Elizabeth, who in Engel's version lives with her sister and the Major for some years, bearing him one child, before finding a home of her own; her love for and rivalry with her sister Frances are at the heart of the story. Engel made Elizabeth a woman of her own era,

someone who grew up during the Second World War, experienced the death of her mother and abandonment by her father at age fifteen, attended McGill University during the heyday of Hugh MacLennan and Leonard Cohen, worked as editor and translator for a small publishing company during the Canadian renaissance of the 1960s, and eventually became a writer herself. The multi-layered story enabled Engel to indulge her interest in the unusual history of the Rains-Doubleday family while also representing personal experiences; in addition to the main narrative, she had plans to include a not-yet-integrated fantasy story, created by Elizabeth in girlhood, of two sisters journeying towards a magical place in search of their lost mother. Writing to her literary agent, Engel judged the manuscript to be potentially a "good book" with many "ramifications . . . worth working on" and looked forward to completing it. Her death from cancer only a month later made that impossible.

In the opening and most developed section of the novel, which describes the death of Elizabeth's mother and its effect on both daughters (the first scene, beginning "When my mother died, I was reading *Jane Eyre*," is brilliant and harrowing), the domestic and social detail makes for a compelling account of post-war girlhood in small-town Ontario. The quality of the writing matches that of such masters of the genre as Margaret Atwood and Alice Munro: always intelligent, supple, convincing. The arrival on the scene of the Major—hired by the girls' father to take over where he cannot cope—introduces a note of Gothic eroticism soon born out; and the subsequent account of the publishing world of the 1960s renders authoritatively the flourishing Toronto cultural scene, which Engel knew well.

Christl Verduyn has done excellent work in bringing the novel into print, providing an overview of the lives of Rains and the

sisters, and selecting, with some explanatory notes, the best and most complete manuscript sections for publication. Her contention that Engel's last work deserves to be more widely known is fully justified by the text she has assembled, which is always vivid and absorbing. While it is difficult to judge an unfinished novel *as a novel*—the disparate parts being unclearly related and occasionally self-contradictory or repetitive, suggesting that significant crafting and re-working would have been necessary before publication—this is nonetheless an immediately gripping text, bearing testimony to George Woodcock's praise for the "excellent simplicity and perfect pitch" of Engel's prose. Readers will undoubtedly regret that the writer did not survive to realize her vision.

Un monde créé et défait

Sylvie Maria Filion

Mary-Jane la tueuse. Prise de parole 14,95 \$

Compte rendu par Pénélope Cormier

Mary-Jane la tueuse : avec un tel titre, on pourrait s'attendre à un récit policier. En un sens, c'en est bel et bien un, quoique non conventionnel. Il s'agit bien plus de sonder les mystères de la psychologie du fascinant personnage éponyme que de résoudre un crime. La cinquantaine de courts récits composant l'ensemble explorent divers aspects du personnage sans toutefois faire de réel progrès. Les titres, tous des variations sur le nom, n'aident guère en ajoutant une couche à l'énigme : « Mary-Jane et les topinambours », « Mélodie-Jane », « Mary-Jane Doe » . . .

La plume imagée de Sylvie Maria Filion est attachante dans sa capacité à énoncer avec simplicité des vérités puissantes : « Mary-Jane connaissait la méchanceté comme étant quelque chose de bon et la bonté comme quelque chose de mauvais. » Touche par touche, l'écriture construit des portraits

cohérents, qui nous font connaître le personnage sans la comprendre pour autant. En ses meilleurs moments, l'esthétique n'est pas sans rappeler Boris Vian, dans le sens où l'intérêt de l'écriture réside dans l'appréciation instantanée de l'univers métaphorique créé, plutôt que dans la recherche à tout prix de la solution à chaque figure de style.

Cette poésie de la métaphore vient équilibrer un autre aspect de l'œuvre, soit son évocation directe de réalités très dures, du viol à la promiscuité autodestructrice. Dans ce contexte, l'invention d'un monde imaginaire devient pour le personnage une porte de sortie, un système de défense et un refuge tout à la fois : « Son univers était un jeu d'agilité. L'on devait se mesurer à son imagination malade, à l'exaspération détraquée, si l'on voulait triompher. »

Tous les aspects de l'œuvre sont ainsi parfaitement synchronisés et cohérents, tout en préservant et respectant le chaos de l'univers du personnage. Malheureusement, l'auteure n'a pas su résister, en fin de parcours, à donner la clé de l'histoire. Cela est extrêmement regrettable, car éliminer ainsi prosaïquement tout suspense poétique neutralise d'un seul coup toute la magie de l'œuvre.

Voir le visible

Catherine Fortin

Le silence est une voie navigable. Noroît 14,95 \$

Olivier Labonté

Lointain écho de la petite histoire. Triptyque 15,00 \$

Michel Létourneau

Les rives claires. Triptyque 16,00 \$

Compte rendu par Cyril Schreiber

Catherine Fortin est une poète rare et précieuse : six ans se sont écoulés entre son premier et son deuxième recueil de poésie. Son troisième, paru en 2007, pose un nouveau jalon dans sa carrière atypique. Dans *Le silence est une voie navigable*, Fortin utilise un langage poétique jamais

complexe mais toujours fort symboliquement. Séparé en trois parties (« Les semblants bleus de nuit », « Territoire de l'obscur » et « Chemins d'occasion »), ce recueil de poésie saura toucher directement le lecteur qui ne peut qu'être ému par ces mots simples et efficaces. Catherine Fortin parcourt les traditionnels thèmes du voyage, de la mémoire, de l'oubli, et de la beauté du monde, sublimée par la nécessité vitale de la création littéraire. En effet, écrire apparaît comme l'unique solution pour restituer la mémoire du monde. Avec, au final, un constat rassurant : « Sommes-nous tous condamnés / à faire le voyage / à ne pas disparaître ? ». Un petit livre tout simplement sublime et poignant.

Olivier Labonté a étudié la littérature à l'UQAM. *Lointain écho de la petite histoire*, son deuxième recueil de poésie, est aussi séparé en trois parties. Dans la première, « Espaces verts », un retour à la terre, à la nature, est mis en scène dans le but de survivre, de se sauver. Dans la deuxième section, intitulée « Martyr le péché », la remontée à la surface (à la suite d'un malheur ?) se poursuit via la compagnie, forcément éphémère, d'un chien. Enfin, dans « Tu prends corps par les nues », un dialogue s'établit entre le « narrateur-poète » et un tu inconnu; rapport plus intime, plus personnel, et pourtant plus touchant, plus universel. C'est dans cette dernière partie que la poésie de Labonté est la plus touchante, car on sent qu'il a trouvé sa voie (ou voix) poétique. Comment résister devant un tel message d'espoir : « déposons les armes / des hommes naîtront / peut-être / d'une forêt ou du brouillard // puissent nos regards déployer leurs lumières ». Malheureusement, le reste du recueil n'est pas du même calibre, et un certain abus d'italiques, combiné à un manque évident de structure (surtout dans la première partie), font de *Lointain écho de la petite histoire* une œuvre de jeunesse imparfaite.

Les rives claires est le cinquième recueil de

poésie de Michel Létourneau, et l'on sent toute sa maturité et son expérience de poète dans ces pages. Les poèmes de Létourneau sont ici très courts, d'une page chacun, et d'une longueur de sept ou huit lignes maximum. Mais leur impact sur le lecteur est grand. La première partie, « Piges dans l'ouvert », laisse parler un je attachant. La deuxième, « Quelques baraquements subsistent », fait plutôt place à un nous qui représenterait tous les humains. Le tout illustre la beauté et l'équilibre du monde, et la place de l'humain au sein de celui-ci. Un retour à l'enfance, thème récurrent dans *Les rives claires*, semble être la solution qui apporterait du sens aux humains que nous sommes. Un grand recueil pour un grand poète.

Gabrielle Roy, franco-manitobaine

Lise Gaboury-Diallo

Sillons. Hommage à Gabrielle Roy. Blé 39,95 \$

Compte rendu par Sophie Marcotte

L'année 2009 a marqué le centenaire de la romancière Gabrielle Roy, qu'on a surnommée, de son vivant, « la grande dame de la littérature canadienne-française », et que Lise Gaboury-Diallo, reprenant une expression de Carol J. Harvey, présente dans l'introduction au collectif *Sillons. Hommage à Gabrielle Roy* comme « la grande dame de la littérature franco-manitobaine ».

L'ouvrage, publié aux Éditions du Blé, qui ont pignon sur rue à Saint-Boniface, ne se veut pas un recueil d'articles savants. Il se donne plutôt comme une suite de courts textes (récits, poèmes, témoignages) inspirés de la vie ou de l'œuvre de Gabrielle Roy, par des « écrivaines et écrivains franco-manitobains, d'origine, de choix ou de passage ». Chacun de ces textes est accompagné d'une œuvre d'art. L'ensemble est précédé d'une introduction de Lise Gaboury-Diallo et d'une brève présentation de Gabrielle Roy

par la sénatrice Maria Chaput, qui insiste surtout sur l'importance de la romancière pour la communauté franco-manitobaine.

Il ne s'agit pas, on l'aura compris, d'un ouvrage destiné aux chercheurs universitaires. Il intéressera surtout les lecteurs de Gabrielle Roy, encore très nombreux à fréquenter ses romans, ses récits, ses nouvelles, et ses textes autobiographiques et épistolaires. Le livre, qui s'ajoute aux publications, conférences, colloques universitaires, et documentaires qui ont célébré le centenaire de l'auteure, ainsi qu'à une exposition préparée par l'archiviste Monique Ostiguy à Bibliothèque et Archives Canada à Ottawa, contribue, à sa manière, à garder *vivant* l'héritage littéraire de la romancière.

Cela dit, ce sont surtout les thématiques et les grandes interrogations qui traversent cette œuvre—celles qui touchent de près à l'être humain et aux tourments qui l'animent—qui font en sorte qu'elle nous interpelle encore aujourd'hui. Que Gabrielle Roy ait été franco-manitobaine, canadienne, ou québécoise, tout cela importe bien peu, dans la mesure où elle a voulu laisser sa marque autrement, c'est-à-dire en poursuivant son unique ambition, comme l'explique François Ricard, son biographe, d'« écrire et [de] rester à la hauteur de sa vocation d'écrivain ».



Un simulacre de noyade

Maurice Gagnon

L'Isle silencieuse. Fides 24,95 \$

Compte rendu par Natasha Dagenais

Dans son troisième roman policier, *L'Isle silencieuse*, Maurice Gagnon nous emporte sur l'Isle-aux-Grues de l'époque d'après-guerre où le corps de Pierre Duquet, un jeune homme de l'Isle-aux-Oies, est retrouvé mort sur la batture, c'est-à-dire sur la zone de balancement des marées séparant les deux îles. L'auteur nous peint une communauté d'insulaires qui s'unissent afin de présenter une certaine image de la dépouille. La vie des insulaires telle que décrite par Gagnon démontre combien les membres de la communauté se soutiennent les uns les autres, chose peu étonnante vu l'emplacement géographique de l'île. En effet, les habitants corroborent l'opinion générale au sujet de la réputation de Duquet : tous semblent dire qu'il s'agit d'un ivrogne et d'un lâche. En d'autres termes, ils décrivent son caractère de telle manière qu'on ne s'attarde pas trop sur ce qui lui est arrivé. Chargé de l'enquête, Gilbert Gauthier est un détective de la police provinciale qui se rend compte rapidement qu'il ne s'agit pas d'une simple noyade. À ce titre, le policier, qui soupçonne une mise en scène, découvre, petit à petit, un complot de silence qui règne sur cette "île silencieuse," un complot mené par les insulaires qui sont très solidaires entre eux. Ce silence rend l'enquête davantage corsée.

Quoique l'intrigue en soit n'est pas si originale, le roman demeure intéressant à cause de l'époque et du contexte social, historique, et géographique. En outre, l'importance de la religion catholique dans cette communauté se fait réellement sentir et reflète parfaitement la place de la religion au cœur de la vie quotidienne des Québécois des années quarante. De plus, on y découvre comme toile de fond la politique de Maurice

Duplessis qui sous-tend les arguments, les potins, de même que les ambitions des villageois; cette vision politique est tantôt soutenue par certains insulaires, tantôt critiquée par d'autres. Cette dichotomie politique est présente également sur le plan social, car le rôle des femmes dans le polar nous rappelle que celles-ci avaient beaucoup de contraintes familiales et sociales, et, trop souvent, leurs choix de carrière étaient plutôt limités. Par ailleurs, l'auteur nous dépeint la rivalité entre les deux plus belles filles du village, Marthe et Édith, qui cherchent, au-delà du mariage et en dépit des contraintes, à s'émanciper. Outre quelques coquilles et quelques régionalismes, le texte se lit plutôt bien.

Façonnages et refaçonnages

Gary Geddes. Bruno Sibona, trans.

L'armée de terre cuite. Noroît 15,95 \$

John Asfour. Nadine Ltaif, trans.

Nisan. Noroît 17,95 \$

Compte rendu par Patricia Godbout

Initiative intéressante que celle des Éditions du Noroît de publier récemment en traduction française deux recueils de poèmes canadiens-anglais qui avaient paru en version originale il y a quelques décennies. *Nisan*, de John Asfour, remonte en effet à 1976 (Fiddlehead Poetry Books), alors que *The Terracotta Army*, de Gary Geddes, date de 1984 (Oberon Press). Dans ce dernier recueil, Geddes s'est emparé habilement d'un sujet très riche, celui de cette armée de terre cuite, découverte en Chine durant la décennie 1970, qui accompagna dans son dernier voyage Qin Shi Huang, premier empereur de Chine au troisième siècle av. J.-C. Au fil des poèmes, une galerie de personnages—archer, garde, lieutenant, bourrelier, etc.—prennent tour à tour la parole pour expliquer comment Bi, le maître potier, s'y est pris pour les modeler. Geddes poursuit, quant à lui, leur façonnage

au moyen de mots, matériaux plus durables. Le vague-mestre n'affirme-t-il pas que si l'armée d'argile est symbole de fragilité, le poème, lui, « continue à vivre dans l'oreille »? Cela, il le fait notamment par le rythme, dans des vers saccadés aussi bien en anglais qu'en français : « cliffs, marshes, quagmires, thickets » deviennent, dans la traduction de Bruno Sibona, « falaises, marais, bourniers, fourrés », rappelant le souci d'un Chateaubriand de calquer le *Paradis perdu* de Milton « à la vitre », jusque dans sa réalité prosodique. Le portrait central qui se profile derrière ceux des soldats et autres membres de l'armée, c'est celui du potier, leur créateur, lequel s'est d'ailleurs représenté dans leurs rangs en maître d'arts martiaux. Dansant autour des statues, le tambour du régiment ne sait plus s'il doit saluer l'original ou la copie. Cette réflexion sur la représentation, le geste de faire et le geste de copier, est prolongée ici, il va sans dire, par l'activité de traduction, laquelle est ici assez experte, quoique trop prudente en quelques endroits.

Poète originaire du Liban, John Asfour est en outre traducteur de poésie de l'arabe à l'anglais. Le recueil *Nisan* réunit des poèmes d'amour et de désamour, écrits dans un style dépouillé qui s'apparente parfois à celui de Khalil Gibran (mais l'auteur prend soin de préciser qu'il n'est pas prophète). Les textes sont presque exempts d'ancrages spatio-temporels (à part quelques renvois au pays du Cèdre que le poète a quitté). On sent aussi l'influence de Walt Whitman, poète nommé dans le recueil. Toutefois, les vers souvent anaphoriques d'Asfour sont dépouillés de la suprême assurance whitmanienne. Le besoin—en même temps que le plaisir—d'écrire semble avoir préséance dans ce recueil sur le message à communiquer : « Que dit la flûte? La flûte ne dit rien. / Elle chante. » La traductrice Nadine Ltaif, elle-même poète, a une bonne plume, de toute évidence. Mais il est regrettable que la version française qu'elle donne à lire soit

alourdie par de nombreuses fautes de divers ordres : « let us rest » ne veut pas dire « laissez-nous nous reposer », « go back to sleep » ne se rend pas par « retourner dormir », et le mot « spring » en anglais ne signifie pas toujours « printemps ». Le problème principal, c'est que certaines images en sont modifiées, ce qui importe en poésie, comme chacun sait.

Cutthroat Fashion

William Gibson

Zero History. G.P. Putnam's \$31.00

Reviewed by Kevin Hung Te Tjia

What is the use of writing the future when we're living in it right now? The answer to this question is why William Gibson is one of the most significant science fiction writers today. Gibson's latest novel *Zero History* caps off a trilogy that began with *Pattern Recognition* (2003) and continued with *Spook Country* (2007). A breathless techno-thriller, *Zero History* features a cast of familiar characters struggling at the turn of a new decade to cope with the future-present world that threatens to leave them behind. Milgrim, the Russian-translating junkie spy from *Spook Country*, returns as one of two protagonists in *Zero History*. He is now dried out and rehabilitated thanks to the reach and influence of Hubertus Bigend, the marketing magnate of Blue Ant fame. This time Bigend has Milgrim pulled back into the shadowy world of corporate espionage to hunt for the elusive designer of a secret high-end Japanese-sourced denim line of clothes going by the name of Gabriel Hounds. Hollis Henry, the ex-singer of a defunct band also from *Spook Country*, joins Milgrim on Bigend's payroll as they engage in a frantic cat-and-mouse chase through the streets and alleys of South Carolina, London, Paris, and then back again to London for the electric

denouement. Their search for indigo-soaked raw denim leads them alternately scurrying on the pavement consulting their current location on glowing iPhone screens, and lane-splitting while perched on the backs of motorcycle courier bikes as city-scapes blur by.

Gibson wears his technological and fashion influences proudly on his sleeve. For the man who wrote *Neuromancer*, the novel that effectively jump-started the cyberpunk genre in 1984, and then famously bought his first computer only to complain about its noise that the fans made, he's taken quite comfortably to cyberspace (a term Gibson himself coined). With branded product placement, Gibson's novel proliferates with iPhones, MacBook Airs, and augmented reality apps. iPhones are the dominant platform for piloting experimental UAV drones, Twitter (private messaging only, of course) is used in lieu of dead drops, and those wingsuit flyers that generated such buzz on the blogosphere a few years ago feature prominently. One wonders if his use of brands and today's technology will date the novel quickly or if the central ideas about the atemporality of higher-than-high fashion, surveillance culture, and augmented reality will transcend the product placement. His influences also help to explain why Gibson jumps with such glee into the cutthroat world of high fashion in *Zero History*. Gibson is currently curating his own line of clothing based on his novels in collaboration with the high-end Japanese brand Buzz Rickson. Ironically, for instance, Gibson and Buzz Rickson have collaborated on a coat based on the label-free jacket worn by the Cayce Pollard in *Pattern Recognition*. In *Zero History* Gibson brings his famously obsessive attention to detail to bear on the semiotics of fashion. Essentially, what do the clothes we wear say about us? And how do we read the clothes of others? The magnate Bigend, who dresses idiosyncratically in a Klein blue suit described as the

pain-inducing colour of a computer error screen, presents a perfect example. Everywhere he appears people cringe instinctively, an entirely intentional strategy on his part. Given the fact that men's fashion traditionally draws its roots from military design, it is no coincidence that Milgrim and Hollis quickly find themselves butting heads with underground arms dealers and Department of Defense agents over a contract for combat wear in an ever increasing high-stakes game that threatens to unseat even Bigend, the once seemingly invincible powerbroker, from his throne.

Science fiction readers and fashionistas alike will be drawn to the novel. Most Gibson fans will be unsurprised that the ending flounders, but the novel is still worth reading for its characters and the tangibility of their environments. The pace of *Zero History* is frantic and requests the reader's undivided attention. Blink and you'll miss something worth catching. As one motorcycle courier memorably advises Milgrim on the art of being a passenger, "[Y]ou need to stay with me, lean with me, on the turns. But not too much. It's like dancing." Stick close to Gibson, lean with him through the curves, and enjoy the ride.



Divergent Perspectives on Grace and Memory

Kuldip Gill

Valley Sutra. Caitlin P \$16.95

Fiona Tinwei Lam

Enter the Chrysanthemum. Caitlin P \$16.95

Moez Surani

Reticent Bodies. Wolsak and Wynn \$17.00

Gillian Sze

Fish Bones. DC \$16.95

Reviewed by Sharanpal Ruprai

It is with a heavy heart that I am reviewing Kuldip Gill's second book of poetry, *Valley Sutra*. Kuldip Gill passed away in May 2009, a month after the collection was accepted by Caitlin Press. Marisa Alps and Kate Braid edited the collection. In the first section, "The Mill Town," Gill presents us with a young Punjabi Sikh girl's memory of growing up in Canada. In "The Clicks and Snaps of a School Day," the narrator recalls feeling guilty about being from "Indja," and not knowing any of the history of Calcutta. In "Recalling Home," the sixty-year-old narrator meditates on how as a young girl she asked her mother questions about her mother's body only to receive pinches and stares. These poems are located in tense childhood nostalgia and reveal how the young narrator has come to understand her world around her. Gill is masterful at weaving issues of race, gender, and religion to recreate a Punjabi Canadian childhood experience. In the second section, "Bill Miner's Notebook," Gill fictionalizes Miner's life and imagines Miner speaking of Canada's first train robbery and places a Sikh man, Amar Singh, on the train guarding the safe. The stories of Miner and Singh are woven together and I am left to ask, who was on the train that night? Was there a Sikh man wearing a turban? Gill's skillful narration and imagination leave the reader yearning to know more about Canadian

history. As someone who considered Kuldip as a friend and mentor, I am left with a pressing question after her passing: who will now write and share these stories, memories, and history of the Punjabi Canadian women's life in the Fraser Valley? I am truly grateful that Caitlin Press published this work and made it available for us to read. Kuldip Gill's grace and storytelling are deeply missed.

In Fiona Tinwei Lam's second poetry book, *Enter the Chrysanthemum*, childhood memories are a dominant theme. Lam associates her childhood memories with her son's childhood and her aging mother's memory loss. In "Nursing Home," all three narrative threads are woven together. The poem "Kindergarten at the Transylvania Flavour Restaurant" suggests that through childhood questions over lunch we learn of our histories "crumb by crumb." Lam's collection is rooted in narrative, and she tells the reader of the pitfalls of being a single mother in "Kite" and "Snowman." At times, the poems are excessively marked by narrative and require more precision, crafting, and focus. Nevertheless, Lam's collection is a pleasure to read.

Moez Surani's debut collection *Reticent Bodies* is plentifully stocked with stylized lyrics that are sharp yet vulnerable. He addresses the limits of poetry by using parentheses as in the poem, "Sunday Morning (after the Gujarat Quake)" where he states in the last stanza, "(How many times have I put off writing this / and even now as I begin / I know I'll tell only half-truths / of sunlight and not monsoon)." In a later poem, "Ally Dolle," he uses parentheses to assert the poet's voice. I found myself reading repeatedly "White Tub" in the second section, "Fictions." The tensions between images of love, sex, and violence are vivid, for example, at the conclusion of the poem when the watermelon is cut and the "Seeds dive laterally from the knife's discourse / the blade falling into sheets / that once held orgasms and repetition." Surani's poems are

skillfully written and the craft of writing is exhibited within the collection. At times a second read is required because some of the line breaks cause some perplexing meaning. In the final section of the collection, "6 Reels of Joy," the poet assumes an incongruous tone that is at times lost on the reader.

Fish Bones is Gillian Sze's debut collection of "punchy poetry." The collection is riddled with unique city images such as in the poems "She Has a Lovely Face," "How to be Dead," or in "17th Floor." In "Fragmented" the narrator sees herself ingrained in the city, "I have found bitefuls of me on the curb, / scraps of me in the gutter." These fragmented images of the body in the city are visually disruptive but innovative. The collection reads as a series of writing assignments that are loosely connected by titles and would have benefited from some stronger organization. However, the poems stand on their own with a distinct voice, imagery, and confidence. The last poem of the collection, "The Changes Between," is for anybody who returns to Winnipeg for the holidays. Sze captures the old beauty of Winnipeg when she writes "So bright you could mistake it for the sun, / the bus is still yellow and orange," or further in the poem she references "Robin's Donuts," a Winnipeg landmark (in my mind). Sze has an upcoming chapbook, *Allow me to Conjugate*, with Withwords Press.

Gill's and Lam's second collections of poetry expand upon Canadian women's literature and engage readers in their divergent perspectives on memory, history, and women's lives. Further, both women poets address cultural memory and its significance for women. Both collections would have benefited from some further editing to cut down the narrative leaks. Surani's and Sze's debut collections represent bold new voices that convey complex lyricism.



Living On

Barbara Godard and Smaro Kamboureli, eds.

Canadian Literature at the Crossroads of Language and Culture. NeWest \$36.95

Reviewed by Lorraine Weir

One of the pre-eminent theorists of her generation in Canada, Barbara Godard brought a learned and complex understanding of semiotics and deconstruction to the analysis of the Canadian literary institution and, in particular, to the study of the circumstances of production and reception of the work of those for whom “exclusionary silencing” re/produced conditions of socio-cultural marginalization. *Canadian Literature at the Crossroads of Language and Culture*, selected essays first published between 1987 and 2005, elegantly displays the breadth of Godard’s theoretical work, including essays on the problematic of representation in Aboriginal women’s writing, on the commodification of Canadian literature and the reproduction of settler deterritorializing strategies in relation to the work of M. NourbeSe Philip, and on the struggle to do theory in relation to Canadian cultural expressions and institutional culture over the past two decades, among other topics. Throughout the collection, Godard’s knowledge of theory informs her often trenchant analyses of multicultural Canada and its literatures, committed to the position that it “is imperative for the critic to make visible the spoil and toil attending any civilizing gesture” in order “to position Canadian literature not just in space, but in time.”

Topologies, then, and allegoresis; poetics and *différance*, border crossings and resistances, governmentality and “minority literatures” and, as this collection brilliantly shows, a principled commitment to theorizing the institutional structures governing the funding and reception of “literature” in Canada. Resisting the swerve toward the transnational, she is also emphatic in her

resistance of Frye’s “Where is here,” theorizing the “topocentric imperative” of settler hegemony as similarly deflective of historical imbrication. Neither liminal nor nostalgic for Godard, border crossings are heuristic moments, opportunities to deconstruct diversity policy as containment for difference, and to theorize those extravagant excesses of gender/race/class which settler Canada delegitimizes and invisibilizes via policies of “inclusivity.” Thus in her brilliant essay, “Deterritorializing Strategies: M. NourbeSe Philip as Caucasianist Ethnographer,” Godard writes that multiculturalism is “a policy of liberal cultural pluralism, . . . [which] works to reproduce binary oppositions of white/colour and fails to expose the power relationships of systematic racism that work to erase difference.” Further, in a passage which in many ways epitomizes her analysis of the settler industry of Can Lit, Godard writes that NourbeSe Philip’s critique “exposes a complex contradiction of Canadian culture where language creates one set of exclusionary practices of silencing and race another overlapping set of erasures, a contradiction signified in the positions of “silenced” other and invisible “visible minority.”

As a feminist theorist, Godard was always acutely conscious of the complexities of her own location with respect to the “*dominant* discourse” and, during the 1980s and ’90s, of the contested position of theory, “totalized and scapegoated” in relation to Canadian literature. Her magisterial essay, “Canadian? Literary? Theory?” brilliantly expresses the theory debates of that period. While Godard was characteristically hesitant to criticize individuals, it is not difficult to see her withering glance directed at critics whose reliance on postmodern dicta masquerades as theory. Reading between the lines of editor Smaro Kamboureli’s interview with Godard, it is also not difficult to see Godard’s own experience of a struggle which she describes in “Canadian? Literary? Theory?” in terms of the rejection for publication of another

scholar's essay "because of its focus on theory. Constructed thus as the doxa of reading theory in Canada is a strong misreading that re-writes and re-positions texts by practitioners of theories through a refusal of the premises of poetics over criticism, either by denouncing them as non-sense or by refusing to engage them at all—exclusionary silencing." As Godard comments in her interview with Kamboureli, "Many younger scholars are unaware of the history of the field," and unaware of the struggles which Godard describes in this essay.

Those struggles to do the work of theory in the context of Canadian literatures characterize much of Godard's career as do the struggles of a theorist whose concern with problematics associated with women's writing, "minor literatures," Indigenous writers and their works, the history of the literary institution in Canada, and translation as theorized practice tended to fragment her scholarly reputation at a time when "specialization" continued to mean criticism, not theory, and "major figures" if not specific regions of settler mapping. The rigour of Godard's work and the intimacy of her understanding of poststructuralist theory in many forms elude easy paraphrase, and her many theoretical essays tend often each to do the work which some might reserve for a book. Not one for needless elaboration or the brief essay devoted to a single canonic author, Godard took on "Writing Between Cultures" (1997) and "Relational Logics: Of Linguistic and Other Transactions in the Americas" (2005)—brilliant, ambitious, theoretically virtuoso essays encyclopedic in scope and uncompromising in theoretical argumentation.

In an elegantly Derridean passage which now seems spectral, Barbara concluded "Canadian? Literary? Theory?" by thinking about the "properly 'Canadian.'" Who might speak, read, claim *le propre*? Who might come like a *revenant* and still the echoes of all the words? "There is no inside/outside

re-reading, re-writing. Beyond 'intention,' these (g)hos[t]ly essays live on—in the (im) possibility of theory." That theory might be/ is possible, a home/at home in this vexed proper, is in no small measure thanks to the work of Barbara Godard.

Anti-Heroes All

Sherrill Grace

On the Art of Being Canadian. U of British Columbia P \$85.00

Reviewed by Janice Fiamengo

The title of Sherrill Grace's *On the Art of Being Canadian* deliberately echoes *On Being Canadian* (1948) by Vincent Massey. The first native-born Governor General, Massey emphasized the importance of the liberal arts to an informed, loyal citizenry and called on artists to create compelling visions of Canada. Grace identifies with him unapologetically: admitting that it is "easy to describe Massey's ideas as elitist and conventional," she yet applauds his cultural nationalism and promotion of government support for the arts, which transformed the Canadian cultural scene in the twentieth century. Like Massey, Grace is interested in the significance of the North both as a place and as a resonant symbol; she too believes that artists play a central role in moulding the nation and helping to form "a loyal and informed public." While distinguishing herself from Massey on the basis of her feminism and deep respect for the First Nations, Grace suggests that she follows in his footsteps in writing a passionate tribute to Canada as it has been imagined by our writers, artists, and film-makers.

The Brenda and David McLean Chair in Canadian Studies, which Grace held at the University of British Columbia from 2003-2005, involved three public lectures that became the primary subjects of this book: the North, war, and cultural icons. Identified as "crucial sites of memory and

cultural representation,” these related topics are explored as repositories of images and associations that have informed Canadians’ sense of what it means to belong to this land and this nation. We confront the North, she argues, as an “inescapable” fact of our experience, as a longstanding symbol of mystery, endurance, or self-sacrifice, and as a part of our homeland requiring protection from southern carelessness and arrogance. After a period of relative silence about the world wars, we have since the 1970s memorialized our war dead in complex ways and are thinking anew about the meaning of military conflict in light of Afghanistan. And although frequently suspicious or even dismissive of traditional heroes, we invest certain “larger-than-life figures”—often outsiders, iconoclasts, and beautiful losers—with representative value. Examining each issue in turn, Grace brings to bear decades of research in considering artistic constructions of Canada.

The result is an interesting hybrid work that addresses a general public—avoiding theoretical language and rigorous or extended analysis—while focusing mainly on elite rather than popular or mainstream representations. Grace’s interest in the nation-building role of art—her conviction that “the voices of the dead . . . tell us how to live”—may prompt readers to question some of her more obscure choices. Much attention is paid to little-known works by artists such as Kate Braid, Charles Comfort, John Murrell, Sharon Pollock, Terence Ryan, Maggie Siggins, and R.H. Thomson rather than, say, to Inuit carvings—so widely associated with the North—or to contemporary war narratives by and about our soldiers in Afghanistan. Much of the discussion is excellent, and of course Grace has every right to highlight the works she finds most compelling and to seek to bring them to a wider audience (more power to her)—but to suggest, as she does, that they have played a central role in our cultural

consciousness, that “without the art there is small hope of remembrance,” is perhaps to overstate the case while ignoring better known or more popular works that *have* had a widespread impact. The question of emphasis is particularly evident in the chapter entitled “Inventing Iconic Figures,” in which Grace focuses on four persons whose lives are linked to our “national story” because they embody aspects of our values and experiences: Métis leader Louis Riel, modernist painters Emily Carr and Tom Thomson, and Mina Hubbard, the woman who, in 1905, traveled across Labrador to complete the journey that had killed her explorer husband two years earlier. The portraits presented are always engrossing, but it is difficult to see the justification for putting Hubbard (even Carr and Thomson are a stretch) in a category Grace defines as including such luminaries as Winston Churchill, Mahatma Gandhi, Lawrence of Arabia, and Helen Keller. We may have national icons of *almost* comparable stature—Tommy Douglas, Terry Fox, and the fictional Anne of Green Gables come to mind—but I suspect we must look for them in popular culture and myth rather than high art.

The non-academic style chosen to discuss these mainly academic works is a mixed blessing that may fully please neither the general nor specialist reader. While enjoying the unpretentious language and approach, I found that the book too often asserts, in sweeping claims, where it should argue or analyze, and I would have liked a more detailed discussion of the works’ formal artistry. A non-academic reader, on the other hand, may well wish for fewer titles, historical references, and citations from scholars. As an academic trained to question narratives of progress, I hoped to find some qualification of the Whig view of history told here, in which earlier representations—often naively patriotic, Christianized, celebratory, and exclusionary—are seen to be succeeded by more self-aware, tolerant,

and sophisticated ones. But these are relatively minor objections offset by the book's richness of scope and accessibility. Criticisms notwithstanding, the book has much to offer: the writing is crisp and comprehensive, presenting wide learning in elegant prose; and like the multifaceted images and figures it brings together, *On the Art of Being Canadian* evokes resonant issues that will continue to engage Canadians for many decades to come.

Essays Afloat and Adrift

Trevor Herriot

Grass, Sky, Song: Promise and Peril in the World of Grassland Birds. HarperCollins \$32.95

Margaret Thompson

Adrift on the Ark: Our Connection to the Natural World. Brindle & Glass \$19.95

Reviewed by Travis V. Mason

Trevor Herriot has established his reputation as a naturalist whose environmental concerns filter through his attention to the Canadian prairies. Where his first book was an award-winning biography and his second a personal (and spiritual) meditation on wildness, *Grass, Sky, Song* comprises elements of each earlier book. An environmental history of prairie grassland that looks anxiously into a dire future, *Grass, Sky, Song* is also an account of the naturalists (and scientists) who have observed and recorded western grassland ecology. If, as Herriot points out, “questions in natural history are often answered by digging into human history,” the stories of amateur and professional ornithologists might enable a suitable response to the ongoing disappearance of native grassland and the birds that have evolved over millennia to survive there. “Looming over every fragment of wild grass,” laments Herriot, is “a future no one talks about, a prairie where no birds sing.” Evoking the final line of Keats’ “La Belle Dame Sans Merci,” Herriot

simultaneously invokes the toxic discourse of Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*, the 1962 book that triggered modern environmentalism. That such an alarming work as Herriot’s needs to be written in 2010 is a sad reminder of how much more damage has been wrought in the half century since *Silent Spring*. Or is it perhaps an indication of what could have been so much sooner if not for Carson and her followers? *Grass, Sky, Song* suggests a bit of both—the promise and peril of his subtitle—by extolling certain virtues and demonizing others. Interspersing the main narrative—which sees Herriot moving across sections of grassland and documenting massive agricultural changes and declining bird populations—are brief “biographies” of individual bird species, which are more status update (population, migratory patterns) than standard field guide.

The book’s tone, which is for the most part informative and thoughtful without sounding alarmist, shifts drastically once Herriot addresses pesticide use and its myriad effects on the health of soil, native grass, grassland birds, and humans. The reasons for his indignation are clearly warranted, particularly as it emerges alongside revelations of his wife Karen’s recent cancer diagnosis, but the main object of his scorn—science—seems misplaced. Characterized by the claim that “[d]oing science . . . is so often about controlling nature, which is of course the very fountain of all that resists control,” Herriot’s attack just barely avoids leaving politicians, scholars, and consumers—in short, people—off the hook. The shift in tone reflects the profound frustration and helplessness that Herriot seems to feel; he blames science, and at the same time he refers to science for the statistics that populate his book; he believes humans are capable of change, but he recognizes that we are reluctant to make the changes necessary to make a difference. The frustration I at times feel when reading this

book, of course, pales in comparison to the frustration articulated in this elegiac tribute to a bioregion and its avian inhabitants.

In *Adrift on the Ark*, Margaret Thompson uses stories of animal behaviour to frame personal reminiscences and indignation of a kind vastly different from Herriot's. The pronoun in her subtitle suggests inclusivity and complicity (despite the implication that humans are not already part of the natural world). The essays themselves, however, suggest otherwise. A woman whose brother kills a bat that was trapped inside her house receives a lecture about her "ridiculous beliefs" from Thompson; a neighbour's clandestine capturing (and subsequent "disposal") of peacocks in Thompson's Victoria, BC, neighbourhood is considered evidence of "sociopathic tendencies." Thompson admires bats for their parental devotion; and she values those feral peacocks (whose introduction to Victoria remains unexamined) as visual spectacle at which passersby can marvel. And yet she tells of a time when, faced with the prospect of devalued property, she wages a "campaign" against beavers to whom, she writes, she "was not going to capitulate." Land ownership is apparently not a "ridiculous belief." And no one involved in the beavers' deaths demonstrated sociopathic tendencies. Why? Thompson doesn't tell. As a collection, Thompson's book is heavy on personal reflection and light on introspection. The result is an uneven look at one person's connection to animals rather than, as the title promises, at humans' varied connections to the more-than-human world.



Questions de distance

Lucie Hotte et Guy Poirier

Habiter la distance : Études en marge de la distance habitée. Prise de parole 23,95 \$

Compte rendu par Jorge Calderón

En 2003, François Paré a publié l'essai *La distance habitée* dans lequel il réfléchissait aux littératures et aux cultures contemporaines des communautés qui vivent dans un contexte minoritaire. Pour Paré, « [c]ette distance habitée (celle d'un sujet pleinement investi de la différence) est toujours fondamentalement créole, transformatrice, aliénante, désobligeante, puisqu'elle est à la fois signe de l'éloignement et du rapprochement, de l'abandon et de la solidarité. »

En partant des théories développées par Paré, Lucie Hotte et Guy Poirier ont réuni des études qui portent sur des œuvres littéraires francophones de l'Acadie, du Québec, de l'Ontario, des Prairies et de la Colombie-Britannique. Les chapitres du collectif *Habiter la distance* sont parfois une critique, parfois une mise au point et parfois une application des théories de Paré sur la mémoire, l'étranger, les frontières, l'itinérance, la communauté, la diaspora, la migration et l'appartenance.

Hotte et Poirier situent leur projet « en marge » parce que les études qu'ils ont réunies se rapportent aux *Littératures de l'exiguïté*, aux *Théories de la fragilité* et à *La distance habitée* de Paré, mais aussi parce que les analyses des différents participants ne sont pas centrées uniquement sur le Québec. Dans le collectif, la *distance* critique concerne la bordure, l'écart, et l'intervalle nécessaires à la prise en considération des francophonies du Canada. Ainsi, l'examen attentif du contact entre le français et l'anglais démontre une expérience commune aussi bien en Acadie qu'au Québec. Toutefois, la réalité du chiac à Moncton est fort différente de l'interaction entre le français et l'anglais à Montréal. Les espaces

francophones du Canada forment certes un réseau linguistique et culturel. Cependant, il faut tenir compte de la mémoire, de l'histoire, et des systèmes d'identification des communautés francophones, car leurs expériences sont multiples.

Si d'une part il peut y avoir une unité de la francophonie au Canada, d'autre part une fragmentation identitaire est aussi évidente. L'immigration récente de francophones du Maghreb, de l'Afrique subsaharienne et des Caraïbes est un exemple important de la transformation des communautés francophones. Pour ces raisons, les identités individuelles et collectives sont en train d'être redéfinies. Le livre de Lucie Hotte et de Guy Poirier contribue dans ce contexte à l'analyse des changements des littératures et des cultures francophones au Canada.

Words and Worlds

Chris Hutchinson

Other People's Lives. Brick \$19.00

Kemeny Babineau

After the Six O'Clock News. BookThug \$18.00

Darrell Epp

Imaginary Maps. Signature \$14.95

Brian Campbell

Passenger Flight. Signature \$14.95

Reviewed by Aaron Giovannone

The four books of poetry reviewed below negotiate relationships between personas and places, between physical and psychic environments, between mental and material realms. In unique ways, each explores boundaries, establishes connections, and makes its own space to dwell in and move through.

In *Other People's Lives*, Chris Hutchinson's dexterous prosody swoops, speeds along surfaces, tunnels into the quotidian, then re-emerges, a little besotted. These poems, in their incisive and quiet interrogations, suggest that reality is not prefabricated; rather, it is shaped by our questions, which are themselves resonant and meaningful.

These poems, despite their vertiginous spiralling into thought and imagination, always come back to earth through vivid, original metaphors, such as when Hutchinson describes Vancouver's English Bay: "The mountains on this coast are not Glenn Gould's / hunched shoulders / though let's say the city hums / in homage to his ghost." In this book, sounds pervade cities, streets, and rooms; in a cafe the barista's voice is "glittery as a polished spoon." Sound billows over the boundary between the sensible and the insensible, the real and the imagined; tinklings and murmurings are messages from within the impenetrable materiality of things, "that world within a world." In *Other People's Lives*, Hutchinson has crafted a sprawling panoply of emotion, thought, reality, and possibility. It is a book in which the creative act has consequences for the "real" world, in which "the dream opens / [and] crackles like footsteps."

In *After the Six O'Clock News*, Kemeny Babineau strives to compose a world-view out of disjunctive fragments. This book is a collage of forms and styles, a mixture of approaches to reconciling the word and the reality, perhaps suggesting that such a meeting is not possible. While the book begins in straightforward, signifying language, describing a First Nations figure running over "the trails . . . smooth as the sole of a foot," this momentum quickly breaks down. Soon language is exploded and spatialized, scattered over the page in pieces of concrete poetry. Language, in other words, is treated as substance, shape, and weight, rather than as a transparent medium for communication. Words become like the "sucking stone in the mouth" which this running figure keeps under his tongue. In a number of places throughout this collection, Babineau riffs esoterically on a number of canonical poets, including Coleridge, Cummings, Lampman, and Pratt, but overall, the book relies on a generalized experimental impulse to tether, sometimes precariously,

these forays. As the exploded language begins to recompose itself into lyrical forms, Babineau strikes some melodic and melancholic notes: “The living are the tenders / of our early tinder sparks.”

Beginning with its title, Darrell Epp’s *Imaginary Maps* lays out on the table its investment in a psychic territory. These short lyrics create a personal space which takes shape between stints on the couch, drives in the car, and attempts at romance. Overall, however, the collection doesn’t make grandiose movements. Rather, like the train cars that Epp makes a living locking up for CN Rail, these poems shunt along their lines, linking big, unwieldy topics like “the end of the world” and “infinity plus a day” through telling details, such as the sound “of that mouse in [the] wall.” At its best, *Imaginary Maps* provides deft turns of phrase and thought: “when we run out of words / we realize that we don’t need / words.” Furthermore, through self-deprecation, Epp deflates the self-absorption which is sometimes a part of the lyrical format: “And the universe, which weighs more / than I can guess, fits quite comfortably / inside my brain.”

The title of the final book reviewed here, *Passenger Flight* by Brian Campbell, suggests movement without commitment to any particular place. The book’s epigraph is from Baudelaire’s *Spleen of Paris*, and Campbell’s work engages formally with Baudelaire’s famous sequence of prose poems. While Campbell’s poems tread through numerous territories, making passing reference to “teak stained tablemats” from Sri Lanka, an “ersatz cherry wood shelf” from Bengal, “dates from Iran,” and “mandarins from Morocco,” the collection does this while refusing to settle down. At times, one wishes for a more intimate engagement with the local, with the sensuous and specific that metaphorical, rhythmical language provides. Because of the numerous abstractions and the author’s

cool, detached tone, one has the feeling of being far away, of hovering at some objective height above the world, “in such a wonderful flying machine.”

Mid-Century Memories

Bud Ings

Mud, Sweat and Tears: Tales from a Country Vet.
Acorn \$19.95

Margaret Norquay

Broad is the Way. Wilfrid Laurier UP \$24.95

Diane Sims

A Life Consumed: Lilly Samson’s Dispatches from the TB Front. Your Scrivener P \$19.00

Reviewed by Kathryn Carter

These three autobiographical texts offer different pleasures to the reader. Two of them recount the authors’ memories of useful lives in memoir form while the third recounts in creative non-fiction the untimely end of a life that promised much.

Reading the two memoirs of mid-century working lives by Bud Ings and Margaret Norquay leads to a first conclusion: what happened to people like this? It is a cliché that our culture with its steady diet of celebrity vanity fails to notice quiet lives of service and integrity. A cliché, but true, and simply meeting these two authors, if only in print, is refreshing and welcome. Although the resourcefulness of the authors is, in their opinion, unremarkable, Margaret Norquay intelligently capitalizes on her role as the wife of a United Church minister to benefit her community. She questions the practices of the Alberta government when they place orphaned children on farms with no concern for their welfare in dubious homes with unkind families. There is, perhaps inevitably, the usual touching story of community collaboration during Christmas time. In “Mr. Kringsberg’s Christmas Dinner,” we read about the local bachelor’s gift to his community when he redirects parishioners from the local church (with a

sign reading “This here is too cold come to my place signed A Kringsberg”) to a feast of tea, milk, sandwiches, and pink and yellow marshmallow cookies at his house. While readers might expect such a story in a collection of prairie memoirs, Norquay’s gift is her lack of sentimentality, so the tone of this story never descends to the maudlin or trite. Hers is not a personal book, rarely touching on what might be the difficulties of raising four children; instead, she relates memories of starting a lending library, sitting on community boards, dealing with her husband’s head injury, and organizing a children’s camp. These bracing tales are told by a woman who looks back on her life with little sense of self-importance and a good deal of humour.

Bud Ings recalls the days of veterinary practice in Prince Edward Island in the 1950s. One of the pleasures of his book is learning about animal illnesses such as white muscle disease, erysipelas, nervous acetonemia, and the dangers of castration by “home remedy.” He relates all of these in simple terms so that readers easily understand what the animals are facing. His empathy and care for the animals is evident in each story, as is his obvious good will towards his neighbours and clients. For example, he reserves any judgment about a neighbour who arrives looking for help while drunk and spattered in his own filth from a bad run of home brew, or a young boy who introduces serious illnesses into a herd of dairy cattle through lazy milking practices. His is a patient and generous voice. Both Ings and Norquay draw attention to the crucial role of the telephone operator who acted to communicate information in the days before text messaging and twitter. Ings writes, “I am grateful for the kindness of snowplow operators who looked out for me, and for my other guardian angels, the rural telephone operators whose jobs have long been obsolete.” As the world of rural veterinary practice changed,

folk remedies disappeared, and more small animals and pets became part of his everyday clientele, Ings himself moved on to a career in provincial politics. This collection of stories recalls with evident fondness the veterinary practices of a different time. Now that UPEI has established itself as a leader in research about animal population health with the new Canadian Excellence Research chair, these stories might attract an even larger audience.

The period covered in *A Life Consumed* is not exactly mid-century, but slightly before, gathering together a series of expressive letters sent by a patient at the TB sanatorium in Gravenhurst, Ontario in the mid 1920s. Along with the letters is a carefully researched evocation of what life must have been like. Imagining what happens between the letters is the undertaking of Diane Sims, who also happens to be a great niece of Lilly Samson. Having written on illness previously, and suffering herself from both MS and ovarian cancer, Sims is ideally placed to imagine the frustrations of an illness that might well become fatal. For example, imagining a struggle to maintain one last conversation with dear friends, Sims describes Samson’s struggle to concentrate instead on her laboured breathing:

Lil is relieved the visit will end soon. She can see those ten minutes stretched out before her, one after another, down a long corridor with many doorways. Pansy stands at the doorways on the left; Dick at those on the right. They are smiling, beckoning her into each room, to spend time, to chat, have fun. But she must keep her attention on the corridor, on proceeding breath by shallow breath down it.

I admit I approached this book as a bit of a purist, thinking that the letters should be left alone to tell the story without embellishment from the author. But I was wrong: the additional information and creative embellishment from Sims is highly successful and moving. The obvious tragedy here is

the loss of a beautiful young woman like Lilly Samson, an intelligent woman who had been teaching in a one-room school-house north of Sault Ste Marie just before falling ill. Taken together, the three books produce a strong nostalgia for tightly knit communities and for lives of purpose which manage to remain devoid of self-congratulatory tones.

Un passeur essentiel

Naïm Kattan

Écrire le réel. Hurtubise HMH 19,95 \$

Compte rendu par Robert Vigneault

Un récit poétique, *Liminaire. Partir avec toi*, donne le ton : une lancinante invitation au voyage, «en tête-à-tête avec une femme» (rêve impossible à Bagdad). C'est tout un itinéraire, emblématique de bien d'autres : depuis le cher Tigre irakien jusqu'à Paris, point de rencontre avec l'Occident; puis les bords de la Marne, Southampton, Cavalière, le lac Magog enfin, dans «l'autre Amérique», où le dépaysement est à son comble. Suivra la réflexion intime des essais car cet écrivain éprouve «le besoin de parler le plus souvent à la première personne» : huit essais, donc, sous la rubrique *Je me souviens*; cinq au cœur de l'incessante visée de Naïm Kattan, *Écrire le réel*. «Je plaide pour l'écrivain . . . le gardien de la parole, du mot, et à travers eux, du sens.» On ne peut que s'incliner devant la réussite littéraire d'un Juif irakien dont la langue première est l'arabe, mais qui a choisi, à l'âge de vingt-cinq ans, après un séjour culturel de sept ans à Paris, de vivre à Montréal, «métropole francophone de l'Amérique», une «nouvelle naissance» : il écrit sa langue seconde, le français, avec clarté et limpidité, voire une forme de minimalisme voulu. Quel paradoxe, pourtant : si limpide que soit cette langue, il n'est pas simple d'apercevoir le fond des choses quand on n'a pas vécu l'expérience d'un migrant dont la mémoire est imbue

d'une culture sémitique nourrie par la Bible, le Talmud, le Coran. «Je suis d'ici, mais je porte un ailleurs qui colore quand il ne détermine pas, en partie du moins, ma vision.» Un point de rencontre, heureusement : la Bible, mais pour ce fervent du sacré, le Livre, plus que «[son] premier et perpétuel livre de lecture», est demeuré esprit et vie, le situant «dans un temps qui est mémoire» et «dans une histoire vécue au présent».

En contrepartie, il est certes difficile, pour tout immigrant, d'assimiler l'identité de la terre d'accueil dans sa complexe réalité. Au Québec, un immigrant se félicitera de l'ouverture, de la diversité que, d'autre part, des forces puissantes travaillent insidieusement à convertir en multiculturalisme, forme de relativisme culturel. Pourtant, aux yeux de lucides penseurs (Christian Dufour, Josée Legault, Joseph Facal, Christian Rioux), ce dépassement vertueux vers l'universel peut s'avérer un piège pour la majorité francophone quand il verse dans un bilinguisme assimilateur, ce que manifestent le recul du français à Montréal ainsi que la triste dérive des Canadiens français. Attention, avertit le livre : «Que sert à l'homme de gagner l'Univers s'il vient à perdre son âme?»

Soulignons enfin combien l'Occident a besoin des lumières de ce «passeur d'un monde à l'autre» en ces jours où l'on a tendance, les jeunes surtout, à ne vivre que de la promesse, en se coupant malencontreusement de la mémoire.



D'un œil critique

Monique LaRue

L'œil de Marquise. Boréal 28,50 \$

Compte rendu par Julia E. Morris-von
Luczenbacher

Dans son roman *L'œil de Marquise*, Monique LaRue, récipiendaire du Prix du Gouverneur général 2002 pour *La démarche du crabe* et du Grand prix littéraire de Montréal 1990 pour *Copies conformes*, raconte l'histoire de la famille Cardinal divisée par des différences idéologiques, notamment en ce qui a trait à l'importance de se forger une identité—linguistique, religieuse, et ethnique, par exemple—dans la société québécoise de la deuxième moitié du XX^e siècle. Plus particulièrement, dans *L'œil de Marquise*, Monique LaRue explore l'impact de l'héritage culturel sur l'attitude de la société québécoise à l'égard d'autrui.

Ce questionnement passe par la narratrice, Marquise Cardinal, qui porte un regard critique sur son Québec natal à travers les différents stades de son évolution : des années nationalistes qui ont vu la mise en place d'une politique identitaire protectionniste, jusqu'aux années 2000 marquées par la Commission de consultation sur les pratiques d'accommodement reliées aux différences culturelles. La question qui sous-tend le discours de la narratrice est : comment composer avec la présence de l'autre sans pour autant porter atteinte à l'« identité » québécoise? Pour y répondre, Monique LaRue remet en question l'identité conçue comme singulière et ébranle les dichotomies telles que Nous/l'Autre, intérieur/extérieur, centre/périphérie, civilisation/barbarie. Sur le plan stylistique, l'échec de l'identité (de « idem » ou « le même ») est mis en valeur surtout par la pluralité des langues parlées par les personnages : français, anglais, espagnol, nahuatl, japonais. Le bilinguisme,

voire le plurilinguisme se révèle, dans *L'œil de Marquise*, une plus-value qui permet aux personnages d'établir des réseaux multipolaires et de se sentir à l'aise dans plusieurs cultures. Sur le plan thématique, l'identité comme « racine » est également désavouée. L'artiste Jimmy Graham crée le Mur de la Paix à Montréal, en réalité un « non-mur », pour inciter une « nouvelle représentation de l'intérieur et de l'extérieur ». Carmen Perez Garcia démentit l'appartenance nationale en se disant montréalaise, car « [u]ne véritable ville . . . dépasse la somme de ses habitants ». Marquise croit, pour sa part, que tout le monde devrait visiter, au moins une fois dans sa vie, le Centre commémoratif de l'Holocauste de Montréal pour reconnaître sa contribution à la « souricière mondiale ». La nature fuyante de l'identité apparaît lorsque Doris Cardinal, contre toutes attentes, avoue qu'il est homosexuel. Marco Tremblay, personnage qui, malgré son apparence, ne se conforme en rien au stéréotype du « *ku-emme* » (« Québécois moyen ») entretenu par Rosa Lou. En revanche, le personnage d'Osler, qui appuie les politiques nataliste et protectionniste, adhère à une pensée identitaire désormais obsolète.

En somme, par son intérêt pour l'altérité, Monique LaRue cherche à montrer dans *L'œil de Marquise* que l'identité individuelle n'est ni singulière ni immuable. Elle est plutôt une image kaléidoscopique constamment en mouvement qui ne surgit que dans l'intersubjectivité. Sur le plan communautaire, l'auteure illustre comment la véritable rencontre avec la différence de l'autre peut inspirer une évolution positive motivée par une plus grande tolérance menant à la responsabilisation collective. Ainsi donc, on pourrait considérer *L'œil de Marquise*, tel que le suggère la quatrième de couverture, comme « un roman de l'existence » et en même temps « un roman social » d'une pertinence universelle.

Rethinking the Diary

Philippe Lejeune. Jeremy Popkin, and Julie Rak, eds.; trans. Katherine Durnin

On Diary. U of Hawai'i P \$23.36

Reviewed by Laurie McNeill

Philippe Lejeune is a remarkably productive and influential scholar whose work has shaped auto/biography studies since the 1970s. Outside of his native France, however, he remains best known for his seminal "Autobiographical Pact," despite his decades of subsequent work on the diary (a form that, ironically, his pact dismissed). *On Diary*, edited by Jeremy Popkin and Julie Rak, and translated by Katherine Durnin, therefore performs an exceptionally valuable service to the Anglophone academic community by collecting twenty of Lejeune's essays on diaries, many for the first time in English. In their introductions, Popkin casts Lejeune as an "explorer" of and "evangelist" for the diary, and Rak hails him as a "pioneer," necessary roles for a scholar who specializes in this critically disdained genre. As Lejeune notes in "The Practice of the Private Journal," "the diary is a social outcast, of no fixed theoretical address," a problematic profile that has caused one of the most widely practised autobiographical forms to be largely ignored or misrepresented. Lejeune's scholarship has been instrumental in revising such intellectual snobbery (including his own, as he readily admits). The volume includes his important corrective genetic studies of Anne Frank's text, his archival research on nineteenth-century adolescent girls' spiritual diaries, and his authoritative analyses of the diary's history and practices.

Throughout the volume, Lejeune highlights the diary's social and historical import and takes seriously the role of private citizens in shaping culture. In her cogent introduction, Rak compares Lejeune to Foucault and de Certeau, emphasizing

his contributions to theories of the self in relation to society, and of the "ordinary, silent producers of culture who create their own logics of expression." Such ideas are exemplified in several studies of contemporary diarists that Lejeune has conducted through surveys, interviews, and archival submissions, contributions to his *Association pour l'Autobiographie* that allow him to examine actual diary practice rather than perpetuate assumptions and stereotypes that have traditionally limited studies of the genre. Further, Lejeune deftly connects cultural, technological, and social practices to explain the form's qualities and roles, usefully tying the diary's rise in Europe to key industrial and ideological shifts, including the mass production of paper in the fourteenth century and time-keeping devices in the eighteenth, as well as concepts of privacy that arose in the late Middle Ages. (His later work on Internet diaries, excerpted here from his book *Cher Ecran*, continues in this vein.) His research on diaries across temporal and geographical regions, including recent surveys from Algeria, remains alert to the import of rhetorical situation, demonstrating that the diary emerges differently in particular cultural contexts. While paper was available "in the Arab world" long before Europe, he notes, diaries did not appear; similarly, he observes that the diary became popular in England and Germany two centuries before it did in France, a difference Lejeune attributes to Protestant versus Catholic sensibilities about the self and its constructions. In these and other observations, Lejeune corrects long-standing Western assumptions about the genre's universality as well as its inconsequentiality.

This volume makes significant contributions not just to cultural, historical, and sociological studies of the diary and life narratives more generally, but also, as Rak argues, to understanding and articulating research methodologies, particularly in an

interdisciplinary context. Lejeune's practice of keeping and publishing research diaries offers a rare and very useful chronicle of the steps that research takes. He demonstrates the minutiae (e.g., "open an expandable file on 'On Today's Date' and begin collecting examples and bibliographic references"), and the macroscopic, articulating the logics of his particular research questions (one study develops, for example, from the premise, "when did people start using the pretense of creating a private space by developing or deploying . . . a dialogic relationship with themselves?"). His frank discussions of biases (his own and others') and research challenges make for surprisingly compelling as well as instructive reading.

Perhaps inevitably for such a prolific scholar, repetition does emerge across the volume, and not all contributions are equally meaty, possibly because the volume puts different types of texts—book excerpts, articles, and public lectures—side by side. But even apparently insubstantial pieces, such as "The Continuous and the Discontinuous" and "Lucullus Dines with Lucullus," contain useful nuggets. Moreover, all make for entertaining reading, a quality that typically eludes academic writing. Lejeune is very present in his scholarship, constructing an autobiographical persona that is deceptively disarming and highly likable: funny, reflective, and smart, as well as charmingly frank. Commenting on a particularly dour and programmatic nineteenth-century advocate for self-help diaries, for instance, he deadpans, "he has no sense of humor." Fortunately, the same cannot be said for Philippe Lejeune. *On Diary* is a fitting tribute to this scholar and his work and a necessary text for diary researchers across disciplines.



Risky Business

Annabel Lyon

The Golden Mean. Random House \$32.95

Karen Connelly

Burmese Lessons: A Love Story. Random House \$32.00

Reviewed by Lisa Grekul

In her highly decorated first novel, Annabel Lyon takes on the risky subject (as more than one reviewer before me has noted) of Aristotle, focusing specifically on his years spent tutoring Prince Alexander (who would become Alexander the Great). Karen Connelly's newest work, an autobiographical exploration of her time spent in Burma during the late 1990s, is no less risky (though arguably more "risqué"). But for readers of *The Golden Mean* and *Burmese Lessons: A Love Story*, there is no risk involved: these books, while obviously very different in terms of form and content, are equally rich and rewarding.

Anyone unfamiliar with Lyon's previous work—her collections of stories (*Oxygen*, 2000) and novellas (*The Best Thing for You*, 2004)—could not have missed her novelistic debut. Winner of the Rogers Trust Fiction Prize, *The Golden Mean* was also shortlisted for the Giller Prize, the Governor General's Award, a regional (Caribbean and Canada) Commonwealth Writers' Prize, the Ethel Wilson Fiction Prize, and the Amazon.ca/Quill and Quire Best First Novel Award. Evidently, the gamble of attempting to say something "new" about Aristotle—to construct not only a fresh narrative perspective on the philosopher himself but also to offer a believable, book-length glimpse into his world, so far removed from our own—paid off. With seamlessly incorporated research and a deftly "humanizing" approach to character, Lyon focuses, to her credit, less on the specifics of Aristotle's work than on the nuances of his personal life, including his

battle with apparent depression and his uneasy sexual relationship with his wife.

Beginning in 342 BCE, and narrated by Aristotle himself, *The Golden Mean* traces the philosopher's seven-year stint in Pella, teaching Prince Alexander, the son of King Philip of Macedon. By choosing to move to Macedonia, along with his reluctant young wife (Pythias) and nephew (Callisthenes), Aristotle delays the advancement of his career at the Academy in Athens and becomes unwittingly embroiled in the political dramas of both Philip's court and family. Although he goes to Pella at the behest of and as a favour to the King (his childhood friend), Aristotle receives little loyalty from Philip in return. He struggles, too, with the business of tutoring both young Alexander (as acutely observant and innately intelligent as he is politically savvy and increasingly hungry for power) and Alexander's mentally challenged brother, Arrhidaeus. As the narrative unfolds, it becomes clear that Aristotle's primary challenge is to teach Alexander lessons never learned by Philip: lessons about moderation and balance. In one pivotal scene in the novel, as Aristotle juxtaposes "the extremes" and "the middle," obviously privileging the latter, Alexander is incredulous. "You can't mean," says the Prince, "to prize mediocrity." Aristotle, noting that "[m]oderation and mediocrity are not the same," asks his pupil to "[t]hink of extremes as caricatures." When Alexander tellingly suggests that Aristotle/Philip and Alexander/Arrhidaeus are examples of such "caricatures," he lays bare the dilemma with which Aristotle himself must contend. Has the teacher found a "golden mean" between thought and action, philosophy and life? Or has he, in polar opposition to Philip, lost himself in "abstraction[s]" and "empty concept[s]"?

Not unlike Lyon's Aristotle, Connelly—author of nine books of poetry, fiction, and non-fiction—confronts existential crises in *Burmese Lessons: A Love Story*, some

intimately related to her status as an author. Initially, Connelly's travels in Burma are motivated by her desire to interview dissidents, most exiled in Thailand, and to publicize, via her writing, both the horrors of Burma's military dictatorship and the struggles of the regime's resisters. But as she falls deeply in love with Maung, leader of a guerilla army, and befriends numerous other Burmese dissidents, she finds herself questioning her "calling" and its efficacy vis-à-vis the cause. As she "guiltily" confides to one activist, "writing a book [isn't] enough," "[m]aybe," she ponders, "I should join an NGO and do real humanitarian work in the field."

Guilty, moreover, about indulging her "personal longings" among individuals who have made extraordinary sacrifices in order to do "political work"—"[d]aily," she writes, "I meet people who have lost everything because they acted and spoke out against injustice"—she recognizes, again and again, her privilege as an "outsider" and wonders if she can ever overcome her position as such. Yet because Connelly neither couches her self-reflexivity in theoretical jargon nor lapses into sentimentality, the narrative never loses its "honesty" or its periodic humour. Loath as I am to use such descriptors as "honest," "raw," and "human" in any review, *Burmese Lessons* is all three. Little is withheld in this book and nothing, it seems, is taboo. This is the story of a woman who loves easily ("I love, I love, I love"), revels in extraordinarily good sex, feels suspicion and jealousy ("[a]re you sure [Maung's] single?" asks an acquaintance, planting the seeds of doubt), experiences severe constipation, and succumbs to malaria. The painfully impossible decision she ultimately faces—to marry and have children with Maung, but in so doing abandon her writing life—becomes the heartbreaking climax of an intensely fraught, multi-layered story.

That Connelly made the right choice is evidenced by *The Lizard Cage* (2005), her

exquisite novel substantially informed by her time in Burma. Indeed, throughout *Burmese Lessons*, Connelly alludes to the ways in which the novel began to “become” over the course of her travels: she writes, “a man’s voice whispers in my head . . . He talks about his own life . . . I’ve also heard his laughter. I’ve heard him sing.” Ultimately, then, while *Burmese Lessons* leaves us with aching questions about the fate of Connelly’s lover, we might speculate that he is immortalized as a ghostly, bittersweet presence in her previous book.

Marlatt Writes Gracefully into Noh

Daphne Marlatt

The Gull. Talonbooks \$17.95

Reviewed by Judy Halebsky

With *The Gull*, Daphne Marlatt creates a Canadian version of a Japanese Noh play. Produced by Pangaea Arts, *The Gull* was originally staged by a team of Japanese and Canadian theatre professionals in Richmond, BC in May 2006. The 650-year-old tradition of Noh combines poetry, vocal technique, dance, acting, staging, and music. This book presents the verbal-text aspects of the production along with five pages of colour photos from the original 2006 performance. It includes Toyoshi Yoshihara’s masterful Japanese translation of the script. In the preface, Marlatt discusses her inspiration for writing the play, and Noh expert Richard Emmert illuminates key differences between the tradition of Noh and spoken drama. The script is carefully laid out with Japanese terminology of Noh structures explained in parentheses. This book provides a starting place for a Canadian audience to enter into the aesthetics and creative structures of Noh without the extensive study of Japanese history and culture required to access

English-language translations of traditional Noh plays.

Marlatt’s Noh play creates a Canadian story within the themes and structures of Japanese Noh. This work is fictional but reflects the history of the Japanese Canadian fishing community of Steveston, BC. It eloquently addresses the trauma, dislocation, and injustice of the internment of Japanese Canadians in World War II and its lingering repercussions. The play begins as two brothers return to the west coast to fish the same waters their father once did. They find themselves piecing together the remnants of the lives of their parents, both of whom have perished in the intervening years. The ghost of their mother in the form of a gull visits them on the boat. As is typical in Noh, this ghost is trapped in this world by lingering emotional attachments. She has come with a message to her sons and asks them to leave Canada for her childhood home of Mio, Japan. In the humorous *Kyogen* interlude that in this Canadian Noh is also tender and poignant, an older returning fisherman reminisces with the brothers about their parents. In the second half of the play, the brothers come to understand the feelings of abandonment and betrayal that their mother suffered in the internment and its aftermath. This moment of insight is key in the play. To stage an opportunity for a ghost to address the living and seek some kind of resolution is also a central structure in the tradition of Noh.

The text traverses translation in multiple ways. The 2006 performance had a bilingual structure. Akira Matsui, in 1998 named an Intangible Cultural Asset of Japan, was the lead actor and played the role of the mother. He spoke and chanted in Japanese using Yoshihara’s translation while the brothers spoke in English. A five-voice chorus chanted lines to fill in the gaps. Unlike the performance, the print version delineates the text into an English and a

Japanese version. Another point of translation is the story itself, which presents multiple shifting perspectives. The most significant example is in how the brothers gain insight into their mother's point of view. This is also echoed in the formal structure of *Noh* in that the chorus chants at times about the lead actor and at other times as the lead actor. Translation was part of Marlatt's journey as she found a way to give *Noh* meaning and significance in BC. Surprisingly, *Noh*'s intense, somber concentration and its deliberately slow meditative pace are particularly well-suited for voicing discontent. *Noh* is able to convey a quiet, intense rage. With Marlatt's nuanced attention as a listener and a writer, *The Gull* tells of a tragic chapter in Canadian history with both power and eloquence.

Throats and Claws

Stephanie McKenzie

Grace Must Wander. Salmon Poetry \$23.97

Jeanette Lynes

The New Blue Distance. Wolsack and Wynn \$17.00

Michael Eden Reynolds

SLANT Room. Porcupine's Quill \$16.95

Reviewed by Emily Wall

These three poets explore the physical, spiritual, and cultural landscapes of Canada. We travel to Nova Scotia, spend time in the Yukon, and dip into British Columbia and New Brunswick. We get to know the cities, farms, animals, and stories of this country. The three books, read together, give us a visceral, body-knowledge of living in this land. Canada has claws. It has granite stones meant to slide on ice. It has wolverines eating beavers. It has teeth and necks and feet. In these new poems, all three poets connect us intimately to the physical and cultural landscapes of Canada.

The two image motifs of Stephanie McKenzie's book *Grace Must Wander* are throats and claws. These images show us

the balancing point of vulnerability and power, of rage, and of fear. The throat poems give us tension and danger: "We wrap our throats turned wolves" ("The Snow Has Voices"). The claw poems are powerful, rage poems:

Their chests puff out as though they
challenge
us, as though clotting on their little claws
was growing
blood, as if Christ were dumb to it all, fist
shoved in his face,
asleep at the wheel. ("Glosses for Theo")

The book balances between these two points as the speaker mourns landscapes that continually disappoint her: "The stones I've pushed are always something / marrow, meaning white or grey-like, the centre / sucked out" ("Marrow"). She turns to a statue of a missionary, to Van Gogh, to Sylvia Plath. These are her priests. And they disappoint her too: they failed in their own lives, and are silent to her now. Although it's almost entirely a dark book, McKenzie never stalls out, and the poems continue to deepen and surprise us as we read. Her fresh images, sharp similes, and rich language compel us to listen to her, and to examine the darkness in our own lives.

"A girl's car plunged / over the edge last week, hundreds of feet into the Esk Valley" ("The Road to Rosslyn Chapel"): Jeanette Lynes is a brilliant storyteller. She borrows, steals, shapes, creates, and tells a thousand little stories in her new book *The New Blue Distance*. She takes anecdotes—her stories, others' stories, stories not even connected to her—and makes them deeply personal. She gives us the Canadian cultural and personal landscape in little slices of story. Her rich sense of humour counterpoints the darkness at the centre of many of these stories (in the story of a car going over a cliff we get to admire Dolly Parton's "magnificent breasts"). Through these poems she gives us a new kind

of ownership. We read about Nova Scotia, about a farm long gone, about the road to Rosslyn Chapel, and these places become ours, because we own the stories now too. *The New Blue Distance* ends with two poem novellas—one about Elizabeth Smart, the second about Beatrice Potter. These rich narratives provide a fitting climax for the book.

Mouths and feet are the recurring images in *SLANT Room*, Michael Eden Reynolds' first book of poems. He connects us beautifully and intimately to the landscape of the Yukon by using feet and mouths, as well as fur and skin, moving smoothly and constantly between animal and person. In his luminous poem about the birth of a child, he writes: "Little one, yours in the four-hoofed heart that pulls itself out of / the river and stands bewildered and sure" ("Fetascope"). Reynolds creates a fine balancing act between images of hope ("Soundtrack to The Moment of Your Birth") and images of rage and pain ("Past the Fence with the Ghost of the Choked Dog"). Reynolds' view of the landscapes of Canada is very intimate—the way our feet respond to the land we stand on and the way the land tastes in our mouths. His very body-centred, physical approach creates a fresh and vivid way to explore place and identity: "This one / has teeth. . . . This one / scents blood packed in the far reach of winter . . . this being its muzzle thrust into its belly" ("Castor Gulo"). What's powerful about these poems is that Reynolds, through language and image, puts us directly into a sense of place—there are no vague abstractions or theories. We're simply there. And we cannot look away.

All three poets ask us to live for a time in the house of the body, in the language of the belly. We hear new stories, we see how close we are to animals, and we explore the landscapes of the back-country imagination. And in reading these poems, we begin to see how our own throats, and our own claws, fit into this place we call home.

Remembrances of Things Past

Susan Musgrave

Obituary of Light: The Sangan River Meditations. Leaf \$16.95

Robert Kroetsch

Too Bad: Sketches Toward a Self-Portrait. U of Alberta P \$24.95

Alice Major

Memory's Daughter. U of Alberta P \$24.95

Reviewed by Karl Jirgens

Like Marcel Proust, Susan Musgrave, Robert Kroetsch, and Alice Major meditate on mortality and time past. These three collections are all long-poem suites of connected lyrics. Susan Musgrave draws from Asian and Western traditions in tribute to Paul, a beloved, lost to cancer. Musgrave links short lyrics, koans, and haiku variants through four seasons, embracing diurnal flux and the life cycle. *Obituary of Light* provides an exquisite self-portrait through meditations over time, loss, and perception itself: "Is it the flags / that flutter now, or the wind?" In answer, not flags, not wind, but mind flutters, now that "There is no place / to take shelter / but yourself." Musgrave advances *haikai* verse forms, as implied by the words of Japanese *Waka* poet Ariwara no Narihira, which introduce the section on Summer: "I have always known that at last I would / take this road, but yesterday I did not know / that it would be today." Narihara's words resonate on the day of Paul's death near the end of the book: "We all knew Paul / was going to die; I just didn't think / it would be today." Bittersweet, Musgrave's elegy finds solace in Zen, compassion, and spiritual enlightenment, recalling Wordsworthian intimations of immortality: "The day we are born we begin / to forget everything we know." She transcends Keats' Grecian Urn, "We eluded beauty and went / right to the truth." Musgrave's vision, informed by fierce love, weaves devoted recollections, quotidian

observations, Anishnabe perspectives, and the narrator's thoughts projected onto the environment, revealing "self," "other," and "all" as one.

Robert Kroetsch tenders profound reflections of an artist's life: "We wrote the books. In whose dream, then, are we dreaming?" Ever the trickster, Kroetsch acknowledges that constructs of self are subject to Wallace Stevens' "necessary angel" of fiction. If the brain is a "skilled forgetter," then "Who among us is not a fiction?" Yet, certain realities remain irrefutable. He recalls boyhood, and cutting down his father's favourite tree to count the rings for a school project: "A tree is a kind of calendar." His disconcerted father indulges him: "He taught me that love has many seasons." Life's metamorphosis is suggested by an anonymous quotation provided by Dennis Cooley: "I've kept my grandfather's axe and used it all these years. I've had to change the head twice and the handle three times." Rich in humour, *Too Bad* features sketches of the author and cameo appearances by Odysseus, Orpheus, Hokusai, Rousseau, Mark Twain, and Eli Mandel among others. The poet's task is to "invent us, again." *Too Bad* meditates on childhood, education, river-boats, philosophy, art, travel, eroticism, food, brain functions, and artistic representation, concluding that "[m]aking meaning is easy enough, / but making the meaning mean is tough." *Too Bad* features classic Kroetschean language-play flavoured lightly by sardonic wit; "I ransacked my life for a poem." "Done in by creation itself." In a semiotic dis-appearing act, Kroetsch names, renames, and un-names himself, noting that "Perhaps the face is a mirage." Ultimately, focus turns to the quotidian and the creative act in process. The artist sojourns onward, recalling that "Every enduring poem was written today."

Arranged in six parts, Alice Major's *Memory's Daughter* enhances the long-poem tradition by adapting biblical and Greco-Roman myth to depict metamorphosis

through life's seasons. A father's dementia, perhaps Alzheimer's, is identified as a "vivid vacancy" in the brain's "architecture." The Muse of Poetry, Mnemosyne's daughter, grants Major dominion over microcosm, macrocosm, and time itself, a "pinprick hole in the sky," illuminating memory. Major celebrates and laments her dying mother, whose clasped hand connects to ancestors during the Industrial Revolution. Recollections are rendered incandescent, "a flowering of light, a globe / I form around the flame." Youthful joys of cinema and music hall give way to war. Recollections begin appropriately with women on the assembly line in a clock factory, soon followed by revolts against wealthy warmongers at the Glasgow steelworks. In subsequent sections, the past surfaces through photos, moments plucked from the flux of time, juxtaposed with x-rays, CT scans of lungs, brain, body, revealing an end through cancer and sleep. A final lullaby, sung by daughter to mother inverts time, "How I wish I could remember / her young face floating over mine, her eyes." The fourth suite, "Time is How," is a remarkable linguistic *tour de force*, radiant in self-referential language, exploring signifying limits and polysemous freedoms. The fifth section depicts a ten-year-old girl with muscular dystrophy metamorphosing in Ovidian fashion into tree, map, melody, transforming fear into courage. The final suite articulates a perfect marriage between poetry and alchemy as "We watch the silver of the moon release you" to memory's daughter.



Géographie littéraire

Madeleine Ouellette-Michalska

Imaginaire sans frontières. Les lieux de l'écriture, l'écriture des lieux. XYZ 22,00 \$

Compte-rendu par Élise Lepage

Imaginaire sans frontières est une très belle géographie littéraire et personnelle qui vient s'ajouter aux autres essais de Madeleine Ouellette-Michalska. Écrit dans un style magistral, ce recueil se divise en deux parties correspondant au diptyque du sous-titre. « Les lieux de l'écriture » regroupe des essais portant diversement sur la création littéraire où l'auteure revient sur la genèse de ses œuvres, la relation critique ou le rapport à l'autre et à soi-même. On relève plusieurs passages d'intérêt sur la littérature québécoise et un plaidoyer en faveur des littératures périphériques. Mais on retiendra tout particulièrement l'essai « De la cyberculture au cellu-roman » qui réfléchit avec subtilité aux nouveaux défis que pose l'écriture et l'édition électroniques, les nouvelles habitudes de lecture et de recherche influencées par la fréquentation du Web. Ces pages, qui témoignent d'une pensée en pleine ébullition, consciente de la complexité des questions auxquelles elle se collette et qui refuse obstinément toute facilité ou dogmatisme, rendent pleinement justice au titre d'*Imaginaire sans frontières*. Que deviennent l'écriture et la lecture une fois toutes les frontières—géographiques, matérielles, linguistiques, etc.—abolies?

La seconde partie sur « L'écriture des lieux » semble au premier abord inviter davantage à la rêverie qu'à la réflexion. Madeleine Ouellette-Michalska évoque divers séjours, de l'Irlande au Sud des États-Unis, d'Aix-la-Chapelle au Mexique en passant par le Maghreb. Chaque essai semble alors se raccrocher à une chronologie, à un fait biographique. La lecture ralentit sans doute un peu. Mais ne nous y trompons pas : ces fragments de récits de voyage se lisent

presque comme des apologues—au lecteur d'en dégager le sens. Les derniers essais sont centrés sur le monde arabe selon différentes perspectives : la question du voile et des accommodements raisonnables, ce que la science occidentale doit au monde musulman, l'imaginaire du désert ou du tourbillon du souk de Fez.

Ce sont « ces territoires imaginaires—mais combien réel—[où] se déchiffrent à la fois le profil de civilisations englouties dans la gangue de l'oubli et le visage inquiet, frénétique et aventurier, du monde actuel » que nous invite à explorer ce recueil d'essais.

À la source du chant

Antonio Porta

Yellow. Noroît 17,95 \$

Compte rendu par Patricia Godbout

« Tous les jours j'ai risqué de mourir / pour ce chant jamais commencé; mais j'ai préféré continuer à monter à la source de ce chant jamais né » : voici ce qu'on peut lire dans une entrée datée du 24 janvier 1988 du journal-poème d'Antonio Porta, un peu plus d'un an avant son décès, survenu en 1989. La *forma-diario* (forme-journal) était alors l'une des formes explorées par Porta pour réfuter un lyrisme vertical qu'il estimait illusoire, souhaitant plutôt faire place à la matérialité et à l'angoisse du quotidien. Cette recherche esthétique qu'il a menée sur le « chant jamais né » se trouve doublement frappée du sceau de l'inachèvement du fait du caractère posthume de la publication de ces poèmes dans le recueil *Yellow* (Mondadori, 2002, avec une postface de Niva Lorenzini). Né en 1935, Porta est un poète important de la deuxième moitié du vingtième siècle qui a fortement contribué au renouvellement de la poésie italienne à partir du début des années 1960. La belle traduction française proposée par Francis Catalano d'une bonne partie du recueil de 2002 est aussi une façon de tenter une remontée à la source de ce

canto mai nato, chant bloqué qui peut « sectionner la gorge », chant d'agonie du merle pris dans les serres du milan, anti-chant. L'antinomie, comme le rappelle fort à propos John Picchione dans une postface à la traduction de Catalano, est la « structure portante » du recueil. Dans un mot de présentation, Catalano présente, lui aussi, le projet esthétique de Porta. Il associe la nature « in progress » de ces poèmes au *non finito*, expression italienne qui désigne précisément, dans une œuvre d'art, son état d'inachèvement. Catalano assimile son travail à celui du technicien affairé à la restauration d'un *non finito* : comparaison probante puisque la traduction étant création, elle réanime le « geste de fureur créative » dont parle le traducteur.

Great[er] Expectations

Beth Powning

The Sea Captain's Wife. Knopf Canada \$32.00

Karen McLaughlin

From this Distance. Cormorant \$21.00

Lola Lemire Tostevin

The Other Sister. Inanna \$22.95

Reviewed by Andrea MacPherson

At first glance, these novels might seem to bear no similarity to one another: one deals with sea travel in the mid-nineteenth century, another with an across-country road trip between a woman and her late mother-in-law, and the third a retrospective account of one woman's life. But appearances can often be deceiving. The three novels all explore the gender expectations imposed upon women and the ways in which they each attempt to challenge them.

In *The Sea Captain's Wife*, Powning's sixth book, Azuba Galloway Bradstock is born and raised in New Brunswick, with a view of the sea her constant companion. This view reinforces Azuba's desire to see more of the world than her hometown, and once she marries Captain Nathaniel Bradstock,

she believes this desire might become a reality. But Azuba is bound by her times, and instead of travelling with Nathaniel, she finds herself left behind with a small child. This traditional role is not what Azuba had imagined for herself, and her frustrations are only tempered by a new friendship with the local reverend. While the friendship is chaste, there is an underlying current of potential, and here the novel treads into the typical historical romance, offering the love triangle as primary concern for Azuba; but Powning instead uses the friendship as a catalyst for change in the shape and scope of Azuba's life. It is this friendship, and an afternoon walk hijacked by stormy weather, that finally makes Nathaniel decide to take Azuba and their daughter, Carrie, to sea on *Traveller*.

While Nathaniel is not happy at the idea of taking a wife and child to sea, Azuba is ecstatic, and tells Nathaniel she is excited about his decision. "I have no choice," Nathaniel replies. "Therefore, it is your choice. Remember that." This statement offers an ominous tone, suggesting the real dangers of life at sea.

From here, Powning takes the Bradstock family on an incredible journey on *Traveller*. We witness sea storms, foreign locales, and dire conditions on board; a memorable passage reveals a starving hen attacking the bone buttons on Carrie's dress, seeking out much-needed calcium and illuminating the desperation attending provisions at sea.

Powning is an accomplished author and thorough researcher; the book is full of both large and small details of sea travel, nineteenth-century protocol, and the geography of foreign landscapes. And while these details certainly add texture and realism, I often found myself overwhelmed by them. The research detracted from the very human characters Powning had created, and I found myself wishing to keep the focus on them and their complex interactions rather than the technical details of sailing.

The novel also traces, in part, the result of new technology on *Traveller*, Nathaniel, and other sea captains; we see *Traveller* compared and reduced in relation to the new metal-clad ships, and in Nathaniel's response witness his understanding that the life he has loved is quickly vanishing. This commentary on the effect of technology on society is apt and well-drawn. By the end of the novel, though, even this change seemed inevitable, and I wished for more surprises along the way in Azuba's journey.

Journeys—from road trips to more exotic travel—are time-honoured devices used to reveal personal transformations within characters, and Karen McLaughlin also explores a journey, though it is much more an interior one. She uses physical travel as a metaphor for another kind of journey, and it effectively allows her to focus on both Robyn's interior life and the symbolism of the landscape without creating a static narrative. Robyn herself says, "I'm driving a metaphor, Muriel. Imagine that."

From *This Distance* traces the protagonist's trip westward across Canada, driving the vehicle inherited from her late mother-in-law, Muriel. From Muriel's burial site near the Bay of Fundy back to her hometown of Calgary, Robyn's memories and the changing Canadian landscape are implicitly linked. Robyn has always believed that Muriel did not approve of her, and she takes advantage of the long trip to converse with Muriel, as if she is with her in the car; in this way, Robyn can reveal secrets that have never before been spoken aloud, saying things to Muriel that she never would have when she was alive. McLaughlin cleverly avoids the traditional pitfalls of the potentially clichéd family secret by using this narrative structure; in this way she directly discusses that which in another novel would be made coy and shadowy until the close of the story.

McLaughlin's ability to aptly detail the impulses, secret longings, fears, and hopes

of an ordinary woman is the strength of the novel; the voice is clear and honest, and feels authentic to the characters and their experiences. Her descriptions and observations are fresh and specific, giving the reader pause to consider not only what we are seeing, but how these observations in turn shape our perceptions of the character. Robyn laments, "I thought I'd weigh much less with you dead, Muriel," and with this, we not only see the depth of Robyn's pain, but also her new, wry understanding of it. At times, however, this style of narrative felt as though I was spying on Robyn at her most intimate, and this intimacy was slightly off-putting.

The Canadian landscape, as well, plays an important role in the novel, from the Maritimes, to suburban Toronto, Regina, Calgary, and Northern BC; here we see not only the beauty and brutality of the country, but also the impact of the natural world on the people who inhabit it; Robyn becomes a kind of manifestation of the landscape, allowing the facets of her personality to unfold throughout the novel.

Geography as metaphor is also at work in Lola Lemire Tostevin's new novel, *The Other Sister*. Through the eyes of Julia, the novel's ninety-seven-year-old protagonist, we see Toronto during wartime, revealing the personal and communal responses to war and social privilege. Julia is moving to a retirement home, and as a gift, her daughter, Rachel, and granddaughter, Thea, give her a laptop and ask her to record her memories. It's a clever device to allow Julia to wade into the past, detailing her own experiences as well as those of her twin sister, Jane. The girls were from a wealthy family, and this sets them apart and allows them to make choices unusual for women of the time; Julia, in fact, turns down a marriage proposal from an eligible bachelor and instead suggests he marry her sister. It is this challenging of gender expectation that sets Julia apart from other characters in the novel, but the

descriptions of her as feisty and forward-thinking no longer feel fresh; I would have rather seen this expressed in a new way, showing Julia struggling with how to reject expectations of her as a woman in the 1940s.

Paired with Julia's story is that of Lena Kohn, a Mengele twin and Holocaust survivor that Julia meets in the retirement home. Lena lost her sister at Auschwitz, and through this foil to her own story, Julia is forced to reconcile her wartime experiences with Lena's, and to admit her ignorance of the real horrors of war. This forced reflection reveals both Julia's empathy as well as the prejudices she had not realized lingered below the surface.

The Other Sister, as well, deals with generational issues between Julia, Rachel, and Thea; each woman represents a different time and gender expectation, and they each rail against obligation and duty, trying to find their own voices and their own paths. In many ways, the novel is about identity, and Tostevin's range of characters allows for this theme to be fully and exquisitely explored; most specifically, the lines between Julia's and Jane's lives are blurred, making their search for distinction and separateness all the more apparent.

Tostevin deftly handles not only the sweeping historical content, but also a strong cast of characters, including Julia and Jane, Lena and her twin sister Lili, Rachel and Thea, and Daniel Browne, another member of the retirement home who, like Julia, has not let age dictate his life. Tostevin creates well-drawn characters, and easily pairs them with historical detail. At the centre of Julia's story lies a mystery involving both Julia and Jane, and this revelation is the pivot on which the plot spins. These revelations of Julia's life, though, are problematic; the manner in which they are revealed, sometimes in italicized sections, other times in stiff dialogue, often feels too much like information being fed to readers, rather than a natural unfolding of story.

When Julia and Lena are discussing their twin sisters, they say:

Did you tell her about Lili?

No. Only about my younger brother and sister.

What happened to them?

Relatives hid them in a Catholic convent in Budapest. They didn't go to the camps.

Why do you think we're lying about having twin sisters, Lena?

I don't know. To protect them, maybe.

They are safer if they don't exist.

As women who have shared their darkest histories, their dialogue feels contrived, forced in order to simply reveal information rather than to illuminate their personalities and their relationship. In this same way, Tostevin often feels compelled to explain what the reader should be able to interpret from the prose. This over-explaining lends an air of insecurity to the narrative, as if the author is uncertain if her words are, indeed, capturing the mood and tone intended.

Though each of these novels approaches gender issues in decidedly different manners, they all manage to illuminate generational challenges faced by women. It is both inspiring and somewhat depressing to think that women from such varied backgrounds as the nineteenth century through to the Second World War and present day could still share so much.



L'illusion bitumineuse

Marc Prescott

Fort Mac. Blé 14,95 \$

Compte rendu par Alexandre Gauthier

Fort Mac de Marc Prescott est l'une de ces pièces coup-de-poing qui frappent l'imaginaire tant elle s'ancre, qu'on le veuille ou non, dans le réel. Sur fond de sables bitumineux, Jaypee, Mimi et Kiki quittent leur Québec natal pour s'installer à Fort McMurray où ils espèrent, comme on leur a promis, faire de l'argent, beaucoup d'argent. Mais malheureusement, non seulement ne deviendront-ils pas riches, mais s'enliseront plutôt dans le gouffre de cette ville du Nord de l'Alberta, dont la population est motivée principalement par l'appât du gain. Jusqu'où sommes-nous prêts à aller pour faire de l'argent?

La pièce cherche à répondre précisément à cette question. Jaypee verra ses illusions se volatiliser rapidement, mais son acharnement et ses décisions plus que discutables conduiront les deux autres membres du trio à leur perte et ce, malgré les avertissements de Maurice, un Franco-Albertain qui réside à Fort Mac pour échapper à son destin plutôt que pour le construire. Seule l'innocente Kiki, la sœur de Mimi, porte en elle, même si le dramaturge expose dès la première scène son désir d'en finir avec la vie, une brève lueur d'espoir. Brève, certes, parce qu'elle sera rattrapée elle-aussi par la fatalité noire comme le pétrole. Kiki est la seule à reconnaître les dangers de l'exploitation des sables bitumineux, invoquant souvent Dame Nature. Mais elle représente surtout les dangers humains liés à l'appât du gain.

Et c'est là l'intérêt de la pièce. *Fort Mac* n'est pas qu'une fable écologique qui s'emploie à dénoncer l'exploitation des sables bitumineux. Ce n'est pas non plus qu'une pièce politique, revendicatrice d'une position anticapitaliste, claire, et précise. Il s'agit tout simplement d'une pièce sur l'humain—l'homme, la femme—qui, vouant un culte à l'argent et à

la prospérité, entrent dans un tourbillon sans jamais pouvoir en ressortir. Les personnages dévoilent peu à peu, directement au public, des fragments de leur humanité, humanité qui s'éffrite tout au long de la pièce.

De la condition du Franco-Canadien en passant par la violence familiale et l'environnement, *Fort Mac* exploite des thèmes actuels, pour ne pas dire des lieux communs. Sa force réside plutôt dans ses personnages : le public assiste, impuissant, à leur destruction, englués qu'ils sont dans les sables bitumineux comme dans leurs illusions. Et tout au long de la pièce, Kiki, en vierge Marie des temps modernes, prie, en vain. Elle est bien la seule à croire en autre chose qu'en l'argent.

Connecting Freedom

Bryan Prince

A Shadow in the Household: One Enslaved Family's Incredible Struggle for Freedom.

McClelland & Stewart \$22.99

Reviewed by Juliane Okot Bitek

With painstaking care, Bryan Prince sorts through mountains of archival research to reconstruct and narrate the story of the Weems family's painful rupture through slavery. When it becomes obvious that the world of slavery is not neatly demarcated between the abolitionists and slavers, the free and the enslaved, black and white people, the narration reveals a complex world in which the Weems family have to depend on anyone who will lend a hand, some money, and the time to write letters and smuggle John Weem's wife, sons, and daughters through the Underground Railway to Canada.

It is fascinating to see how small the world was even before the contemporary global village. The Weems family saga spans Jamaica, the United States, Canada, and Britain and connects luminaries such as Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, a young Abraham

Lincoln, and Harriet Beecher Stowe, the author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. There are throngs of priests, writers, former slavers, family, strangers, and other everyday people who did what they could to re-unite this family. While letters to editors and pamphlets arrived in the private homes to elicit sympathy and funds, there were the firm detractors, whole communities who defended, for example, the mailman who refused to deliver such literature despite the wrath of the federal government. Indeed, it took a global village to bring this family together.

Shadow is a welcome addition to the growing body of work that not only revisits the era of slavery that was not that long ago, one whose shadow should never be forgotten. There are several private individuals who support and assist the Weems family from Newcastle upon Tyne in Britain, to Grange Hill, Jamaica, and Buxton, Ontario. *Shadow* takes its place among recent Canadian writing on slavery such as Lawrence Hill's *Book of Negroes* (2007) and Afua Cooper's *The Hanging of Angélique* (2006) as it retells the role of Canadian citizens and their occasional reluctance to wholly welcome the fugitives from the United States. All three explore Canada's links to the slave trade, not only as Canaan, the land of freedom, but also, in this case, a place for a brief repose, continuing struggle, and ultimately life and death in a place that cannot be home because of the family members that remain in the United States.

This is not Prince's first foray into slavery in the Americas. His *I Came as a Stranger: The Underground Railroad* won the 2005 Children's Nautilus Book Award for nonfiction. *A Shadow in the Household* is a gratifying read and a compelling work.



Premières pages

Judy Quinn

Lémondé. Noroît 14,95 \$

Hector Ruiz

Qui s'installe? Noroît 16,95 \$

Jacques Audet

Lests. Noroît 16,95 \$

Compte rendu par Emmanuel Bouchard

La collection « Initiale » des éditions du Noroît réserve ses pages aux premiers recueils. Paru en 2008, celui de Judy Quinn fait parler les arbres. C'est ce qu'évoque déjà son titre, *Lémondé*, qui recouvre l'idée de la perte, de ce qui a été enlevé d'inutile ou de nuisible. S'impose à la lecture ce sentiment répété d'un lien entre l'arbre (la nature) et l'homme : prolongement, correspondance, miroitement ou carrément rupture, abandon. « La quenouille qui pousse / c'est la main de l'air / qui s'ouvre / à sa parole », lit-on dans les premières pages. Laisser parler ou non, ouvrir la voie aux mots, laisser faire le silence, donner en somme au livre l'espace où grandir, voilà encore ce que disent ces textes finement ciselés « où se logent les promesses ». Entre les retailles qui en tombent de page en page et ce que le poète accepte de laisser visible, le lecteur hésite, mais entretient la certitude d'une genèse, comme en témoignent d'ailleurs les derniers textes du recueil, tournés tour à tour vers le passé et l'avenir : « Une gaieté lourde tombe comme un fruit / les branches dont le cœur s'abrie / préparent quelqu'un d'autre / il te ressemblera / le passeur de vies ».

Hector Ruiz, quant à lui, présente une première œuvre qui s'inscrit sous le signe de l'errance. On y voit déambuler un être déraciné s'abandonnant aux hasards imposés par le « paysage urbain ». Cette ville, c'est Montréal, ses ponts, ses rues, ses vitrines, ses parcs; ses habitants aussi, ceux de la nuit surtout. Le poète y « erre au gré des ruelles », les « lignes de main tendues vers l'abîme », aux prises partout avec « les

contradictions qui secouent [son] corps », comme s'il ne devait jamais cesser de se réinventer, de « recompose[r] le vent », et cela, malgré « l'inflexion de la solitude » et la mort qui pousse au-dehors et au-dedans : « Ce n'est pas l'autre que tu combats, mais la mort /aussi risible que cela puisse paraître / la mort en ton vis-à-vis, en toi ». Une forte impression s'impose à la lecture de cette poésie un peu horizontale : celle de suivre un « regard » voulant lui-même « échapper » au poète, qu'on sent « marche[r] derrière [ses] yeux ».

Lests de Jacques Audet évoque les variations d'une tension : celle qui provient de cette masse à laquelle fait allusion le titre. C'est bien là l'objet du livre, dans lequel le lecteur « cherche un appui » de manière à en saisir le sens horizontal, justement. Mais, comme la réalité dans cette poésie, le référent semble « coule[r] hors de ses digues »; reste ce mouvement, parfois désincarné, qui oscille de haut en bas, multiplie les chutes et les envols, attire les êtres et les choses comme des aimants ou les détache l'un de l'autre : « Faille où tu tombes tout d'un bloc / Plus lourde que le jour / Essoufflé par ses cercles / Ta main découpe la lumière // Dans ta chute le vent / T'habille d'un autre nom / Tu reprends ton âme / Enroulée aux oiseaux // Ton vertige englouti à grand seaux / Tu lances ta massue à travers l'écume ». Cette tension, cette force qui accuse tout ce qui lui fait contrepoids, trouve ailleurs son expression dans une forme de relâchement, qui en constitue le degré zéro : « le sommeil a pillé / nos dépouilles // il a fui nous laissant / à l'écart de nos rêves // sans aucune attache // hormis son doigt muet / qui glisse sur nos visages / et y rameute l'ombre à sa guise ». Un recueil d'une remarquable unité.



Tough Being Tough

Timothy Quinn

Octopus Intelligence. Guernica \$20.00

Tom Walmsley

Dog Eat Rat. Mansfield \$19.95

Philip Quinn

The Skeleton Dance. Anvil \$20.00

Reviewed by Timothy Dugdale

Tough guys don't dance. But they sure like to write even when they should stop. Just ask Timothy Quinn. His new book, *Octopus Intelligence*, is two novellas in one. One of the stories is hard-boiled, the other runny in the centre. The former follows Charlie Weyl, a retired intelligence officer with a dodgy testicle and the dyspeptic sensibilities of a seventy-eight-year-old fading to black in the Big Apple. Weyl staggers around town trying to deal with his pain, stopping here and there to ruminate about the banana republic revolutionaries and shady operatives that populated his past as a spook masquerading as a salesman. But Weyl isn't just on the run from death; someone has busted into his pad and left a cryptic message that has him looking over his shoulder for the last time. Quinn wisely uses the present tense to chart Weyl's ordeal, taking the reader inside the man's paranoia and desperation.

The second novella concerns Toby Cooper-Dunne, a paleontologist who is just back from Morocco where he has discovered some long-extinct creature in the desert. Toby's a bit of a partywaist, I'm afraid, an emasculated academic with one unrequited eye on a saucy research assistant and the other on his scheming colleagues. Quinn uses Toby as a ventriloquist's dummy to tell us *ad nauseam* a) the planet is ancient b) humans are animals that perish quickly and randomly on said ancient planet and c) God is on permanent vacation. In the last third of the book, we learn of the connection between Toby and Charlie. By then, alas,

Toby is a most unwelcome pill that does nothing for Charlie's compelling condition. Or our patience.

Tom Walmsley is a seasoned veteran of wearing out his welcome. *Dog Eat Rat* bears all the hallmarks of the Walmsley oeuvre—sex, drugs, ratty apartments, damaged people being edgy in ratty apartments. Here he has thrown a detective story into the mix. But it's just a front for more naughty shenanigans by cardboard denizens of doom. Ginger and Trip are private investigators who conduct pointless stakeouts when they are not off indulging in various sex fantasies with various clients like George DeWitt, a rich man with a taste for phone sex and a wife who gets hot talking about hell. It's all fun and games until somebody needs a whipping.

As a playwright who specializes in desperate living, Walmsley is usually strong on dialogue that burns away the posturing of junkies and fetishists and their ilk. Here he's shamelessly lazy. Characters banter over their various transgressions at a level of interest barely pitched above the prickly, sexually frustrated zombies that populate an Atom Egoyan film: "Rebecca bit his neck and Trip tore her blouse. He was naked before she was. 'Let's make it a sin,' said Rebecca." Walmsley is toying with self-parody, which in the end might be the only strategy left to him. In the age of internet porn, celebrity rehab, and evangelical housewives covered in tattoos, edge is over. The harder an artist tries to push the envelope, the lamer the results. If Walmsley really wants to shock us, his next work should be a children's book for Mormons.

If you can't have plot, then at least have pace. That appears to be the strategy of Philip Quinn in his novel, *The Skeleton Dance*. Alas, Quinn has his book running towards, rather than away from, that regrettable back alley where William S. Burroughs gives handjob to Russell Smith and Brett Easton Ellis. The star of the show

is Robert Walker, a failed rocker turned failed copywriter. A gutless underachiever prone to self-pity, he likes his drugs as much as he hates his life. Behind the wheel of the Porsche that takes our Bobby over hell's half acre of decadence is Klin Abrams, a criminal lawyer up to no good with a nasty motorcycle gang, the Diamondbacks. Klin and Robert are boyhood sweethearts, wankers from way back before they moved onto kinky adulthood, such as it is in dreary old Hogtown. The snow on the streets is gray, the snow up their noses is white, and the mood black tinged with bisexual mauves.

All is not lost. After dragging you through a lot of party people bullshit, Quinn delivers a wonderful little love scene, full of longing and ineptitude, between Robert and Ingrid, a fellow copywriter who is stepping out on her hubby.

You take what you can get in a book like this. Indeed, a mere two pages later, the bike-gang appears and Robert is spirited away to a warehouse where they keep all the clichés of menace and mayhem particular to the leathered brethren. Then it's off to the Caribbean for a drug caper. Klin quickly disappears and Robert is visited by the bikers and their entourage of pornographers and cretins. He drifts through a series of macabre hallucinations, scored by *The Doors*. The worst is yet to come, back in Toronto. For him and for the reader.

Quinn is a good writer, capable of strong sentences and vivid imagery. But this is a story that does a disservice to his talent. It's a cartoon with stale echoes of a dozen other books about Peter Pan dummies, their drugs, and their posturing. It's tough trying to be tough.



Reading List

T.F. Rigelhof

Hooked on Canadian Books: The Good, The Better, and the Best Canadian Novels Since 1984.
Cormorant \$32.00

Reviewed by Alison Calder

Hooked on Canadian Books is difficult to review, primarily because it is so hard to categorize. Part literary guide, part polemic, part collection of reviews, and part memoir, *Hooked* defies easy description. T.F. Rigelhof will be a familiar name and voice to many as a contributing reviewer in *The Globe and Mail's* book section. But *Hooked* is not a collection of previously published reviews. Instead, one might think of it as like one of those movie guidebooks that was intended to be taken along to the rental store (in the olden days when there were such things, that is). *Hooked* is aimed at readers who want to read more, and who want some advice about how to spend their time. Entries on novels are arranged into four sections: Reading by Association (*Kompatibilität* and Novels of Friendship); Reading and Coming to Terms with the Past (*Vergangenheitsbewältigung* and Novels of Knowledge); Reading Some of "The Talented Women Who Write Today" (Novels of Comfort and Love?); and "Midnight at the Oasis" (Reading Novels of Joy and Redemption). The book concludes with a recommended reading list covering the twenty-six novels that Rigelhof thinks matter most to Canadians. A hard-working, dedicated reader of novels, he expects nothing less of his own readers.

Another way to think of *Hooked* is as a tasting menu. Rigelhof presents brief samples of/advertisements for the Canadian books that he has most enjoyed reading over the past sixteen years. Many entries are, at most, a page or two long, though several are longer and a few span only a paragraph. These are not reprinted reviews,

though Rigelhof mentions that many began that way. In fact, they often read like reviews of other reviewers, as they include extensive quotations from other reviews as well as long quotations from the primary texts. The entry on Guy Vanderhaeghe's *The Last Crossing*, for example, focuses more on how Annie Proulx, Noah Richler, Clive Sinclair, and Marina Endicott evaluated the novel than on the novel itself. Rigelhof's entries are also not plot summaries: as he intends to entice a reader to pick up the book in question, he is careful not to give away a text's secrets. Thus, many entries include necessarily vague allusions to mysterious shattering events or collisions that change characters' lives, without revealing exactly what, precisely, is so meaningful. One caveat: the entries may not be without error (the very short writeup on *Green Grass, Running Water* lists the rivals for Alberta's hand as Eli and Charlie, not Lionel and Charlie, for example).

So what, in Rigelhof's terms, is "good, better, and best" literature? In his introduction, he lays out his hopes: "This book is written from one reader to another—to as many others as possible—in the hope that enough copies will be bought and circulated so that those of you who read privately and you who participate in reading clubs will find reader-friendly approaches to recent Canadian novels in English that expand the narratives of your own lives." "Although" he is a college teacher of humanities and a professional reviewer and author, he is, he writes, "first, last and always a reader of contemporary fiction." The authors he includes are "engaged and engaging: they employ whatever abilities at their command to make their works readable and they want to be read seriously even when they're at their funniest. Who doesn't?" Well, it seems there are a few: "some writers write to be studied rather than read, taught rather than enjoyed, and count success not in sales and readers but in tenure track points for themselves

and friends within academia.” The lines he’s drawing here are well-worn and obvious: good “engaging” texts versus self-centred “academic” ones. But this division, which pops up occasionally throughout the entries, is confusing in relation to the text selection itself. A number of the books that Rigelhof promotes are written by academics or professional teachers in various capacities, and many of them have been enthusiastically adopted by course instructors across Canada (thus contributing to their sales and readership). Some of them are extremely dense structurally and linguistically, and for some, like *Green Grass, Running Water*, the concept of “readability” seems inadequate. It would be helpful in understanding Rigelhof’s criteria if he included some specific discussion of the bad and the worst novels as well. It’s understandable that *Hooked* doesn’t focus on these “bad” books—telling people which Canadian books NOT to read is all too often redundant—but without seeing what the range of quality actually is, there’s no way to measure what “good” actually means. As a result, the selection criteria seem to boil down to “books I like,” which is ingenuous considering the amount of thinking and theorizing that Rigelhof is actually doing. The way in which the project is expressed seems to be selling the project short.

This is not a book to sit down and read straight through: the effect would be like spending an afternoon reading back-cover blurbs. The essays are provocative but short, bite-sized rather than woven into sustained arguments. *Hooked on Canadian Books* may be better served by being treated as an occasional reference book, one that you can pick up and put down, reading entries here and there. For me, this is a browsing book, one that reminded me of novels I’d read and enjoyed, some I’d read and disliked, some I’d meant to read but had ended up forgetting about, and some I’ll take a second look at the next time I’m in a bookstore.

Short Simplicities

Hélène Rioux; trans. Jonathan Kaplansky
Fragments of the World: Wednesday Night at the End of the World. Cormorant \$21.00

Eva Tihanyi
Truth and Other Fictions. Inanna \$22.95

Deborah Willis
Vanishing and Other Stories. Penguin Canada \$24.00

Reviewed by Kathryn Carter

Let me begin simply: if you have time to read only one of these three fine books of short stories, pick Deborah Willis’ *Vanishing and Other Stories*. The praise and award nominations for this, her first collection of short stories, are warranted. The comment from Alice Munro adorning the Penguin edition in which she praises the emotional range and depth of the stories is apt. Willis is absolutely a voice to listen to. Her writing is simple, effortless; the aphoristic insights given to characters are gems. Academic Penny in “The Fiancée” receives this pithy advice from her mother as she contemplates marriage: “Of course he’ll disappoint you. But that’s not the worst part. Disappointing him. That’s what’ll kill you.” The range of imagined lives is similarly impressive. The recently widowed Tom in “Escape,” the teenage girl in “Sky Theatre,” the young urbanites in “This Other Us” each inhabit a fully realized and complete world that the reader comes to understand through flashbacks and understated, elegant narrative. However, the collection is not without its minor faults. While the use of the second voice works to excellent effect in a story like “Remember, Relive,” where it intimates the distance between a woman and girlhood sexual secrets, grudgingly yielded, it does not work as well in “Romance Languages,” perhaps because the character herself cannot bridge the distance between her mother’s somewhat reckless, tabloid-esque worldview and her own reticence. Here the

second-person point of view does not let the reader adequately glimpse under the surface of the character's motivations. Having said that, Willis trusts her reader to put together the puzzle pieces of motivation, and this is one of her chief strengths. Willis' implicit trust in the complicated beauty of unresolved emotional connections underpins all of the stories with a clear-eyed benevolence.

If Willis' stories plunge us into a sharply delimited world of domestic lives, Hélène Rioux takes readers on a romp across a wider geographical space and over a more varied, integrated, imaginative terrain. She uses slender, evocative threads of coincidence to tie together these loosely connected stories, and catching the clues is a delight. For example, Morello cherry jam appears in more than one story, as does a surrealist photo by Manuel Alvarez Bravo, the song from a movie score, an accident on a Quebec highway, a menu featuring a dancing shrimp, among other flotsam of contemporary life. These work to remind readers that the ephemera of our world ricochet from one life into the next, one location to the next. As Carmen says in "Early and Late Evening in Coayacan," "I think everything is connected. The present is linked to the past." Each of the stories is connected as are points on a map. Indeed, each chapter/story is located in time and space by the title, "Three o'clock in the afternoon, on a beach in Cabarette," which offers a simple and effective way to ground each narrative even before it begins. There is a great deal of imaginative play at work here and a craftsman's eye for detail which only becomes fully evident once you have finished reading the entire collection. My only quibble with these expansive, inclusive stories is that Jonathan Kaplansky's translation is wooden at times; he received a similar criticism when he translated *Intimate Dialogues*, and I see more evidence here of a kind of tone deafness. I suspect

these stories are even more impressive in the original French.

The stories in the third collection, *Truth and Other Fictions* by Eva Tihanyi, feel at times more like experiments in fiction-making. This is Tihanyi's first collection of short fiction; her previous publications have been poetry. Poetic condensation is certainly one of the strengths she brings to her writing, but she tends too much to the easy aphorism. "Body and Soul" interweaves the stories of Mary Leakey and Billie Holiday to good effect but promises more than is finally delivered in the tenuous connection at the end of the story. A *New York Times* cookbook is a better departure point for the next story, which sketches with economy and vigour a woman's adult love life. This is one of the most accomplished stories of the collection. While the other stories work to involve the reader, the endings sometimes feel pat or predictable. "Tigers Either Way" telegraphs its moral in the title even before it clobbers the reader with a Zen parable in the first paragraph. Many of the stories blend with a sameness of voice, but this should disappear in future work when the author lets herself sink more into her material.



Generic Expectations

Ray Smith

Century. Biblioasis \$21.95

Andrew Steinmetz

Eva's Threepenny Theatre. Gaspereau \$27.95

Reviewed by Lisa Grekul

If *Century* and *Eva's Threepenny Theatre* have anything in common, it is their authors' interest in exploring the shifting sociopolitical and cultural/intellectual terrains of twentieth-century Europe. In Ray Smith's novel, the flux of the century is reinforced by the text's slippery genre; in fact, the destabilization of genre seems the *raison d'être* of *Century*. Generic "slipperiness" is also, arguably, a component of Andrew Steinmetz's book. In part a biography of, and a fiction about, his great-aunt, *Eva's Threepenny Theatre* is simultaneously autobiographical. Read alongside *Century*, however, Steinmetz's text is more engaging and far more compelling because the writer's blending of forms feels unforced and organic, a natural by-product of his attempt to capture the spirit of Eva and her age.

First published in 1986 by Stoddart, *Century* was re-released in 2008 by Biblioasis with a preface by Charles Foran. Praising Smith for his achievement, and scolding Canadian readers for overlooking significance, Foran confesses that, as a disillusioned reader of "CanLit" in the 1970s, he had all but given up on Canadian authors ("[w]hy so formally and linguistically conservative and why, why so glum?") until he stumbled upon Smith's novel. After reading *Century*, Foran sought out Smith's previous books (*Lord Nelson Tavern*, 1974; *Cape Breton Is the Thought-Control Centre of Canada*, 1969) and discovered a "local" writer (Smith was born in, and has returned to, Cape Breton, though he spent the better part of four decades in Montreal) "burdened by neither a plodding sense of the novel form nor the apparently

unbearable heaviness of being Canadian."

Divided into two parts, *Century* is a series of six short fictions spanning the period of 1893 to 1983. In diverse settings (Montreal, Venice, Paris, the coast of British Columbia), we meet characters at different stages of life, grappling with various problems: in the opening story ("In the Night, Heinrich Himmler . . ."), Jane, an alumnus of the 1960s on the cusp of suicide, is visited in dreams by Himmler; in "The Princess / The Boeing and / The Hot Pastrami Sandwich," Jane's brother Ian and his wife struggle to come to terms with their child's tragic death; in "The Garden of the Hesperides," Jane's and Ian's father attempts retirement after losing his wife to cancer; and in "Serenissima," the wife/mother, facing her terminal prognosis, tries to revive an adulterous relationship. What these characters have in common—and add to them Kenniston Thorson, the main character of the final two stories, set in 1893 and 1923 respectively—is a sense of existential crisis, perhaps best articulated by Thorson. "Is it enough," the narrator asks, "that he is part of something, part of the network, the system, the idea that is bigger than him and his little hut, but encloses them, the idea which comes on silvered rails that stretch to Munich, to Vienna, to Istanbul, to Baghdad? But why does he join the idea? His daily bread? Whose idea? And why the idea? Where does it come from?"

To Foran, *Century* seems "too singular, strange and unclassifiable" for most readers, though he is optimistic that the novel will find a broader readership in its re-release. Arguing that "naming a thing can often limit how it is viewed," Foran suggests that the ideal reader of *Century* is one who can recognize the irrelevancy of generic labels: the magic of the novel is precisely its absence of "[c]onventional unities of theme and action"; instead, the "textures" and the "musicality" of Smith's language "serve as medium and message alike." Loath as I am

to be categorized as a conventional reader, I suspect that a good many readers—myself included—might find the novel less “strange” if it didn’t announce itself as a novel. For some of us, who certainly appreciate texture and musicality, genre matters. Genre arouses interest and establishes expectations: *Century*, to be blunt, disappoints in large part because it fails to do either.

Eva’s Threepenny Theatre, by contrast, is a gripping work of creative non-fiction that will exceed readers’ expectations. The “family memoir” can be wearying, especially when its author feels duty-bound to showcase historical research; when “facts” are lacking, it can as easily become a drippy-sweet, sentimental journey. Steinmetz’s text is neither—perhaps because the Montreal-based author is an experienced memoirist (he previously published *Wardlife: The Apprenticeship of a Young Writer as a Hospital Clerk*, 2001), perhaps because his background as a poet (see *Histories*, 2000, and *Hurt Thyself*, 2005) has endowed his writing with no-nonsense precision.

Aptly structured in five parts (read: five acts), with Eva playing the lead role, the narrative begins near the end of her life: diagnosed with pancreatic cancer at 82, Eva is visited by her great-nephew; facing his great-aunt’s final curtain call, Steinmetz sets out to learn about and record the details of her life, acknowledging that his “portable recorder and tin microphone” are “poor tools . . . for capturing a life.” Eva’s life is reconstructed in the text’s three dominant narrative strands: Steinmetz’s encounters with her in her London, Ontario, home (circa 1994); stories of her childhood (she was born in 1912), adolescence, and adulthood in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and, finally, Canada; and scenes which sharply focus on her work in the theatre, especially her involvement in the first performance of Bertolt Brecht’s *The Threepenny Opera* in 1928. Extraordinarily gutsy and resilient, Eva survives not only the trauma

of war, exacerbated by her Jewish ancestry, but also a motherless upbringing, a dominating brother (Steinmetz’s grandfather), and the untimely death of her son.

According to Steinmetz, acting classes taught Eva how to perform on-stage and how to “be” offstage. She gained the “ability to change and change again, never coming to a standstill. She was pure verb.”

In recreating Eva’s experiences, Steinmetz deftly draws his readers into the stories of a family and an age, which coalesce to form, necessarily, the backdrop of his own life. While he develops a rich “cast of characters,” including his grandfather, his father, Eva’s sisters, and Eva’s last partner, Steinmetz is no detached recorder or alienated observer. And yet, the “singular” (to revisit Foran’s language) achievement of *Eva’s Threepenny Theatre* is that Steinmetz makes no apology for the seamlessly elegant ways in which he plays the “playwright.” Guided by Brecht’s notion that “[a]rt is not a mirror to reflect reality but a hammer with which to shape it,” Steinmetz makes his hammer apparent without bludgeoning readers with it. We don’t need to be told that he can never know the full truth—and yet, we somehow sense that he has come stunningly close.



Regards sur l'Ontario français

Société Charlevoix, Jean-Pierre Pichette, dir.

Cahiers Charlevoix—Études Franco-Ontariennes, n° 7. Prise de Parole 30,00 \$

Compte rendu par Pierre-Yves Mocquais

Le volume (346 pages) comprend six articles, un *Avant-propos* et une *Chronique des activités de la Société Charlevoix* et de la *Société des Dix*. Les articles, substantiels, ont entre quarante et soixante dix pages et possèdent un appareil critique riche.

Gaétan Gervais consacre une étude à « L'école du Fort Frontenac ». Si les renvois bibliographiques sont complets et abondants, l'étude pêche par l'absence de notes explicatives. Son intérêt principal consiste en ce que Gervais démythifie l'existence d'une école au Fort Frontenac à sa création en 1675 en dépit de sources abondantes qui prétendent le contraire.

Le texte de Jean-Pierre Pichette dont les travaux sur l'oralité et le folklore de la Francophonie canadienne en milieu minoritaire ne demandent aucune introduction, est une genèse et une présentation détaillée du *Romancero du Canada* de Marius Barbeau (1937) replacées dans le contexte des ouvrages qui l'influencèrent. L'étude traite de questions de réception et de l'influence du *Romancero* sur les carrières d'anthropologues, ethnologues, et folkloristes québécois de renom.

Yves Frenette dans son étude sur *L'Ontario français du Centre et du Sud-Ouest, 1940-1970*, période cruciale et mal connue de l'affirmation de la société franco-ontarienne, analyse les courants migratoires, les relations avec la majorité anglophone, les transferts linguistiques, l'hétérogénéité culturelle, et le réseau institutionnel.

Les deux études suivantes de Simon Laflamme et de Raymond Mougeon portent sur les jeunes Franco-Ontariens. Laflamme

pose la question de savoir s'il existe des différences entre les francophones et les anglophones dans la manière dont ils utilisent Internet et dont ils se représentent. L'étude de Mougeon porte sur l'emploi des conjonctions et locutions de conséquence chez les jeunes Franco-ontariens et souligne les divergences d'utilisation entre jeunes Montréalais et jeunes Franco-Ontariens.

« Un exemple de 'Groulxisme' appliqué : l'Association de la jeunesse franco-ontarienne de 1949 à 1960 » de Michel Bok enfin, souligne que si on connaît le rôle de Lionel Groulx dans la question des écoles de l'Ontario, l'on sait moins comment l'idéologie qu'il prônait put contribuer, pendant plusieurs décennies, à l'action de l'AJFO.

Même si la Société Charlevoix semble un club fermé (ses membres sont élus à des « fauteuils »), les études qu'elle produit se révèlent particulièrement satisfaisantes tant par leur ampleur que par leur qualité.

Figures of Memories and Cities

Carmine Starnino

This Way Out. Gaspereau \$18.95

Anne Compton

asking questions indoors and out. Fitzhenry & Whiteside \$15.00

Reviewed by David C. Waddell

Carmine Starnino's *This Way Out* reads like an atlas for city streets carved from grit. Its honesty reeks with the details of life stripped down past its bare beauty, not necessarily finding its core, but positing, knowing where to start looking. What is refreshing about the book is that the reader is never freed from a reminder of what makes up a day in urbanity: the gore and detail of the prophetic, downtrodden, artistic act is made real by keeping "great conclusions at bay" and sticking "with small answers." He constructs his poems with sensitivity to a conversational cadence and the problems

these poems highlight: the boldness of getting by. He carries his “spondee of rev and roar” as a way of retaliating against the fears of survivability, and his audience is a friend or anyone in a paper-thin apartment. As you can guess, this is not a quiet book.

Starnino’s poetry pushes for a greater awareness of economic strata, but most interestingly he does so by taking stock of extremely local details to explore the generalities of the larger world. Personal details and histories in his poems trump the economic systems that cause them. *This Way Out* is more of a series of shout-outs for hope mingled with apprehensions about the future, rather than an obsessive retelling of where these problems came from.

Similarly, Starnino acknowledges literary history without letting it take centre stage. Where the pastoral of Wordsworth left us behind (or we it), Starnino instead limns a wilderness of personally known street corners, tight apartment walls, and families. Tender (or maybe sore) paternal relationships are yoked and discussed against the backdrop of lives worn weary by consumer culture. The frenetic energy of the “founding Flarfists, late into the night, hitting send,” alongside the frozen moments before startling a duck in the park, brings us to a poetic urban that is unapologetic, nude, and aware that you cannot stop staring.

Taking a different approach to imagining the everyday is Anne Compton’s third book of poetry. Compton employs a very meditative approach to understanding the interpersonal spaces between families, gardens, and the words within those spaces. She provides a refreshing refinement of both diction and timing by mining the speech of ancestors on grand literary and small rural scale to contextualize her exploration of the private and public spheres. “The Fisherman’s habit of non sequiturs” and other quotations from personal and communal pasts trace memory as anecdotal yet never removed from present

moments and conversations. A fine example is her use of epigram to invoke Tennyson while deploying the language of personal memories born from the histories and gardens of Atlantic Canada.

No one reading Compton’s book can help but consider her use of sections to frame the poems that arise from her specific situation as woman, daughter, and writer. Sections begin with a quotation that hints at open-ended questions about religion and desire figured through memory. The quotes are truly questions rather than statements for Compton. Allusions to trauma lurk, but what makes the book stand out is her calm and understated voice that describes these traumas. Compton paradoxically figures peace and fear in the same breath.

For Compton the public and domestic come to terms in a language not wholly her father’s, not wholly her own, but stark, compelling, and intimate. It is a joy to travel with Compton over girlhoods, wakes and their accompanying waking, and the language of confluence and convergence, memory, and community. As she reminds us: “we will gather, gather at the river.”

Navigating the Boat of Faith

John Terpstra

Skin Boat: Acts of Faith and Other Navigations.
Gaspereau \$25.95

Reviewed by Deborah C. Bowen

“I have thought this about the place: anything can happen.” As he sits in church, the poet’s attention moves from the fine performance of a jazz trio to a child playing with a skeleton on a keychain. Thus John Terpstra’s first paradox in this searingly honest meditation on the clumsiness of “growing up Protestant.” Whether in stories of St. Cuthbert, the seventh-century namesake of Terpstra’s present church and a saint around whom extraordinary miracles

accreted, or in stories of St. Brendan the navigator, a sixth-century Irish monk who went on a seven-year journey in a curragh with fourteen other monks to find the Land of Promise (and perhaps found North America), or in stories of present-day people in and around the church, anything can and indeed does happen there.

Terpstra has taken up an enormous challenge in this book. How can a Western twenty-first century poet write honestly and compassionately about his love-hate relationship with the Christian church? In Terpstra's own church, the previous minister (male) was dismissed for sexual improprieties; this almost destroyed the church community. The minister is still estranged, but they still meet to pray for him. The present minister (female) is diagnosed with a brain tumour; they meet to pray for her, and she is healed. A visiting preacher with a prison ministry takes in a pedophile and creates for him an accountability group who, like Brendan, will be "sailing into the unknown, at the mercy of wind, wave and current." These themes of navigation and miracles ancient and modern are constants in the church's choppy waters. When the previous minister was first accused, "So outrageous did these reports seem that it would have been easier to believe" what medieval records recount, "that Brendan and company indeed spent Easter morning on the back of a whale, or that Cuthbert's body remained uncorrupt for centuries after his death."

Terpstra writes as both poet and cabinet-maker: "I have thought: the reason I persist is for what is being made." As in his previous creative non-fiction, *The Boys* (2005), he employs not chapters but thought-paragraphs, tight sections sometimes no more than a couple of lines in length. There is a kind of liturgy of phrases that repeat—"why do I persist?" "any and every thing happens," "this too is bullshit." The relationship of everyday life to liturgical mystery is

vividly realized, as is the relationship of the glorious to the inglorious, often in the same person: "I have thought: the church as an institution is built upon the rock of the disciple who swore on a stack of bibles that he would never, under any circumstances, deny the one who won him over, and who several hours later did that very thing three times running." As Terpstra asks himself why he keeps being part of this wayward and suffering and paradoxical institution, he responds, "this is the only place I know where time and eternity meet on a regular basis." *Skin Boat* is another place where readers may experience that meeting.

Responsible Voices

Mary Tilberg

Oonagh. Cormorant \$21.00

Reviewed by Jannik Haruo Eikenaar

Oonagh may be her first novel but Mary Tilberg, an accomplished poet, presents an exhaustively researched work of historical fiction that is, in its finest moments, both lyrically haunting and ethically compelling. An imaginative reconstruction of the mid-nineteenth-century immigration paths of Oonagh Corcoran and Chauncey Taylor, *Oonagh* traces the intersection of those paths, Chauncey's tragic death at the hands of a racist mob, and Oonagh's consequent work in supporting the Underground Railroad.

Among the novel's geographic shifts, from Connemara and Virginia to Upper Canada, the challenge of surviving in a landscape that is both determinedly hostile and distractingly beautiful remains constant. Oonagh escapes the confines of the kitchen to walk beneath the nearby "massive oaks and elms and maples shivering their shadows around [her]" and Chauncey notes not only the swamps and rivers that bar his walking escape but also the "gold and orange of impending dawn" that "[leak] down into the shimmering grey waters" of Chesapeake Bay.

Tilberg's dedicated research is clear in these details of landscape as well as in the difficult responsibility of portraying historical racism to a contemporary audience. Her attempts at the latter, though, result in a tension that is not always well resolved and which is most apparent in Oonagh's overly self-conscious musings, as when she reflects on her "responsibility to record for future generations the truth of [her] experiences." Moreover, Oonagh's is an anachronistic moral certainty that verges on condescension: her "stomach [lurches]" on hearing a racial slur directed at Chauncey, and several times she attempts to "puncture the self-righteousness" of so-called "pious men of God."

While Oonagh's voice is occasionally awkward, Chauncey's is consistently engaging. He recites Shakespearean love sonnets from memory, imitates perfectly Oonagh's Irish accent and provides the reader the correct pronunciation of Oonagh's name ("OOO now!"). His narration of a flight from violent enslavement parallels Oonagh's story of crossing the Atlantic but with greater immediacy and compulsion.

Chauncey's last words, as he leaves his wedding-night cabin to play out the role of the new husband in placating the charivari, are those of optimism and reason. Inevitably, his words fail and his voice is forever silenced. Tilberg's elegant silencing of that voice, though, demands the reader's moral outrage and it is here that *Oonagh* is at its best and most responsible.



Journey Through Language and Fear

Rhea Tregebov

The Knife Sharpener's Bell. Coteau \$21.00

Reviewed by Tanya Christiansen

The Knife Sharpener's Bell, Rhea Tregebov's first novel, is a tale of multiple migrations. As the child of Russian-Jewish immigrants living in Winnipeg in the 1930s, Annette Gershon is uprooted from her home when her idealist, Communist-supporting, and homesick parents decide to move back to Odessa in the USSR. The story traces the fallout from this decision as Annette grows up amid the perils of Stalinist society and the trauma of World War II. As an older woman once more living in Canada, Annette narrates the story in an attempt to sort through her difficult memories.

Tregebov's representation of a seldom-discussed chapter in Canadian emigration history is carefully researched and wide-ranging. The early chapters of the novel depict the desperation and despair of Depression-era Winnipeg in order to make the Gershons' decision to return to Russia comprehensible. However, our sympathy for them is mediated both by the betrayal felt by the child Annette upon being transported from her familiar world and by the constant sense of foreboding that pervades the text. This feeling is created not only by the reflections and hints of the older Annette, but also by the frequent bouts of inexpressible and seemingly object-less fear felt by her younger self. These fears are connected early on with the sound of the titular knife sharpener's bell, an appropriate image as the novel spends far more time anticipating the horrid events to come than on describing them when they arrive. The deaths of most of Annette's family in the Odessa Massacre are handled quickly but hauntingly, as are her eventual arrest and imprisonment in a Soviet labour camp. The true focus of the

novel is on the experience of everyday Jewish life in the Soviet Union during the fraught years of the war and the Terror, as Annette's nameless fears gradually take shape in the pervasive power of the Soviet state, though in that form they still remain impossible for her to fully articulate until years later.

Unsurprisingly, given Tregebov's work as a poet, the novel is particularly interested in how language is lived. Annette navigates between English, Yiddish, and Russian, each discouraged or promoted as her situation and the society around her change. She experiences Yiddish and Russian as the tongues of her passive father and dominating mother, respectively. Her Yiddish is increasingly silenced as Soviet anti-Semitic sentiment grows, while she initially thinks of the Cyrillic alphabet as a "betrayal." Annette's sense of herself as always foreign, always somehow outside of the collective group, seems to stem as much from her multilingualism as from her Jewish background. In one particularly interesting scene, she is the only person in a cinema able to understand both sides of the propaganda in an American newsreel overlaid with Russian subtitles. These encounters with the vagaries of language contribute to Annette's search for order, perfection, and a sense of home in architecture, although even buildings have political meaning, as her frequent musings on the subject remind us.

Tregebov's poetic background also appears in the novel's lyrical narration, particularly during the many dream passages. These sections feel almost overloaded with symbols that accrue increasing meaning as the novel progresses, but they serve to convey the fears and observations that are inexpressible in Annette's waking life. They also help underline the central idea of the novel: Annette continues to return to as she contemplates her parents' choice, that all aspects of human life, including buildings, wars, governments, and nations, are first dreamt into being by believers.

Celebrating Barry Callaghan

Priscila Uppal, ed.

Barry Callaghan: Essays on His Works. Guernica \$20

Reviewed by Douglas Ivison

In a career spanning over forty years, Barry Callaghan has made significant contributions as a journalist, professor, critic, poet, prose writer of fiction and non-fiction, publisher, editor, and translator. Yet, despite (or because of) these diverse accomplishments, Callaghan is not widely known outside of literary circles, nor has his work received a great deal of attention from those working on Canadian literature. As a corrective to the lack of critical attention devoted to Callaghan to date, with this volume of Guernica's Writers series editor Priscila Uppal draws our attention to Callaghan's work and achievements. As she writes in her introduction, "it is my intention with this book to generate discussion of Barry Callaghan's work and life, a subject which has hereto garnered too little attention considering its enormous significance to and impact on many aspects of public life."

Uppal has assembled what she describes as a "nearly definitive book assessing and celebrating almost all aspects of Barry Callaghan's career thus far." The sprawling 500-page collection is a bit of a mish-mash, comprised of previously published and original full-length critical articles, reviews, short anecdotes and appreciations (some only a few paragraphs), and memoirs. The book is organized into four sections: one devoted to his poetry (the longest section), fiction, and non-fiction, and a final one devoted to miscellaneous topics, such as his activities as teacher, publisher, and translator. The book concludes with a 2004 interview of Callaghan by the American novelist William Kennedy. Each section opens with a poetic (or in one case musical) tribute to Callaghan, followed by a short appreciation or review,

before presenting us with a handful of more substantive critical pieces, interspersed with shorter pieces of various types. The structure is largely effective in providing a sustained focus on Callaghan's major works, particularly the Hogg poems, which receive the most attention. For the most part, however, the shorter pieces—reviews, introductions, appreciations—distract from the insights being provided by the more substantive pieces, and often seem to be included more for their praise of Callaghan and his work than for their critical insights. In particular, the short pieces by well-known writers (including Margaret Atwood, Timothy Findley, George Elliott Clarke, Anne Michaels, and others) seem intended solely to document Callaghan's achievement and reinforce his status. The collection would have been stronger without them.

Despite Uppal's claims that the collection's purpose is to assess and celebrate, its overall tone is more celebratory than assessing. Uppal's introduction emphasizes her close personal and professional ties with Callaghan, and she describes herself as a "fan." Many of the contributors are similarly friends, colleagues, and fans of Callaghan, and frequently situate themselves as such. As a result, there are a few too many pieces "assessing" Callaghan's brilliance and not enough providing a more thorough analysis of his work and contributions. A collection that placed more emphasis on critical engagement with Callaghan's work would ultimately have done a better job of demonstrating the significance of his achievements. For example, although the pieces on Callaghan's literary magazine, *Exile*, are of interest in providing a history of that magazine from the perspective of those involved in its production, the collection does not really provide a critical assessment of *Exile's* contribution to the Canadian literary scene. Similarly, the tributes and nostalgic memoirs do a good job of presenting Callaghan as a larger-than-life

personality, one who has had a great impact on the Canadian literary scene, but their personal and anecdotal nature means that they provide us with little sustained assessment of Callaghan's contributions as a publisher, critic, and teacher.

That said, Uppal's collection does a valuable service in drawing our attention to Callaghan's writing, making a particularly compelling case for the richness of his Hogg poems. It should be noted, however, that most of the critics employ more traditional critical approaches: the collection is noteworthy for the absence of pieces utilizing poststructuralist theory or contemporary poetics. As a result, Uppal misses an opportunity to demonstrate Callaghan's continuing significance in the contemporary literary and critical environment.

Barry Callaghan: Essays on His Works is a useful resource, providing insight into his literary and social context, collecting in one volume some critical writings that can form the basis for a critical assessment of his writing, and making the case that Callaghan is a figure worthy of more scholarly attention. Unfortunately, however, its lack of critical distance, its sprawling, diffuse nature, and its failure to submit Callaghan to examination through the lens of more contemporary approaches ensure that it is less effective than it might have been in achieving its goal of "adding purposefully towards a fuller understanding of Barry Callaghan's artistic visions, his literary commitments, his national and international impact, and his potential lasting contribution to arts and letters."



Power of Stories

Richard Van Camp

The Moon of Letting Go. Enfield & Wizenty \$29.95

Richard Wagamese

The Ragged Company. Anchor \$21.95

Reviewed by Sophie McCall

Richard Van Camp's newest collection of short stories, *The Moon of Letting Go*, and Richard Wagamese's latest novel, *Ragged Company*, are part of a larger shift in contemporary Aboriginal literature in which an entrenched opposition between Native and White communities is less the focus than the internal hierarchies within Native communities. This is not to say that the characters do not encounter overt racism and other forms of discrimination; indeed on a daily basis they confront "NDN-hating people" (Van Camp), as well as a middle-class deeply fearful of homeless people (Wagamese). In Van Camp's stories, Native and non-Native characters include drug runners, dealers, child molesters, shady school principals, crooked cops, and medicine men who "use their power for bad." In Wagamese's novel, while three of the four main characters are Aboriginal, it is their homelessness that triggers an immediate and visceral form of social prejudice. In neither book can a reader assume anything about Aboriginal identity; yet both also demonstrate—in very different tonalities—a commitment to reviving and living up to the ethical principles embedded in certain Aboriginal traditional knowledges, teachings, cosmologies, and, most importantly, stories.

Van Camp is trying to capture, I think, the ambivalent effects of certain changes in Aboriginal politics as they manifest on the ground. In the title story, the narrator notes that even though Rae is now called Behcho Ko and the Dogrib people now call themselves Tlicho, "there was still too much gambling, there were still too many new

trucks and empty cupboards." Despite an apparent renewal of Tlicho-centred principles, the community has forgotten the story about the man who was a bear; as a result, the people overlook the gifts of a powerful medicine man who is feared and dismissed as "the devil." Moreover, in this "new" social order, prejudice against Dogrib people can resurface. In "The Last Snow of the Virgin Mary," when Kevin Garner, an 18-year-old who is trying to exit his drug-dealing life, asks for an application form for teacher's college, the secretary responds incredulously: "you, Kevin Garner, want to teach our kids?" But there are no clear angels or demons here, and the story takes a very funny turn when Kevin, high as a kite, accidentally broadcasts a 1970s porn videotape while working at the regional TV station. Van Camp's stories are about the sheer exuberance of storytelling as characters fall in or out of lust, become exposed by nosy neighbours, dare to act against the social strictures of the community, or make difficult choices that have unforeseeable consequences. The road to redemption often follows the side routes of chance sexual encounters or dangerous confrontations. Yet as much as the tone is playful and irreverent, ultimately, a strongly affirmative message of personal and social integrity is transmitted.

Both books ask the reader to look more closely at what or who is devalued by mainstream society, and the epigraph by John Steinbeck for *Ragged Company* could also apply to *The Moon*: saints and sinners are not easily distinguished. Wagamese's novel, which is narrated by one retired journalist and four homeless people who win \$13.5 million from a lottery, confronts social intolerance of homelessness. For the three Native characters, who have vastly differing degrees of connection to their heritage, homelessness is connected to an ongoing colonial history of enforced diaspora: land dispossession, residential school, foster

care, and a lack of educational and economic opportunities. The central question of the novel is how to get back “home,” which is defined as “a truth you carry within yourself.” In this search, *One For The Dead*, an Ojibway woman who grew up on a reserve and at a residential school but who has lived on the streets since she was fifteen, emerges as the moral centre of the book. The values explored in the novel are explicitly connected to her teachings that draw on her earliest memories of living with her extended family on an Ojibway reserve. The possibility of literally pissing away \$13.5 million haunts the characters, all of whom have a history of alcohol abuse; but through conversation, which has profound ethical significance in this metaphysical novel, three of the four characters learn to cope with the life-changing impact of the “gift.” For one character, living inside walls cracks open an unresolved past and triggers insurmountable psychic trauma; yet his dying gesture is to give away all of his money. In part inspired by his example, the characters return the greater part of the money to the community in different forms: through art, training, counseling, hope—and an inner-city ferris wheel operated for free.

The tone of the two books is sharply disparate: Van Camp’s is frolicsome, frisky, darkly humorous; while Wagamese’s is intense, heartfelt, deadly serious. At times, the teenage male narrators in *Moon* that Van Camp nails so well can grate my feminist sensibilities (though honouring women is a huge theme) and the sincerity of *Ragged* at times stretches believability (though the gruff character of Digger, as well as the novel’s humour, undercuts this tendency). Both books succeed enormously in conveying the complexities of ethical principles such as respect, honour, and care for all beings while discouraging readers from reaching stereotypical conclusions about Aboriginal teachings.

Prismatic Reflections

Aritha van Herk and Conny Steenman-Marcusse, eds.

Carol Shields: Evocation and Echo. Barkhuis
\$25.00

Cathy Converse

Following the Curve of Time: The Legendary M. Wylie Blanchet. Touchwood \$24.95

Reviewed by Linda Quirk

Two new books, which celebrate the writings of Carol Shields (1935–2003) and M. Wylie Blanchet (1891–1961) respectively, reveal some of the ways that readers inhabit beloved texts and are inhabited by them. Although Shields and Blanchet wrote in different times and in different genres, each writer’s “work resonates so powerfully that she becomes herself a character in the story of her reader’s lives.”

Perhaps better known to readers in British Columbia than to those in the rest of Canada, *The Curve of Time* is Blanchet’s account of her adventures when, after being suddenly widowed in 1926, she supplemented her meagre income by renting her home to tourists over many summers. During these summers with her five children on a small boat, she travelled the frequently dangerous coastal waters of British Columbia. She relied for vital navigational advice on the journals of George Vancouver and on a colourful cast of local characters. Blanchet and her family entered a landscape of unspeakable beauty, but one which put their skills and their fortitude to a daily test.

In *Following the Curve of Time*, Cathy Converse follows in Blanchet’s wake, examining the story behind the story and creating a well-researched portrait of the author and of the people and places that she encountered on her travels. Converse chronicles the changes that time has brought to what was once a remote landscape, and accounts, among other things,

for the distinctions between Blanchet's descriptions of local First Nations villages and Emily Carr's earlier observations. Throughout the book, time seems to curve back on itself as Blanchet reimagines Vancouver's explorations and as Blanchet's adventures, in turn and over many decades, serve as both guide and inspiration to generations of boaters who have been drawn "into an enchanting world from which they don't want to emerge."

Part of the Canada Cahiers series published by the Association for Canadian Studies in the Netherlands, *Carol Shields: Evocation and Echo* is an eclectic mix of fiction and non-fiction, poetry and prose assembled by Aritha van Herk and Conny Steenman-Marcusse. Contributions from fellow writers, scholars, friends, and family come together to offer "prismatic reflections of Carol Shields," both of her stories and of her person. A fitting tribute to one of Canada's most beloved authors, her "distinctively buoyant spirit" is very much in evidence throughout the collection. Margaret Atwood's memorial tribute concludes: "And live she did, and live she does; for as John Keats remarked, every writer has two souls, an earthly one and one that lives on in the world of writing as a voice in the writing itself. It's this voice, astute, compassionate, observant, and deeply human, that will continue to speak to her readers everywhere."

Readers (who are also writers) participate in this ongoing conversation by reimagining elements of Shields' fictional world, and these are some of the very best pieces in the collection. For example, Susan Swan's clever contribution purports to solve the mystery of Mary Swann (*Swann*) when the central character turns the tables and writes about the author. Several contributors offer marvellously resonant responses to short stories by Shields, including Aritha van Herk's "Debris," which evokes "Segue," and Christl Verduyn's "Fool's Gold," which echoes "The

Orange Fish." Alex Ramon updates *Larry's Party* with an email message sent to the central character from an old friend on a computer named "Gertrude, the Fourth." Peter Oliva reveals, among other things, that it may have been a reader's question which prompted Shields to eventually allow a "dog to stray into her fiction" (*Unless*). Many of the pieces in the collection demonstrate that reading the work of Shields is not a passive activity, that "her familiar and yet transgressive perceptiveness asks for a conversation," and that this conversation is very much ongoing. Carol Shields, herself, is given the last word in the collection with a reprint of "The Writing Life" (first published in *The Washington Post* in 2000). In it she reveals that, although readers' responses frequently surprised and mystified her, she had learned to "let them have their way." And so they continue to do.

On the Way with Wayman

Tom Wayman

Boundary Country. Thistledown \$18.95

A Vain Thing. Turnstone \$19.95

Woodstock Rising. Dundurn \$21.99

Reviewed by Neil Querengesser

Long recognized as an accomplished Canadian poet and shortlisted for a Governor General's award in poetry, Tom Wayman turns his hand to prose in these three works of fiction, ranging from short pieces to a full-length novel. Although the results are sometimes uneven, Wayman has established himself as a significant figure in his recently adopted genre.

Boundary Country, his first published book of fiction, is a collection of short stories, many of which are set in British Columbia's southern and interior regions, the geography of which is clearly familiar to Wayman and rendered with impressive

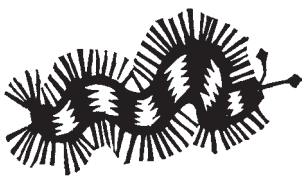
verisimilitude. They include a story of an owner of a salon chain who picks up a hitchhiker with a shady past east of Osoyoos, an imaginative account of a visit by Sir Paul McCartney to a gathering of assorted Nelson citizens, and a bittersweet tale of a divorced man helping friends move a horse to winter pastures as he meditates on his failed attempt to begin a new relationship. Other stories move further afield in time and place, including an account of a family of Russian and European Jews trying to escape the rising tide of anti-Semitism in the 1930s, and a speculative piece featuring an imaginary relative of Alfred Nobel who demonstrates to a Union lieutenant in the American Civil War the power of his cousin's new invention. All the stories in this collection are notable for the authenticity of their narrators and point of view, the tone of each narrative perfectly matching its narrator's personality.

A Vain Thing, Wayman's second book of fiction, consists of four novellas, all of them ostensible variations on the title's central theme of (national) vanity. Wayman's penchant for speculative fiction, already evident in *Boundary Country*, is even more pronounced in this collection. The first novella, *Djkarta Now*, set in perhaps only a slightly imaginary future, is told from the point of view of a racist political candidate in Vancouver, leader of the Democracy Now party, a thinly disguised front for the racist Djkarta Now organization that wants to oust all recent Chinese immigrants from the province. Wayman skilfully manipulates exterior dialogue and interior monologue to eventually reveal the narrator's true colours and his hypocrisy. *The Rock Eaters* tells the tale of mineral-eating, Winnebago-travelling aliens in the shape of wheat stalks who have made Earth a favourite tourist destination. The hero of this piece must risk his life to save some of these aliens when they are trapped inside a burning restaurant. Thanks to Wayman's mastery of the

point of view and setting, it is actually not too difficult to willingly suspend one's disbelief while reading this wry satire on xenophobia. In *Land Under the Snow*, a cross-country skier in the Okanagan falls through a mountain snowdrift into the life and customs of an old middle-earth Nordic village, meeting the love of his life and learning much about himself in the process, only to be turned in another direction just as things start to go well for him. The finest and most realistic novella is *Love in the Afterlife*, an acerbic look at life and love from the perspective of an emotionally insecure grant-winning Vancouverite writer who takes up with a new girlfriend and other squirrely characters in the Toronto literary scene. Whether or not this is a roman à clef, it is nevertheless lively and delightful satire, distinguished, despite the overt symbolism, by one of Wayman's better endings.

Woodstock Rising, Wayman's first full-length novel, is an over-the-top labour of love narrated by a young man in his twenties with the quasi-autobiographical first name of Wayman, struggling to meet his thesis supervisor's demands for a completed product in the fourth and final year of his somewhat postponed Master's program at UC Irvine in the politically and culturally explosive academic year of 1969-1970. But his thesis certainly isn't the only thing he has to contend with. The lone Canadian in his group of friends and acquaintances, Wayman is attracted to several of his fellow female students, particularly Nora, with whom he eventually establishes the novel's central romantic relationship. He is an active member of the Students for a Democratic Society, as well as a member of a small idealistic circle, including a couple of disillusioned Vietnam vets, that decides, after prolonged conversation and several shared joints, to launch a decommissioned nuclear missile, replacing its deadly payload with a jerry-built satellite broadcasting

songs from the recent and wildly successful festival at Woodstock. After pulling off this rather implausible feat, much to the chagrin of the current president, Richard Milhous Nixon, they soon desire even bigger and better ways of making an anonymous name for themselves, planning a sequel to Woodstock so big and so bright that they will have to wear shades. Despite all the suspense and the realistic build-up, however, the novel's climax and its denouement, characteristic weak points in Wayman's fiction, are a bit of a letdown. Nevertheless, this novel is certainly worth reading. As usual, the voice of the young narrator is impeccably realized. If the narrative sometimes sprawls a bit over the book's almost five-hundred pages, it can be attributed to the narrator's enthusiastic desire to create a detailed chronicle of his personal *annus mirabilis* at the centre of some of the most culturally significant events in America. The pages are replete with realistic historical details of American struggles over Vietnam, class, and race, mirrored in the sectarian conflicts within the SDS. The various tribulations and triumphs of Southern California campus life in the late 1960s are vividly recreated, and abundant quotations from popular songs of the time give a compelling picture of a remarkable era. Part satire, part serious cultural chronicle, and part wish-fulfillment fantasy, *Woodstock Rising* is an enjoyable and insightful novel. It will resonate particularly with those readers who lived through the turbulent times of the late 1960s—especially those who missed out on the original Woodstock.



A Great Achievement

Christine Wiesenthal, ed.

The Collected Works of Pat Lowther. NeWest \$24.95

Reviewed by Mervyn Nicholson

Pat Lowther . . . Pat Lowther . . . Pat Lowther . . . Isn't that the poet who was murdered by an envious husband who threw her body into her favourite place on the West Coast, Furry Creek? If I described the details, the editors would no doubt censor them. Suffice it to say that the sheer horror of Lowther's fate has had a horrible side effect, too, by shifting attention from her writing over to her life, that is, to her death. As a result, far more has been written about her "story" than about her poetry. Her life story has generated two admirable book-length biographies, a non-fiction novel, a play, a poem sequence, and a TV documentary, in addition to short notices—not to forget the Pat Lowther Memorial Award—given annually for her. This is an iconic, even mythic figure. Even Lowther's *life* has a mythic quality, given her struggles with poverty, her radical political awakening and socialist commitment, feminist consciousness, extraordinary dedication to poetry as a calling, and her interest in cosmology and multi-media. But we need to attend to Lowther the writer, not Lowther the murder victim. Professor Wiesenthal's beautifully edited book ought to go a long way towards shifting attention to Lowther as *writer*, where it should be, where it is owing to her.

Lowther's most famous poem is "A Stone Diary," also the title poem of the book in which it originally appeared, published posthumously in 1977 by Oxford Canada and, ironically, Lowther's breakthrough collection. The title poem, "A Stone Diary," was picked by Margaret Atwood to represent Lowther for the new Oxford book of Canadian poetry. But "A Stone Diary" is only one of many extraordinary poems by Lowther, as Professor Wiesenthal's edition makes

plain, and Atwood should have given Lowther more space. She deserves it. For Lowther is surely one of Canada's greatest poets.

Lowther published three collections before *A Stone Diary* in tiny presses and tiny print runs. Sadly, only a fragment remains of her multi-media planetarium show, *The Infinite Mirror Trip*, of which Professor Wiesenthal writes:

Nor can the text alone, obviously, replicate "the total art form" that was Lowther's original "multi-media" production. Nevertheless, as a window onto an ephemeral performance piece, one of the first such shows by a West Coast woman poet, the text is valuable, providing rich new insights into Lowther's cosmological exploration of the "relationship between inner and outer space," and her show's attempt to convey, in her own words, "the excitement and complexity of the natural world," as opposed to "current concerns with mysticism and the supernatural."

This is a creative power that shows genuine originality (look at the date of Lowther's "multimedia" show!) and, I would argue, real genius. What distinguishes Lowther is her intensely metaphoric habit of mind. Lowther's work is very unlike so much of Canadian poetry. She is not an anecdotal poet. She is not preoccupied with creating brief snapshots of experience, which is what Canadian poetry so often does. The anecdotal approach collects events and preserves them in words. Lowther had a different impulse. Not that she can't write poems of that type, for she can, and does. But her creative impulse is oriented toward presenting perceptions—not describing objects or events. What can be imagined is more important in her poems than what is conventionally thought of as "reality." She aims to make us see things and understand things that cannot be communicated by means of description. By imagining, we see.

I open this book at random and read:

In the continent behind my eyes
voices are
pretending to be birds
They fly from rise to rise
of land
like a chain of torches

There is a "continent" within us: the world of our images, powers, perceptions (not to mention an infinite complexity of organs, fluids, neurons, muscles, bones), which are just as real as the world of objects outside us, but a lot harder to know and to share. But that is what Lowther does, again and again and again.

In a review of Christine Wiesenthal's fine (2005) biography of Pat Lowther in *Canadian Literature*, I closed by calling for a proper edition of her collected poems, and Professor Wiesenthal has produced that needed edition. It's a superb work of scholarship. Yes, one could wish there was more commentary on the poems or wonder where Lowther's prose is (any letters?), because it too should be part of what calls itself the "collected works." But really, all I have to offer is praise and gratitude for this fine book.

Media, War, and Society

David Williams

Media, Memory, and the First World War. McGill-Queen's UP \$49.95

Reviewed by Marlene Briggs

What explains the ongoing preoccupation with the First World War? How will the loss of living veterans shape future memorial practices? David Williams, the author of *Imagined Nations: Reflections on Media in Canadian Fiction*, resorts to media studies to answer these questions. In a series of stimulating chapters emphasizing form rather than content, he links the changing representations of 1914-1918 to developments in communications technologies. More specifically, he argues that the shift from book

to screen occasions the temporal crisis of modern war. This ambitious comparative and interdisciplinary monograph incorporates oral epic, canonical memoirs, television documentaries, and digital testimonies. It also features animated discussions of Canadian artifacts and military operations. Yet the sweeping hypotheses of this expansive study, which juxtaposes the Trojan War with the Great War, undermine its close readings of celebrated writers and popular formats. Williams discriminates between communications epochs and cognitive paradigms only to conflate historical contexts and social groups. On the brink of the centenary, *Media, Memory, and the First World War* delineates an unusual approach to an established topic, although its functional model of memory obscures contested processes of cultural reception after collective violence.

Williams divides his research into five parts. The first section outlines key concepts and reviews pertinent literature by Paul Fussell, Jay Winter, and Jonathan Vance. Like Fussell before him, Williams stresses cultural rupture. Part two considers classical memory in Homer's *Iliad* and Virgil's *Aeneid*, culminating in a reappraisal of *Barometer Rising* by Hugh MacLennan. Williams then addresses the epistemological import of modern film in Wilfred Owen's letters and lyrics, Siegfried Sassoon's life writing and poetry, Erich Maria Remarque's narrative *All Quiet on the Western Front*, and Charles Yale Harrison's bestseller *Generals Die in Bed*. The fourth section explicates *The Wars*, the acclaimed novel by Timothy Findley, and *The Lost Boys*, a recent play by R. H. Thomson. Williams prioritizes cinema and photography in his investigations of writing by combatants and descendants. Finally, a television documentary, *For King and Empire*; a digital archive, *The Memory Project*; and three museum exhibitions enrich the intriguing survey of electronic memory. Williams comes full circle in his

conclusion, remarking that the interfaces of the World Wide Web foster the resurgence of oral culture. Throughout, he acknowledges debts to eclectic authorities on media and memory. Williams might have engaged more extensively with scholarship on war, the least theorized term in his title.

Paradoxically, Williams adopts a trans-historical approach to conflict in his periodic history of memory. He displaces civil, political, and psychological concerns germane to the disparate experiences of warfare by thematizing the combatant through the Homeric figure of Achilles. Similarly, his discourse on commemoration flattens differences between ancient Greece and modern Europe. While Williams ignores clashing social contexts, he highlights contrasting cultural forms. Unlike Achilles, the heroic warrior whose renown depended on the oral poet, for example, Clare Laking, a deceased veteran of the Canadian Field Artillery, continues to speak on the internet. The chapter on Sassoon, a "modern-day Achilles" who exemplifies double consciousness, illustrates the strengths and weaknesses of this method: Williams draws striking parallels between technological innovations and literary texts but reduces psychic struggles to formal dilemmas. For the most part, he regards mourning, trauma, and violence as self-explanatory terms in his argument. In this respect, vexed relationships between post-traumatic symptoms and visual cultures warrant systematic exploration. With the exception of vivid prose on specific events such as the battle of Ypres (1915) and the Halifax explosion (1917), Williams subscribes to a synchronic vision of war at odds with his diachronic conception of media.

The death of the last known Canadian World War I volunteer, John Babcock (1900-2010), signals the end of an era, the loss of living memory. Williams anticipates the direction of the field in his timely commentary on electronic archives and

interactive exhibits. Despite the controversies attending new media, he suggests that cyberspace facilitates collective memory by expanding the local boundaries of community. Hyperbolic analogies between afflicted combat soldiers and unsettled internet users, however, expose the limits of this enthusiastic outlook: *Media, Memory, and the First World War* favours technological modes over social processes. Williams generalizes about diverse audiences in the absence of a sustained analysis of the intergenerational dynamics informing particular memorial practices. Notably, he dedicates this book to his great-uncle, Private J. Morris Williams, who died at Ypres. Findley, Thomson, and others also trace familial connections to trench carnage. In each case, ideological motivations and interpersonal networks complicate prevailing media frameworks. Williams successfully demonstrates the significance of form in First World War representations. Yet the structural epistemes of communications technologies cannot encompass the situational variables of affect, ethics, and politics central to scholarship on conflict, culture, and memory.

An Intergenerational Approach to Truth

Leslie Walker Williams

The Prudent Mariner. U of Tennessee P us \$29.95

Barbara Ruth Bluman

I Have My Mother's Eyes. Ronsdale \$21.25

Reviewed by Maria Cotroneo

Truth and its resistance against secrecy link the two plots of the books under review. Although these two books differ in genre, one being fiction and the other a memoir, they share a similar subject matter. They offer two unique intergenerational stories that describe the violence and suffering originating from the discrimination against certain cultural groups.

In *The Prudent Mariner*, Riddley Cross, a nine-year-old girl living in Savannah, Georgia in the 1970s, finds and inherits her late grandfather's collection of postcards. One of these cards shows the image of a young white girl smiling as she stands beside the lynching of a black man. The story unfolds and develops as Riddley, unaware that this young girl in the postcard is her grandmother Adele, tries to discover who the girl in the postcard is and why it was in her grandfather's possession.

In this novel, author Leslie Walker Williams portrays the provocative and disturbing realities faced by African Americans during the first half of the twentieth century. Throughout the narrative, the profusion of racial remarks and actions forces the reader to witness the discrimination that pervades the plot. In an effort to uncover the truth from a world of complicity and secrecy, Williams presents an insightful glimpse of what we are faced with when truth is the result of evil and wrongdoing.

I Have My Mother's Eyes is the story of Zosia and Natek's journey from Poland to Canada during World War II. Zosia's daughter Barbara Bluman recounts her mother's incredible story of survival and resilience in Nazi-occupied Europe, highlighting the struggles both she and her father endured. This memoir illustrates the anti-Semitic actions and beliefs that dominated the time. It focuses on how people, in particular Jewish people, had to cope with the hostility and violence directed toward them. As Barbara races against time to record the truth about her mother's past, she also becomes the unfortunate victim of cancer that ultimately takes her life. Her own daughter Danielle is left to conclude this memoir of both her grandmother and her mother.

Barbara Bluman's chronicle illustrates the need to tell and the need to witness. Accepting her own Jewish identity, she has taken on the responsibility of leaving a trace of her

mother and father's past before it's too late and there is nobody left to reveal the truth. Portraying what has been a legacy of unfortunate circumstances for this Jewish family, Barbara Bluman decides to describe what has been for many years, at least in her own respect, kept a secret.

In both these stories, past and present come to meet. The life stories of three generations are represented and narrated, detailing the family history of two completely different families in the twentieth century. Through the life experiences of the grandparents, their children, and finally their grandchildren, both Leslie Walker Williams and Barbara Ruth Bluman adopt an intergenerational perspective that makes both these narratives more complex and intriguing. Both also trace changes in sensibilities that take place as each generation confronts the same cultural differences between themselves and others. As readers, we trace the truth and how it is manipulated through time. Although the circumstances of these two narratives are different, they both illustrate how the buried truth of the distant past comes awake through narrative.



Painful Transitions

David Zieroth

The Fly in Autumn. Harbour \$18.95

Shane Neilson

Meniscus. Biblioasis \$17.95

Michael Kenyon

The Last House. Brick \$19.00

Ilya Tourtidis

Path of Descent and Devotion. Libros Libertad \$14.95

Reviewed by Ryan J. Cox

Poetry has a long history of serving as a means to understand and cope with loss, pain, and uncertainty. After all, as Aristotle himself points out in the *Poetics*, “there are some things that distress us when we see them in reality but the most accurate representations of these same things we view with pleasure . . . because it turns out that [we] learn and infer what each thing is.” This function of poetic representation allows Thomas Gray to turn the death of his beloved tabby into a teaching moment and similarly animates the latest collections from David Zieroth, Shane Neilson, Michael Kenyon, and Ilya Tourtidis.

The Fly in Autumn, Zieroth's eighth book of poetry and winner of the 2009 Governor General's Award, is very much concerned with death and endings. Several of the poems actually take place in the deathbed, while others like “Raised with Dogs” merely anticipate that moment. Death, however, is not necessarily the problem, the thing to be feared. Rather, death is portrayed as a transitional moment, a parting with history and lived experience, and, as in the poem “Celebration,” an end to physical suffering. Where fear enters the equation is in the uncertainty of what follows the transition. Zieroth describes the bravery of the man lying in his death bed who declares “*there is no god*” in the poem “How Brave.” This constitutes bravery because without the possibility of the afterlife there is only the

grave and a return to constituent elements, which is an embrace of oblivion or at least ambiguity. The ending is a break, a boundary that must necessarily sever those who pass it from what came before. This concern with the end as break also manifests itself in the poems that are not specifically about death, and it is arguably the emotional centre of the book.

The more serious verse in *The Fly in Autumn* is balanced by a pronounced absurdity and a genuine sense of humour. Zeiroth strikes a blow for formalists everywhere when, while declaring that they may be the people at the party in the wrong clothes and “bolo ties” who break into “marching songs,” he labels the free-verse crowd who apparently fear belonging to “something more than prose” with that worst of all potential epithets—“hipsters.” He does this in “These Poems Have Attitude,” using the madrigal as his form of choice. The balance that the humorous and absurd poems bring to the more conventionally serious poems produces a collection of incredible richness and depth.

Shane Neilson's *Meniscus* is less concerned with death than it is the sometimes overwhelming pain of life. His first full-length book of poems—mixing new poems with material from two previous chapbooks—moves from a troubled childhood marked by fear and abuse at the hands of an alcoholic father to an adult life where the speaker suffers from bipolar disorder and illness. At times the pain, anger, and despair in the poems can be overwhelming, and though the final section, “Love Life,” suggests that love and fatherhood provide a resolution to the crises of the previous two-thirds of the collection, this feels vaguely unsatisfying. This is perhaps because the opening cycle, “The Beaten-Down Elegies,” which by virtue of its position in the book sets the tone, in its depiction of the abusive father-son relationship seethes continually. While in other portions of the book Neilson

is more willing to let light in, including ironically the suicide poem “Methods,” which is an effective rejection of Dorothy Parker's “Résumé,” the first cycle is unrelenting.

Where *Meniscus* is strongest is in its ability to establish a sense of place. The rural scenes feel deep and authentic even as they illustrate the decline of small town rural life as in “Requiem on Old Route 2.” However, Neilson's ability to make the bipolar mind comprehensible, a place that needs to be understood, in “Manic Statement” is perhaps the book's greatest success. It never lapses into cliché and even manages to slip in a bit of wit, as when in the poem “Lithium” he concludes with the lines “palliative / salt of the earth.”

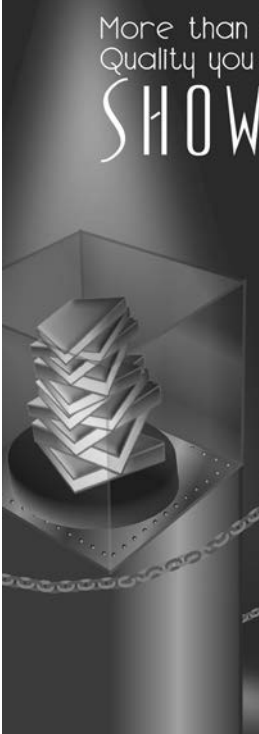
In *The Last House*, Michael Kenyon confronts the loss of youth. While this loss in and of itself is rather significant, here it is magnified by the loss inherent in immigration. As Kenyon writes in the poem “Manchester,” “In a new country you neither / belong nor don't.” In the poems that focus on immigration, there is a clear feeling that history and a sense of belonging must be abandoned in order to pass into the new world. The previous life is sacrificed in order that the current one may begin. This motif imbues poems like “Manchester,” “Chimney,” and “Vernacular” with an archaeological quality that captures the desire and inability to return to a home that can no longer exist.

The Last House suffers significantly from a lack of economy. The poems are at their best when they are contained and tight, but too often they spin wildly out of control. The best example of this is the serial poem “This is True,” which deals with the loss of a beloved dog. The first section, called “Dog,” is beautiful, evocative, and moving, but with each subsequent section the poem becomes more confused and less effective.


Perhaps one of the most crippling losses that a person can endure is the loss of spiritual conviction and certainty. While

some experience this loss as a moment of freedom, others are crippled by it; thus it has historically produced some incredibly compelling poetry. Ilya Tourtidis' *Path of Descent and Devotion*, however, does not seem to offer anything new to the conversation. The verse is at best oblique, and at its

worst clichéd. A number of poems, like "Ave Martyr" based on Plato's Allegory of the Cave, attempt to re-engage and reiterate classical and Christian mythology, but offer little in the way of compelling commentary on these texts. This is well-worn territory and nothing is done to make it unfamiliar.



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The Joyful Child
NORMAN RAVVIN

Mordecai Richler's Reception in Israel

Joseph B. Glass

The notion that Mordecai Richler's writings have been well-received and popular in Israel has been widely assumed and repeated. Indeed, readers in the Jewish State usually find interest in any Jewish writer depicting the Diaspora experience. Of the many Jewish authors in Canada, Richler's name has been put forward as an example of a Canadian cultural icon in Israel. Adrienne Kertzer, for one, implied as much when, in her review of *Contemporary Jewish Writing in Canada*, she wrote: "Montreal's other major Jewish writer [after A.M. Klein, Irving Layton, and Leonard Cohen], Mordecai Richler, the writer who, until the recent international success of Anne Michaels' *Fugitive Pieces*, is likely the Canadian-Jewish writer best known outside Canada" (141-3; see also Fulford, Levene). Prime Minister Jean Chrétien, in a 2002 address to the Canada-Israel Committee dinner honouring Israeli president Moshe Katzav, also mentioned the popularity of Mordecai Richler in his remarks on bilateral Canada-Israel cultural relations:

Canada and Israel have shared and enjoy the vibrancy of our two cultures. Canadians have revelled in the richness of Israeli music, theatre, literature and art. We avidly read the works of your foremost authors. Just as Mordecai Richler and Margaret Atwood are very popular in Israel, Canadians see the latest Israeli

plays and attend numerous Israeli exhibits at our museums . . . We are thrilled at the keen interest that Israelis have shown in Canada through the highly successful Canadian Studies Programme at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

Chrétien's emphasis on Atwood's popularity among Israeli readers, with ten of her novels as well as other works translated into Hebrew, is well founded; however, his emphasis on Richler's popularity does not reflect the reality in Israel.

In order to better locate and explain Richler's place in the Israeli cultural scene, this study looks at the reception of his works by three distinct audiences—the general public, the Anglophone population, and the academic world.

The General Israeli Public

Richler's potential readership in Israel is limited despite the country's high adult literacy rate (97.1% in 2004), because not all Israelis read English or the other languages of Richler's translations (see Table 1).¹ Because Israel is an immigrant-absorbing country, Hebrew is not the first language of a considerable portion of the Jewish population.²

English is the mother tongue of only a small part of Israel's population (approximately 120,000), although it is a second language for many. English as a second language is mandatory in schools and universities for both Hebrew- and Arabic-speaking students. This, however, does not guarantee the linguistic proficiency required to read and comprehend Richler's writings in the original.

Table 1 Mordecai Richler's Works in Translation: A Comparison*

Name and Year of Publication of Works Translated into Other Languages	Language & Year of Translation						Other languages
	French	German	Italian	Dutch	Hebrew		
The Acrobats	1954	1955					Norwegian 1955 Danish 1955 Swedish 1955
Son of a Smaller Hero	1955	1963, 1994					
A Choice of Enemies	1957	1958	1991				
The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz (Film 1974)	1960, 1976, 1998, 2006	2007		1989, 2000	1976, 1978		Czech 2003 Polish 1994 Serbian 2007
Cocksure	1968	1998	1970	1970			Portuguese 1974 Japanese (no year)
The Street	1969						Russian 2005
St. Urbain's Horseman	1971	1976, 1980, 2002, 2005			1980		Spanish 1975 Japanese 1978
Jacob Two-Two Meets the Hooded Fang	1975	1977, 1978, 1996, 1997, 2001	1984, 1994, 1998, 2005	2003	1984	1992, 2005	Danish 1977, 2002 Swedish 1978 Norwegian 1978, 1988 Finnish 1979 Thai 1986 Bengali 1995 Estonian 2002
Joshua Then and Now	1980 (Film 1985)	1989	1981		1993	1987	Portuguese 1982 Hungarian 1986 Polish 1996 Chinese 1998
Jacob Two-Two and the Dinosaur	1987	1987	1994, 1999, 2005	2004	1988		Norwegian 1988 Danish 2002

Solomon Gursky was Here	1989	1992	1992, 1994	2003	1991	1994	Spanish 1992 Greek 2000 Czech 2004
Oh Canada! Oh Quebec! Requiem for a Divided Country	1992	1992					
This Year In Jerusalem	1994			2002			
Barney's Version	1997	1999, 2001	2000, 2002	2000, 2005	1998		Hungarian 1998 Spanish 2000 Greek 2003
On Snooker: The Game and the Characters Who Play It	2001			2002			
Total	15	10	10	8	7	5	Spanish 3 Norwegian 3 Danish 3 Czech 2 Greek 2 Hungarian 2 Portuguese 2 Swedish 2 Polish 2 Estonian 1 Finnish 1 Japanese 1 Serbian 1 Thai 1 Chinese 1 Bengali 1 Russian 1

Sources: Searches of catalogues of the Library and Archives of Canada, Ottawa, Jewish National and University Library, Jerusalem, www.worldcat.org web search, University of Calgary Library and Cultural resources, and UNESCO, Index Translationum.

* Only works that have been translated into another language are listed.

Cultural and religious reasons further account for the relatively small size of Richler's Israeli readership. The Arab (and Arabic-speaking) population of Israel cannot be expected to show much interest in Diaspora Jewish literature. Approximately twenty percent of Israel's Jewish population belong to ultra-orthodox communities that place varying degrees of restrictions on reading secular literary works. The coarse language, descriptions of sexual acts, and putative immorality in many of Richler's writings would result in their censorship by the religious leadership. Furthermore, the ultra-orthodox have identified Richler as a "self-hating" Jew and as having been antagonistic toward Jewish orthodoxy despite his distinguished lineage.³

The Israeli publishing industry determines which foreign-language books are translated into Hebrew based on which are likely to turn a profit on their investment. Fiction is popular in Israel, and bestsellers can sell as many as 100,000 copies or more (Cohen). To offset costs, publishers can apply for the International Translation Grants through the Canada Council for the Arts in order to defray up to fifty percent of the translation costs of a Canadian work (Israeli publishers received grants for two translations in 2004 and four in 2005. No grants were awarded before 2004) (Canada Council for the Arts). Indeed, Richler, with five works in Hebrew, is one of many Canadian authors whose writings have been translated. Over the past ten years, ten novels by Margaret Atwood and five novels by Carol Shields, as well as works by Michael Ondaatje, Nancy Huston, Alice Munro, Yann Martel, Ann-Marie MacDonald, and Nadine Bismuth have been translated. Lucy Maud Montgomery was translated as early as 1951, and selected writings of Stephen Leacock appeared in 1955.

Certain of Richler's works are not likely to be relevant to Israeli readers (for example, *Oh Canada! Oh Quebec! Requiem for a*

Divided Country, with its discussion focusing on internal Canadian relations and politics). On the other hand, *This Year in Jerusalem* provides autobiographical details of Richler's life, his connections to Israel and Zionism, and his impressions of Israel and the political situation; in theory, it should have had more appeal. What then might account for its relatively poor reception in Israel? One answer is that Sheldon Teitelbaum, a Los Angeles-based senior writer for the *Jerusalem Report*, criticized its disjointed structure, labelling the book as "an exercise in self-justification" (see also Ravvin; Zimelman). Teitelbaum remarks:

... his book ends up offering as much insight into what life in Israel is really like as one might find in a portrait of Southern California as seen through the eyes of expatriate Newfoundland fishermen. . . . When another Montreal native, Saul Bellow, undertook a similar stint in Israel, the result was the thoughtful memoir "To Jerusalem and Back." But when Richler piles his bits of reportorial cod on the racks to dry into something approaching a point of view, what we are left with in the end is the reek of fish turning nasty in the sun.

Reading a book I badly wanted to like, I began to understand why so many French Quebecois head for their bunkers every time Richler publishes a portrait of his native Quebec. . . . (56-57)

Small wonder, then, that Israeli publishers did not consider Richler's views on Israel and related experiences to be marketable and decided it was not worthwhile translating into Hebrew.

In all, five of Richler's works (including one of his children's books) have been translated into Hebrew. In comparison, ten of his works have been translated into French, ten into German, eight into Italian, and seven into Dutch (see table 1 for all translations).

Two of the Hebrew translations were published following the release of the film versions of Richler's works—*The*

Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz (first published 1959; film released 1974; Hebrew translation 1976) and *Joshua Then and Now* (first published in 1980, film released 1985, and Hebrew translation 1987). These films piqued the interest of the Israeli audience; the publishers capitalized on their popularity by quickly proceeding with the translation of these volumes. These films are shown from time to time on Israeli television and cable channels and at Israel's cinemas. They are also available at video rental stores (Ben-David 10).

The English-speaking Audience

In Israel there are an estimated 200,000 (2003) native English-speakers. Popularly and ironically known as “Anglo-Saxons,” they make up approximately three percent of Israel's population. This group (and a small number of Israelis with a high level of English proficiency) read English-language literary works in the original; however, for many years English-language books were expensive, and not all of Richler's works in English were available to Israeli audiences. Today with the opening up of markets through e-commerce (for example, Amazon.com), it is easier for Israelis to obtain copies of Richler's writings.

Some of Richler's works received favourable reviews in the Israeli English press (Gefen; DiAntonio). The review “The Road Not Taken” considered *This Year in Jerusalem* to be of some interest to certain sectors of the English-speaking immigrant population in Israel. This work could serve as a source for comparison between the lives of Zionist youth who fulfilled the dream of *aliyah* (Hebrew for ascent, the act of immigration to the Land of Israel) and those who remained in the Diaspora. For Richler, part of the reason for his 1992 visit to Israel was “to find out what had happened to my old *chaverim*, whom I had known when they were young, when everything was possible. Were they at ease

in Zion? Or did they regret having made *aliyah*” (*This Year* 55).

Part of Israel's native English-speaking population (right-wing and orthodox Jewish) find Richler's political views vis-à-vis Israel and his views on orthodox Judaism offensive. Richler's name is on the right-wing Jewish SHIT list (“SELF-HATING and ISRAEL-THREATENING” list) (Masada). This is due to Richler's support for a two-state solution in Israel (and a one-state solution in Canada) (Ball). His views were not particularly significant in Israel until his visit to the country in 1992. Sam Orbaum explained, “If no one here [in Israel] detests him, it's probably only because he hasn't been here since 1961” (“Make ‘em Mad” 10). Attention paid to him during his stay in Israel and the subsequent publishing of *Next Year in Jerusalem* raised Richler's profile in Israel.

Richler's negative portrayal of Jews in certain novels contributed to the shunning of his writings by orthodox Jews in Israel. Some critics claimed that *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* played up negative Jewish stereotypes. Further, Orthodox Jews took offence at his attitudes towards Jewish leadership. These attitudes are exemplified by Richler's reaction in 2000 to the statement by an Israeli Sephardi chief rabbi that the victims of the Holocaust were reincarnated sinners who had to die to atone for their vile deeds. He declared: “Unto each religion, its own zealots. Iran suffers its crazed ayatollahs, and my people endure too many nutty rabbis.” (Richler, *Unto Each Religion* A14).⁴

Recently there has been a rediscovery of Mordecai Richler in Israel. This began with obituaries and review articles following Richler's passing in July 2001 (see “Author”; Orbaum, “Canadian Author 10”). Book reviews continued to appear after his death. A new review of *Barney's Version* appeared in the *Jerusalem Post* in 2006 (Septimus 27). *Jerusalem Post* reporter Sam Orbaum, a

cousin of Richler's, has helped to ensure that Richler's name appeared in Israel's English press.⁵

Academic Audience

Richler's writings have been studied to a limited extent in courses in English Literature, Comparative Literature, and Contemporary Jewry at universities and colleges in Israel.⁶ The departments of English Literature at Israeli universities have had a strong tradition of teaching American and British literatures, while the literatures of Canada and of other Commonwealth countries have received less attention. Through the initiative of a number of Israeli academics, and sometimes with the support of the Government of Canada's Faculty Enrichment Awards, a number of courses in English and French Canadian literature have been developed and taught. A few of these courses are survey courses in Canadian Literature while others are thematic and include Canadian authors—for example, a course on women writers that includes Margaret Atwood.

The experience of academics has been that when Richler's works (for example, *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*) were taught, the predominantly female student population's reaction was negative because of perceived misogynistic undertones. Furthermore, Richler's works have not been ranked high on the research agenda in Israel. Most Israeli Canadianists in the field of literature are women. They often find his writings sexist and choose neither to teach nor to conduct research on them. Nonetheless, Professor Richard Sherwin of Bar-Ilan University and Professor Danielle Schaub of Oranim College have on occasion included a work by Richler in their syllabi, and presumably others have as well.

An academic niche for Richler's writings has been in the field of contemporary Jewish culture. Richler has been part of the discussion in courses dealing with Diaspora

literature, Jewish Diaspora experience, and anti-Semitism in North America. Often Richler has been discussed together with the writings of Philip Roth and Saul Bellow.⁷

Recent published anthologies of Jewish writing—*Contemporary Jewish Writing in Canada* edited by Michael Greenstein and *The Oxford Book of Jewish Stories* edited by Ilan Stavans—include works by Mordecai Richler. These anthologies facilitate the accessibility by Israeli university faculty and students to Richler's writings and can be used in survey courses.

Until recently, the study of Richler's writings was not on the Israeli academic agenda. No academic articles on Richler or his writings by an Israeli academic have been identified.⁸ However, a growing number of researchers are developing an interest in Richler; at the eleventh Biennial Jerusalem Conference in Canadian Studies held in 2006, researcher Sara Kaufman of the University of Haifa presented a paper entitled "Canadian Tug o' War: Ethnic and National Tension in the Novels of Mordecai Richler" (Israel Association for Canadian Studies). In addition, in my own research on the migration of North American Jews to the Land of Israel, excerpts from *This Year in Jerusalem* were utilized in order to provide colourful examples of the Zionist youth movement experiences in Montreal of the 1940s (*New Zion; Canaan*).

In summing up, the teaching and study of Richler's works has not been significantly integrated into Israeli academic curricula and research programs, partly for structural reasons—emphasis on the British and American literary canons—and partly out of preference. Quite simply, few academics teaching Canadian literature have selected Richler's writings.

Summary: The Reception of Richler's Writings in Israel

With the limited embrace of Richler's works in Israel, a challenge exists as to how it might be possible to awaken greater interest

in Richler in Israel to expose readers to his satirical characterization of Canadian life and insights into the Jewish community of Montreal. Often the integration of the writings of a specific author into teaching and research is the result of the interest taken by a specific academic. Studies dealing with the history of Canadian Studies in different countries around the world often point to the important contribution of particular Canadianists to the development of a field or discipline in Canadian Studies locally.⁹ The interest and drive of a passionate academic can lead to the research and teaching interest in a specific writer. The challenge is to cultivate this interest.

In order to pique the interest of an Israeli academic, the level of awareness of Richler and of his writings needs to be raised through visits to Israeli universities and colleges by experts on Richler as well as the publication of articles that connect his work to Israeli concerns. If Israeli researchers are interested in and recruited to engage in the study of Richler's writings, they will subsequently integrate material into courses and inspire a new generation of graduate students. There is intense competition for the limited funding available for the study of Canada in Israel through grants and scholarships from the Government of Canada, the International Council for Canadian Studies, Israel Association for Canadian Studies, and the Halbert Centre for Canadian Studies at the Hebrew University. The existence of support for research and scholarships specific to study of Richler could guide activities in this direction. If Richler were to be embraced by Israeli academia, his works would be diffused into a larger general audience.

Of Richler's works, there appears to be a market for the translation of two more of his works into Hebrew—*Barney's Version* and *Jacob Two-Two and the Dinosaur*. The former has gained international recognition and popularity. The later is a sequel to an already popular children's book. He is better

known in Israel for the films of his works than for his writings. This could serve as a factor in drawing the general audience to Richler's writings in Hebrew translation. Furthermore, the animated television series *Jacob Two-Two*, which has yet to be aired in Israel, could serve as a catalyst for interest in Richler's books for children ("Jacob Two-Two"). Some recent articles on Mordecai Richler in the Israeli press and the 2005 Hebrew translation of *Jacob Two-Two and the Hooded Fang* may contribute to a rediscovery of his other writings.

In all, contrary to what has been assumed, there has been limited interest in Richler and his writings in Israel as a result of the narrow reception by the different Israeli audiences—the general public, English-speakers, and academics—for their respective reasons. The potential exists to expand this market, but it requires investment in research, teaching, translation, and promotion.

NOTES

- 1 In April 2007, the State of Israel's population stood at approximately 7,150,000 inhabitants. Statistics in this section regarding Israel's population are drawn from Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, *Statistical Abstract of Israel* (57).
- 2 The largest sources of immigrants were the former Soviet Union (938,000), North Africa (234,000), Romania (108,000), North America (77,000), and Ethiopia (71,000). Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, *Statistical Abstract of Israel* (57).
- 3 He is the grandson of Rabbi Judah Yudel Rosenberg (1859-1935) who is best known for his Hebrew edition of the *Zohar*, a cabalistic text, as well as several volumes devoted to legends and folk-medicine in Yiddish.
- 4 For a detailed discussion see Soloway.
- 5 Schechner; Orbaum; Ben-David, "Obscenity"; Septimus; Richler, *Jerusalem* 118.
- 6 The discussion in this section is based on personal communications with Prof. Hedda Ben-Basat, Tel Aviv University, e-mail communication

- March 1 and 4, 2004; e-mail communication between the author and Prof. Simone Grossman, Bar-Ilan University, March 1 and 3, 2004; e-mail communication between the author and Prof. Richard Sherwin, Bar-Ilan University, March 1 and 7, 2004; e-mail communication between the author and Prof. Danielle Schaub, Oranim College, March 1, 3, and 7, 2004. See also Glass, *Canadian Studies*.
- 7 The film *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* was on the reading list and part of the discussion for the course "Contemporary Canadian Jewry" offered by the Institute for Contemporary Jewry at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and taught by the author of this paper in 2001-02.
- 8 Based on searches of RAMBI—The Index of Articles on Jewish Studies, *MLA International Bibliography*, and Google Scholar. Richard Sherwin of the Department of English at Bar-Ilan University presented, "The Rorschach Use of Wilderness in Margaret Atwood's *Journals of Susanna Moodie* and Mordecai Richler's *Solomon Gursky Was Here*" at the Tenerife Conference on Canadian Studies, 7 November 1994, La Palma, Tenerife. Rachel Feldhay Brenner of the Department of Hebrew and Semitic Studies at University of Wisconsin, after completing her BA in English Literature and French Civilization and her MA in English Literature at Tel Aviv University, went on to complete her PhD at York University on "The Formative Influence of The Holocaust in the Writing of Mordecai Richler."
- 9 See: Gutiérrez-Haces; Foster; Glass; Hoerder and Gross.

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Articles

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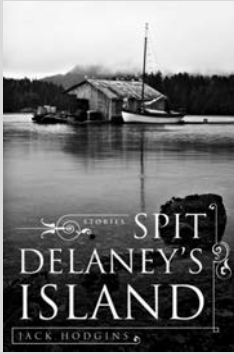
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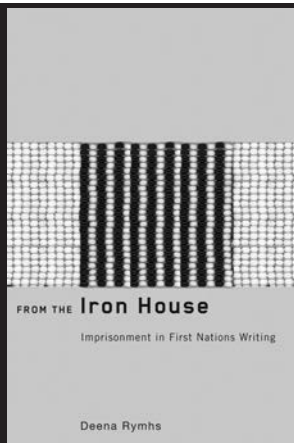
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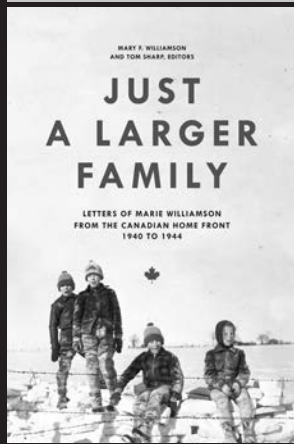
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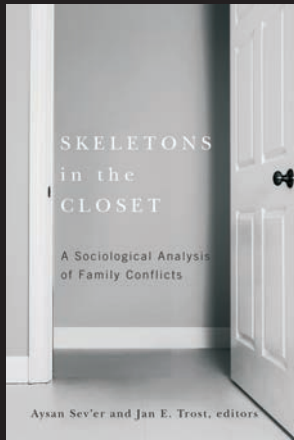
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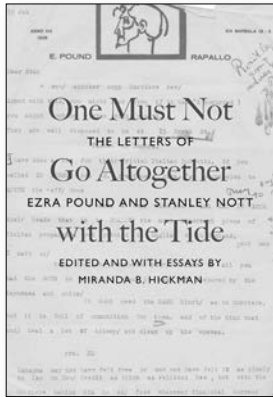
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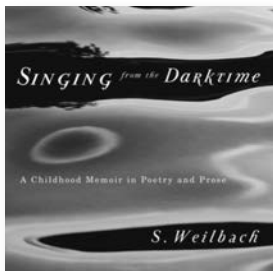
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